

# Protecting Africa from the Chinese: U.S. Media Print Coverage of Sino-African Relations, 2002-2012

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**ABSTRACT---** *Burgeoning and increasingly important political and economic links between China and Africa have been accompanied by greater media attention on various aspects of this relationship and in particular, its benefits as well as problems for African states. While there are references to the bias against China in much of the western media's coverage of Sino-African relations in the scholarly literature analyzing this relationship, surprisingly little systematic work has been done to analyze and discuss this coverage. In this paper, I seek to fill this gap in the literature by providing a qualitative analysis and discussion of the recurrent themes present in the coverage provided by four main U.S. broadsheets on Sino-African relations from 2002 to 2012. Specifically, this paper argues that the following images and narratives dominate the coverage of Sino-African relations in these newspapers: (a) an opportunistic and merciless China that is out to exploit Africa, (b) an Africa that has no agency and must be protected from the Chinese, and (c) a West that has the sole ability and responsibility to protect Africa from the Chinese.*

**Keywords---** China, Africa, U.S., media, images

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

China's growing presence and role in Africa in the last decade has drawn considerable attention recently (Alden 2005). Much of this attention has, in turn, concentrated on describing and analyzing China's motivations as well as the political, economic and social consequences of its increasing presence for Africa. An important component contributing to these descriptions and analyses has been the western media's coverage of these developments. In several studies that have attempted to examine and evaluate China's relationship with Africa, this media coverage has been described as both biased and simplistic (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011; Mohan and Power 2008; Sautman and Yan 2009). Since the media is a critical medium for increasing awareness of an issue among the public and policymakers and also for framing how the public and policymakers understand an issue and the policies that ensue (Yang and Liu 2012), examining and analyzing the coverage of Sino-African relations is important.

With the exception of Emma Mawdsley's (2008) examination of British broadsheets, however, there appears to have been very little systematic analysis of the western media's coverage of the subject. This paper seeks to fill this gap in the literature by examining and analyzing the way in which Sino-African relations have been reported and covered in four major American newspapers from 2002 to 2012. Besides adding to this literature, examining and analyzing the media coverage of Sino-African relations is also important as part of a broader understanding of American depictions and constructions of China, as the Sino-American relationship will be the most significant one in twenty-first century international politics.

I do this by providing a qualitative analysis of articles and reports on Sino-African relations in four major American newspapers – the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal* - from 2002 to 2012 when coverage of this relationship shifted from almost non-existent to its present levels. Newspapers were selected as research has demonstrated that they are more influential on policymakers than TV or radio broadcasts (Yang and Liu 2012, p.701). Finally, these four specific American broadsheets were chosen as they 'generally lead other news sources and set the foreign policy agenda for the general public' (Yang and Liu 2012, p.701).

Research and analysis of these newspaper articles began first with a search conducted on the ProQuest News and Newspapers database for articles related to the topic of China and Africa. This search, which yielded 102 articles, was then followed by repeated and close readings of each of these articles. During the first five readings, I noted the focus and content of these articles and reports, the arguments made, and the language and images used. After that, I compared the themes that had emerged across articles within a specific newspaper, and then, across newspapers, before grouping

similar and dominant themes together.

This paper argues that there are several dominant images and narratives in the coverage of Sino-African relations in these American newspapers. These include the portrayal of an opportunistic, inhuman, and merciless China that is out to exploit Africa, an Africa that has no agency and must be protected from the Chinese, and a West that has the sole ability and responsibility to protect Africans from the Chinese. These themes are consistent with the narrative tropes of ‘African weakness, Western trusteeship, and Chinese ruthlessness’ in U.K. broadsheets discussed and highlighted by Mawsdley (2008). While it is too soon to draw conclusions regarding the implications and consequences of China’s increasing presence and role in Africa, the similar themes present in U.K. and U.S. broadsheets indicate that particular representations and depictions of China, Africa and the West are popular and influential.

The rest of this paper proceeds in three parts. Section two provides a quick survey of Sino-African relations. In section three, I analyze the content and major themes in the coverage of Sino-African relations in the newspapers, and section four provides a brief conclusion.

## **2. SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS**

China’s contacts with Africa began long before the twentieth century. East Africa, for example, was one of the areas explored during Admiral Zheng He’s well-known voyages (1405-1433) during the Ming Dynasty. Despite this contact, China’s contemporary relationship with Africa only became established at the Asian-African conference that was held in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955 (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011, p. 242; Taylor 2006, p.20). Over time, this engagement became stronger through the connections and solidarity forged within the broader international political landscape of anti-colonial struggles for independence and the goals of the Non-Aligned Movement. This Afro-Asian solidarity provided a significant basis for Sino-African relations and ‘China’s emphasis on South-South co-operation based on a number of perceived “similarities” between China and African states’ (Mohan and Power 2008, p.27). At the Bandung Conference, China extended principles based on ‘mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity; non-aggression; non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; peaceful co-existence’ that had been originally formulated for its relationship with India to all countries in the developing world that were also non-communist (Taylor 2006, p.18).

After Bandung, China’s involvement in Africa grew during the 1960s. This was underpinned by a strong emphasis on political ideology in which Africa was understood ‘as being on the first, anti-imperialist step of a two-step progressive process – the second step being a genuine socialist insurrection or revolution’ (Taylor 2006, p.24). Furthermore, the growing ideological gulf between China and the USSR, which eventually culminated in the Sino-Soviet split, also drove China to widen and deepen its linkages in Africa and jostle for a leading position in Afro-Asian solidarity organizations and the non-aligned countries (Ishmael 1971). These were seen as a means of strengthening China’s position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union (Taylor 2006, p.21).

This growing involvement was reflected in the steadily increasing number of official delegations that visited Africa and the provision of development aid in areas ranging from public health and infrastructure to light and heavy industries and the construction of sports and cultural complexes (Taylor 2006, p.22; Mohan and Power 2008, p.27). Usually provided in the form of a grant, this aid was also bilateral in nature and given when it contributed to a mutually beneficial relationship between China and its aid recipient.

From the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, however, Chinese involvement in Africa tapered off as China was consumed by internal problems that precipitated and were later, also exacerbated by the Cultural Revolution. It was only the end of the Cultural Revolution, the imprisonment of the Gang of Four, and the subsequent rise of Deng Xiaoping to power that put China on the path towards economic reform. These reforms, which encapsulated the triumph of pragmatism over ideology in China, kept Chinese attention focused on Japan and the U.S. from the mid-1970s to the 1980s. Sino-African relations were not a priority; trade, even as it grew from about US\$300 million to US\$2.2 billion in the twelve year period between 1976 and 1988 (Snow 1995, p.318), was increasingly marginalized (Taylor 1998).

In the first decade of the twenty-first century however, Chinese political and economic involvement in Africa grew tremendously and is often cited as ‘one of the most significant recent developments in the region’ (Maswana 2009, p.73). These recent changes in Sino-African relations can be seen in a number of areas. Institutionally, one of the most visible signs of this change is the establishment of the multilateral Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, which has the task of helping to coordinate the relationship. Since its establishment, five ministerial-level conferences have taken place under its auspices and it has grown from a forum with 44 participating states from Africa in 2000 to 49 states plus the Commission of the African Union by 2012.

Economically, the change in this relationship can be seen in the increasing volume of trade, foreign direct investment and aid flowing between China and Africa. The total volume of China’s imports from Africa increased from 1.1 percent in 1995, to 3.2 percent in 2005, and 5.3 percent in 2011 (UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2012, p.72). These imports

were drawn primarily from natural resources and primary goods, with oil forming 62 percent of China's purchases from Africa, and ores and metals forming 17 percent in 2008 (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011, p.237; Maswana 2009, p.73). Non-commodities in the form of textiles and apparel, processed food, and small manufactured goods formed less than 10 percent of China's imports from Africa in 2007 (Maswana 2009, p.73). Overall, it should be noted that the volume of China's imports from Africa, standing at 5.3 percent in 2011, is quite small compared to 39.1 percent from Eastern, southern and Southeast Asia, 11.2 percent from Japan, 12.1 percent from the European Union, and 7.1 percent from the United States (UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2012, p.72). Chinese exports to Africa amounted to 3.8 percent of its total volume of exports in 2011 (UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2012, p.60) and this is mainly in the form of electronic goods and machinery as well as clothing, footwear, and light manufactured goods. Generally, Africa is not a major export destination for China. In 2011, 34.3 per cent of China's exports went to Eastern, southern and Southeast Asia, while 17.1 percent and 18.8 percent went to the United States and the European Union respectively (UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2012, p.60).

Chinese foreign direct investment in Africa has also risen. In 2007, Chinese FDI in Africa amounted to US\$4.46 billion, an increase from US\$1.6 billion in 2005 (Renard 2011, p.18). Despite this growth, it only consisted of 5.9 percent of total Chinese FDI (Renard 2011, p.18). In the area of aid disbursement through traditional ODA instruments like grants, debt relief, concessional as well as zero-interest loans, China provided about US\$1.2 billion in 2008 and approximately US\$1.4 billion in 2009 (Brautigam 2011, p.211). In comparison, the World Bank disbursed US\$4.1 billion while the U.S. and France provided \$7.2 billion and \$3.4 billion respectively (ibid.). Finally, China also provides Africa with financial instruments not usually considered as ODA in the form of commercial loans from Chinese banks, preferential export credits, and market-rate export buyers' credits (Brautigam 2011, p.205). Generally, China's need for commodities has been one of the drivers of Africa's economic growth which has registered an average of more than 5 percent between 2000 and 2012 (African Development Bank Report 2013, p.6).

Officially, China's relationship with Africa today is underpinned by the following general principles and objectives which it has set out in a 2006 White Paper, 'China's African Policy' (People's Daily, January 2006):

- Sincerity, friendship and equality. China adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, respects African countries' independent choice of the road to development and supports African countries' efforts to grow stronger through unity.
- Mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity. China supports African countries' endeavors for economic development and nation building, carries out cooperation in various forms in economic and social development, and promotes common prosperity of China and Africa.
- Mutual support and close coordination. China will strengthen cooperation with Africa in the UN and the other multilateral systems by supporting each other's demands and reasonable propositions and continue to appeal to the international community to give more attention to questions concerning peace and development in Africa.
- Learning from each other and seeking common development. China and Africa will learn from and draw upon each other's experience in governance and development, strengthen exchange and cooperation in education, science, culture and health. Supporting African countries' efforts to enhance capacity building, China will work together with Africa in the exploration of the road to sustainable development.

Observers and analysts are however, divided regarding China's motives as well as the long-term benefits of China's role in Africa. There are those who argue that contemporary Sino-African relations are built on pragmatism rather than ideology and paternalism. Furthermore, the economic links and aid from China will help African development in the long-run (Aning and Lecoutre 2008, pp. 39-50; Brautigam 2003; le Pere and Shelton (2006); Yang 2006; White and Alves, 2006). Others claim that China's pronouncements regarding South-South partnerships is mere rhetoric as its relationship with Africa stems from self-interested political as well as economic objectives. Politically, Africa, with over 50 nations, could be an influential and significant voting bloc for China in international organizations ranging from the United Nations to the World Bank and the IMF (Brookes 2007). Economically, Africa's rich resources are an important source of oil and minerals needed to fuel China's economic growth. In times to come, Africa's markets will also be a destination for products manufactured in Chinese factories.

Generally, critics of China's role in Africa argue that it is neo-colonial, exploitative, highly opportunistic and detrimental to the cause of labour and human rights (Brookes 2007; Holslag 2011; Lyman 2006; Hess and Aidoo 2010; Esteban 2010). Economically, these critics highlight that Africa's overall export and import patterns remain mostly the same. Specifically, the Sino-African economic relationship is one where African states are exporting raw materials to China while importing manufactured goods. This, according to its critics, is no different from exploitative economic relations of the colonial era (Maswana 2009, p.79). Furthermore, critics also claim that the activities of Chinese firms have detrimental consequences for the development of African companies and businesses as well as employment levels and conditions. For example, Chinese firms and businesses have been accused of underbidding local African companies, using cheap imported Chinese labour (Brookes 2007, p.3), dumping cheap Chinese goods in African markets (Maswana 2009) and even crowding out local 'mom-and-pop' stores. The underbidding of African companies and the presence of cheap Chinese goods like textiles, for example, create extremely difficult conditions for local African businesses to

compete, survive and develop (Brookes 2007, p.3). Furthermore, the practices of Chinese companies of bringing in Chinese labour limit employment opportunities for the local population and do not contribute to the development of skills (Lyman 2006, p.133).

These critiques, however, provide a rather one-dimensional picture of China's impact on Africa. Economically, the picture is far more complex than the one-note proclamations regarding China's neo-colonial practices and must be situated in the broader historical and structural context of global economic and production patterns. First, Africa has been externally oriented since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has remained in a subordinate position in the international division of labour since then (Mohan and Power 2008, p.31). Second, Sino-African economic relations have developed within the larger context of a neo-liberal regime of rules and norms created for trade and finance which has facilitated and accelerated changes to the global production structure 'in which parts and components of goods are produced in different locations around the globe' (Maswana 2009, p.83). This product segmentation has resulted in 'the establishment of an asymmetry in the distribution of the value added created at different segment[s] along the global chain' and between China and Africa (Maswana 2009, p.83).

Politically, critics of contemporary Sino-African relations argue that China's involvement in Africa has also come at a price due to its general disregard for human rights, governance and transparency (Lyman 2006, p.129). China, for example, has been accused of supporting and protecting autocratic regimes like Sudan and Zimbabwe with human rights violations (Lyman 2006, p.135). In addition, China's economic and trading relationship with them provides access to resources that might have been inaccessible or difficult to obtain (Taylor 2008, p.64). Finally, these policies have negative repercussions in the international community as they have decreased the bargaining power of those who are working towards the promotion of human rights in Africa (Taylor 2008, p.64).

Despite these differences and ambiguities in evaluations of China's motivations as well as the consequences of its presence in Africa, U.S. media coverage of Sino-African relations has converged on several key themes and images consistently and frequently. The next section identifies these recurring themes and provides a critical analysis of how media have framed this relationship and constructed specific images of China, Africa as well as the West.

### **3. ANALYSIS OF THEMES OF U.S. NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS**

A critical analysis of the coverage of Sino-African relations in these four newspapers highlight three recurring images and narratives: an unscrupulous and amoral China, an Africa where the leaders are brutal, and the citizens are helpless, and finally, a West which is the only actor capable of rescuing ordinary Africans from China and from their own brutal and avaricious leaders. These images are, in turn, constructed from several persistent themes regarding China, Africa, and the U.S. and the West. The first set of themes is collected around a monolithic China which is overrunning Africa, the self-interested motivations driving China's policies and practices in Africa, the mostly detrimental consequences arising out of its increasing presence and role for Africa, and China's irresponsible actions which are not in line with the good practices of the broader international community. A second set of themes emerging from these newspaper articles is that of Africa beset with chaos, corruption and dictators who are brutalizing and plundering their own states. The third set of themes builds on the first two through a contrast to the behavior and actions of the West who are part of the responsible international community. Each of these themes and images will be examined in turn in the rest of this section.

The image of a China that is unscrupulous, cunning and amoral, willing to form economic and political ties with any state and use unfair trading and business practices as long as it is able to fulfill their own interests is clear in a wide variety of articles from all four newspapers. This is built from a number of themes and the first is of a China that is suddenly (and in an unprecedented manner) overrunning and overwhelming Africa with its presence and activities all across the continent and major sectors of its economy (Leggett 2005; Copson 2006). China is depicted as an unstoppable 'juggernaut' that is buying up mines and oil concessions, building roads, sports complexes and parliament buildings, attending telecommunication conferences in large numbers, flooding African markets with cheap manufactured goods, and even setting up mom-and-pop stores that are competing with locals in their own neighbourhoods (Leggett 2005; Copson 2006; Lee 2006; Gerson 2011; French and Polgreen 2007; Polgreen and French 2007a). Additionally, Chinese leaders have made more visits to African states than the leader of South Africa, the continent's regional hegemon (Dixon 2007), and also, rolled out the red carpet for state visits from African leaders. The final and most often cited proof of the unprecedented and overwhelming scale and scope of this involvement is the 'tremendous' increase in China's trade with Africa, which logged a 50 percent rise to \$18.5 billion in 2003 from its 2000 levels (French 2004).

While there are a few slightly more balanced reports that place China's involvement in Africa in the broader international context by acknowledging that it 'imports less African oil, invests less money and spends less on aid than does the United States or Europe' and that as 'an African trading partner, China ranks third, behind the U.S. and France'

(Wines 2007), these are few and far between. Specifically, most of the newspaper articles examined neglect or ignore the fact that only 9 percent of Africa's oil exports went to China in 2008. Europe and the U.S., on the other hand, received 33 percent each (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011, p.237). More broadly, the U.S. was the world's largest oil importer in 2011 with China following in second place (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011, p.237). In fact, China's national oil companies held only 3 percent of the combined commercial value of all oil companies with investments in African oil in 2007 (Downs 2007; Downs 2010; International Energy Agency Report 2011). These oil assets are, in turn, 'of a size and quality of little interest to international oil companies (IOCs). In fact, many of these assets were relinquished by the IOCs' (Downs 2007, p.44). In the area of trade, China accounted for 18 percent of Africa's trade in 2011 (Africa Progress Report 2012). Therefore, depictions of China overrunning Africa as well as other actors there are simply overstated. Additionally, and as Lumumba-Kasongo (2011, p.237) notes, these statistics demonstrate that Europe and the United States also have a large presence in Africa and yet China is portrayed as an overwhelming and neo-imperialist presence.

The second recurring theme emphasizes that China's presence in Africa is based on self-interest and part of a larger Chinese campaign to compete for power, resources and influence with the West (French 2005; Leggett 2005). These articles stress that China is motivated and guided by its relentless search for energy and natural resources rather than its professed solidarity with the global South. Depicted as 'surging' and 'unquenchable' (Lee 2004), these energy needs – which are also behind its deepening relations with energy-rich states like Iran, Kazakhstan and Ecuador across the developing world (Lee 2006) – are paramount and underpin its policies and practices in Africa (Gerson 2006). For example, a *New York Times* article from August 2004 highlighted that President Hu Jintao paid a visit to oil-rich Gabon rather than Benin with whom it had 30-year old ties (French 2004). In other words, political principle and friendship had been discarded for natural resources. In another article also by the *New York Times*, China's offer of a multi-billion dollar package of financial and technical assistance to African governments during the 2009 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation was portrayed as part of advancing 'a courtship that already has gained Beijing wide access to oil and minerals across perhaps the most resource-rich continent in the world' (Wines 2009). Hence, China's offer of aid to Africa could not be for altruistic reasons but rather, part of a strategy to gain more access to the continent's oil and minerals. Altruism, friendship, and political principle, in other words, are not part of China's practices and policies in Africa.

Besides energy and mineral resources, China's policy to deepen its economic, political and military ties with Africa is also viewed as part of a broader campaign and plan to 'pry developing countries out of the US.' sphere of influence' and 'redraw the world's strategic map' (Kahn 2006). With its natural resources, votes at the UN and other intergovernmental organizations, Africa is becoming part of the new twenty-first century 'great game' between the U.S. and a China that is attempting to expand its influence and presence all over the world in its rise as a global superpower (Kurlantzick 2007; Dixon 2007; Leggett 2005).

Overall, these articles often ignore or dismiss Chinese statements that they do not aim to create an exclusive sphere of influence or adopt the Western approach of imposing their values and political system on other countries. Critically, these reports also neglect or fail to scrutinize or discuss the motivations and policies of western powers in Africa that may be no different from China's in many respects.

A third recurring theme in these newspapers that has contributed significantly to the image of an amoral and avaricious China comes from coverage regarding the costs and benefits of China's policies for Africa. In the area of benefits, there is acknowledgement that China's forays into Africa have created jobs albeit low-paying ones (Vogt 2008). Cheap Chinese imports have also provided ordinary Africans with access to goods and services that were unaffordable until very recently (Polgreen and French 2007; Vogt 2008). Generally, Africa has enjoyed GDP growth gains due to the surging demand for natural resources from China (Copson 2006). Lastly, there is mention that China has educated thousands of African university students, built roads and provided medical assistance through the work of Chinese doctors (Copson 2006).

Discussions of the economic, political and social costs to Africa are however, far more dominant in these newspapers' coverage. Economically, China is framed as a neo-colonial power (Polgreen and French 2007) stripping Africa of its resources (Vogt 2008; Dixon 2007; Montesquiou 2010; Trofimov 2007). and turning it back to a supplier of raw materials and undermining economic diversification (Gerson 2011). Furthermore, cheap Chinese imports – ascribed as the unfair result of the undervalued Chinese yuan, subsidies, and free or low-cost government loans (Polgreen and French 2007) - have crowded out African factories and in particular, textile mills (Polgreen and French 2007) which are unable to compete, make their own products, and contribute towards the development of 'healthy, diverse economies' (Dixon 2007; Wines 2009). Furthermore, Chinese firms do not transfer technology or skills to Africa. They also import Chinese labour for jobs which locals could perform or do so easily with some training (Montesquiou 2010; French and Polgreen 2007; Dixon 2007). Even if there are jobs, these reports stress the very poor working conditions in Chinese-owned businesses where workers are treated inhumanely (Trofimov 2007) and paid extremely poorly (Dixon 2006; Dixon 2007). Here, articles across all four newspapers have concentrated on Chinese-owned mines in Zambia as emblematic of these problems (Vogt 2008 ; Trofimov 2007; Polgreen and French 2007; Wines 2009).

Sino-African economic relations are far from perfect and in fact, problematic in many areas. However, the focus of these newspapers contributes to the portrayal of problems and tensions as the dominant feature of this relationship. For example, problems and tensions arising from competition and labour certainly exist but a fuller, complete and more honest picture must include several factors. First, China has played a role in the expansion of business networks across Africa. These networks are, in turn, significant as catalysts for local industrial development. West African cotton growers, for example, have been beneficiaries of these networks (Maswana 2009, p. 76). Second, accusations that China is undermining the ability of African states to diversify due to its focus on natural resources neglects the fact that the West has been similarly guilty and for a far more extended period of time.

A fourth recurring and important theme in all four newspapers which has contributed to the image of an amoral and unscrupulous China comes from depictions of China as a willing and untroubled partner of corrupt, dangerous, unsavoury and unstable regimes like Sudan (Goodman 2004), Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Niger (Nossiter 2010) and Angola (Goodman 2006; Nossiter 2009; Leggett 2005; Kahn 2006; Dixon 2007). In order to meet its need for oil, natural resources, and to achieve its global ambitions. For example, China has been accused of supplying arms and bullets that were used to kill innocent women and children during the Darfur Crisis because of oil (Montesquiou 2010). More generally, China is accused of obstructing the UN's efforts to resolve crisis and more damning, 'underwriting its second genocide in three decades' (Kristof 2006; Goodman 2004). By propping up unsavory regimes across Africa, China is depicted as an important obstacle to the progress of human rights there (Vogt 2008).

In contrast to China, these newspapers highlight that western investors pulled out when there was civil unrest in Chad while France and U.S. suspended aid to Niger when Mr Tandja dissolved parliament and the nation's highest court (French and Polgreen 2007). In other words, western states act morally and are mindful of the value of human lives. The Chinese on the other hand, are portrayed as untroubled about slipping in to fill the vacuum left by these western states as they have 'no qualms about dealing with the continent's most brutal and corrupt leaders' (Leggett 2005). While China's expansion into Africa may be problematic for human rights, transparency and even governance in some cases, it is instructive to note that similar policies of the U.S. and other western states during the Cold War and even today are simply ignored in the newspaper reports. Also unacknowledged is China's search for oil in states with less than desirable reputations and human rights records simply because other key actors have sewn up large oil concessions in other parts of the world. Finally, as discussed by Shaun Breslin and Ian Taylor, human rights concerns for the average African and Chinese person have not been consistent (2008, p.68). These concerns regarding human rights were, for example, neglected in the latter half of the 1990s when the West wanted access to the Chinese economy. When Chinese businesses started to compete with western corporations, concern regarding human rights reared its head again. In the U.S. for example, concern regarding child labour practices in China had more to do with the unfair competitive advantage it gave to Chinese firms rather than to the rights of these children (Breslin and Taylor 2008, p.66). In other words, 'material interests have long tended to dictate the capitalist West's response to the issue of human rights when it relates to China and in this regard, Sino-African ties and the attendant expressed concerns over human rights is no exception' (Breslin and Taylor 2008, p. 59).

A fifth theme contributing to the image of an amoral and unscrupulous China emerges from the depiction of China as simply not acting like a responsible member of the international community if resources are at stake (Kristof 2006). Here, its policies of non-interference and stress on state sovereignty, and no strings attached investments and loans are considered especially problematic. In emphasizing state sovereignty and non-interference in its relationship with Sudan, Guinea and Zimbabwe, China, as highlighted in these newspaper articles, is depicted as undermining the efforts of others in the international community (Nossiter 2009; Sanger 2006; Pierson 2012) who are working for political change in such regimes (French and Polgreen 2007). In effect, it may underwrite political repression.

China is also portrayed as irresponsible in its provision of development aid to Africa (Kahn 2006). In these newspapers, China's generous aid programs, low-interest loans and other gifts are linked to the undermining of western efforts to foster good governance in Africa (El Gazzar 2009). Furthermore, China's loans to African countries are also depicted as irresponsible as they are likely to lead to increased indebtedness, an issue that the West has been trying very hard to resolve through Western debt forgiveness (Jopson and Anderlini 2009). They also argue that the aid provided by China is highly problematic because it is tied to the buying of goods and services from Chinese companies selected by Chinese officials that discourages competitive bidding by the borrowing nation (LaFraniere and Grobler 2009). Finally, the secrecy surrounding the aid provided by China is likely to lead to corruption and 'runs counter to international norms for foreign assistance. In a part of the world prone to corruption and poor governance, it also raises questions about who actually benefits from China's projects' (LaFraniere and Grobler 2009).

Many of these reports on China's development policies ignore the many problems that have originated from aid programs formulated and implemented by the West. Also neglected is the fact that not all aid deals have been successful. For example, CNPC's \$2 billion investment in a Nigerian oil refinery fell through while work on Angola's railroads had 'either [been] halted or encountered serious delays' (Elizabeth C. Economy as cited in Hanson 2008).

In contrast to China's amoral and unscrupulous image, the West is portrayed as Africa's savior. It is the ethical West who will save Africa from the exploitative and amoral Chinese as well as from themselves. This image is built on several of the following themes: the U.S. and the West have business practices that are far more ethical than China's. The West does not support dictators in Sudan, Zimbabwe and Angola. For ordinary Africans, the West is trying to promote good governance, transparency, and human rights, as well as development programs that will help improve their everyday lives. Finally and perhaps most critically is the fact that this image is possible because it is built on a glaring omission: the lack of acknowledgment that western interactions with Africa have been less than perfect. In these reports, China's involvement throughout the continent, whether in the form of national resources acquisition or major infrastructure projects, is not the only feature of interest. Also recurrent is the depiction of this success as being rooted in unfair trading and business practices of China, Inc. (Copson 2006) In contrast to ethical western firms, Chinese firms have succeeded because they underbid by focusing less on near-term profit and more on securing business deals and political influence (Leggett 2005). Furthermore, these Chinese firms have a competitive advantage over western firms because of access to soft loans and other incentives (Copson 2006; Oster 2006), government backing for aid deals and loans to 'secure preferential treatment' (Oster 2006; Hagerty and Connors 2011), and the use of political influence to secure business opportunities for its state-owned companies (Kahn 2006). These newspapers also state both implicitly and explicitly that China's trade with Africa has grown tremendously because it has bypassed the IMF and World Bank and 'flout[ed] many of their lending criteria, including minimum standards of transparency, open bidding for contracts, environmental impact studies and assessments of overall debt and fiscal policies' (French and Polgreen 2007; Montesquiou 2010). Finally and as discussed earlier, ethical western firms pull out of states like Sudan and those that are experiencing instability which may put their employees in danger.

China's development and aid policies are implicitly contrasted against those of the U.S in the work of several of these journalists (Gerson 2011). From the reports discussed above, it is also clear that China's choice of non-interference and no strings attached loans and aid is considered irresponsible and inferior to the policies of the West. Furthermore, the U.S. promotes economic liberalization and good governance while providing aid focused on human needs and structural reforms. In a rather extreme example published in the Washington Post, American economic success is touted as proof of the value of open trade, limited government, and liberal democracy 'which are ultimately more productive than state planning and more appealing than a new soccer stadium' (Gerson 2011). Hence, the U.S. is depicted as the model for Africa and the source of the right policies that will further its growth.

Significantly, these reports are also notable for the absence of critical reflections on western interactions with Africa in the past and present. For example, the long history of colonialism in the relationship between the West and Africa are ignored. In the contemporary period, the development and aid policies and programs emanating from the U.S., the World Bank and the IMF since the end of World War II can hardly be considered models of success and yet, are hardly mentioned. In fact, some policies like the IMF's Structural Adjustment Program are said to have 'impoverished Africa over the past 30 years' (Campbell 2008, p. 100). As pointed out by Sautman and Yan, very little has been

'said about U.S. support for oil producers such as Gabon, Angola, Chad and Equatorial Guinea (Peel 2003; Max 1997) or about its intelligence and other military cooperation with Sudan. (Economist 2005; Hari 2005) During his tenure as Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, who tried his main opponent for rape and treason and changed the constitution in order to remain in office, was a much-praised U.S. ally. (Economist 2006; Levitsky 2002) China does purchase illegal African timber, but so does the European Union, and China does not participate at all in the biopiracy in Africa carried on by Western pharmaceutical firms.' (Sautman and Yan 2007, pp. 76).

Last but not least, there are 'multiple commonalities between the agendas and policies of developed' western states and those of China' (Mohan and Power 2008, p. 26).

The third recurrent image and narrative trope which emerges from these newspaper reports is of an Africa that is full of chaotic, unstable states, which are run by brutal and rapacious dictators as well as a population of ordinary Africans who have neither a voice regarding China's involvement nor the will to act either for or against this involvement. This image is constructed from the primary focus of these newspapers on China's activities in Sudan, Zimbabwe, Angola, Chad, Niger and Guinea rather than states like Botswana, Ghana, South Africa and Cameroon, which enjoy both political stability and economic growth. In concentrating on the former and neglecting the latter, these newspapers contribute to the continued production and reproduction of images of Africa – redolent from the age of colonialism and still found across contemporary popular as well as academic accounts of the continent – as savage, primitive, dangerous, ridden by war, disease and ultimately, hopeless (McEwan 142). Furthermore, the media coverage of civil conflicts and the politics of these rogue regimes are often ahistorical and removed from broader and significant economic and geopolitical factors.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror* (NY, NY: Pantheon Books, 2009).

Finally, China's engagement with Africa has invoked a gamut of complex responses that range from trade unions with critical positions on the labour practices of Chinese mining firms to government officials and business interests who welcome and support China's growing presence on the continent (Sautman and Yan 2009; Alden 2007). These newspapers, however, are often characterized by the lack of reporting on African views regarding China's policies of non-interference and respect of state sovereignty, and loans and development aid (El Gazzar 2009). Such reports assume that these policies can only harm the aid recipients without making any effort to understand their positions. In other words, Africans have been depicted as passive passengers in this great game between China and the West. Critically, stripping Africa and Africans of their voice and agency also enables the continuing portrayal and construction of the West as the only actor capable of saving Africans from themselves and from the Chinese.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Sino-African relations are neither completely free of problems nor beset by them. Yet, U.S. newspaper coverage of these relations, like that of U.K. broadsheets, converge problematically on three specific and recurrent images and narratives: an unscrupulous and amoral China, a helpless Africa at the mercy of China and its own dictators, and finally, a West that is not only morally, economically and politically superior to China and Africa but the only actor capable of saving the latter from the former. Significantly, such one-sided depictions of all three are possible, in large part, due to the willful forgetting of the negative features of the West's own interactions with Africa in the past and present.

This paper's findings, when considered in conjunction with Mawdsley's research on U.K. broadsheets, points to the persistence and continuity of very specific images and narratives regarding China, Africa and the U.S. in both the U.S. and the U.K.. Since such constructions and representations can have very real material effects through providing the justification for certain policies, they must be taken seriously. In particular, the dominant image of China that emerges from these newspapers is part of a broader and important prevailing view of Chinese foreign policy that has developed in recent years. Characterized as assertive and a threat, this conceptual framework of China, while not entirely accurate, has become the norm in policy discourse among media, think tank, and policy elites (Johnston 2013; Yang and Liu 2012; Liss 2003; Broomfield 2003). As such, the stakes for international politics are high since such representations of China 'can make or take away spaces for alternative descriptive and causal arguments, and thus the space for debates about effective policy' (Johnston 2013, p. 46).

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