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THE STUDY OF SOFT POWER: CHINA'S PRESENCE IN  
AFRICAN REGION

by

JESSICA HUANG

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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The Study of Soft Power: China's Presence in African Region

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Jessica Huang

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

The Study of Soft Power: China's Presence in African Region

by

Jessica Huang

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The Western media and policy analyses frequently give negative portrayals of China's presence in developing countries. This study, however, explores why China's soft power succeeds in developing regions of the world. In particular, why is it that while China's soft power is not quite universally accepted, it works in developing nations such as those in Africa? This paper makes the argument that the constructivist idea of identity is instrumental in understanding Chinese soft power within Africa. That is, the key components of China's soft power reflect shared identities with the developing world and especially African nations, and as a result contributing to a better reception of China's soft power in Africa.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For my parents and sister.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Concept, Argument and Literature

### **Relevance of Soft Power**

The likely reason that China's soft power may not have gained as much traction as hard power is because the abstract IR concept cannot be readily measured with traditional statistics. However, that does not necessarily diminish its credibility or relevance, as soft power has weight. For example, scholar Christopher Ford's "Soft on 'Soft Power'" explores how soft power can challenge the traditional norm of analyzing foreign policy through hard power and instead offer a different perspective on the attraction element. Ford aptly states how through the prism of soft power, "critical aspects of a nation's power [actually] could be found [in] appeal of its 'values,' [benevolence of] foreign aid programs, the attraction of economic relationships, the seductiveness of [cultural] products, [as well as the nature] of its social, economic, or [its] political system" (Ford 91). Indeed, by gaining ample admiration, approval and respect from others, a country could benefit from a positive image and even wield influential power that others have willingly bestowed upon it; in addition, according to Ford, "[the] concept of a 'soft power' as a sort of aggregate measurement of a country's overall socio-political clout in the world [does retain] some utility as an analytical tool" (93). This creates chances for international relations scholars to conduct research on soft power that has been overshadowed by hard power, with hopes of advancing findings that may enhance the field.

The study of international relations and political science itself often involves a seemingly basic but also very crucial concept: power. Indeed, there are many facets of power worthy of analysis, and the international relations field generally deals with hard power; like the name itself

suggests, hard power demonstrates states' immediate and tangible resources that compel allies and enemies to act according to aforementioned states' will. Hard power as a result has received much scholarly attention, but its counterpart also deserves attention for very different reasons. The concept of soft power also demonstrates states' abilities to get others to act accordingly, not with coercion but persuasion. This can actually be achieved through measures that are not readily clear or even tangible, such as a state's culture. If other actors accept or are influenced by a state's cultural exports via soft power, this may inevitably lead to alliances or policy developments that can profoundly affect involved parties. Therefore, soft power is worth studying and especially with a certain state that has built a reputation on hard power: the People's Republic of China. The Asian superpower is known for flexing its economic strength and for some military might. However, it lacks soft power that not only could gain approval and respect from others, but more importantly influence them. The main purpose of this paper is to explore a rising China's attempts at wielding soft power specifically in the African region and the effects, by arguing how shared identities contribute to better reception of China's soft power in Africa; it shall begin with an introduction on soft power's relevance.

The relevance of soft power in regards to international relations can be explained by examining nation branding and public diplomacy. First, as mentioned above soft power is the ability to persuade actors to act accordingly through attraction and also influence; this can lead to developments among state actors whether it is through alliances or policies, making soft power important in the realm of international relations. Then comes the question of how soft power is exuded, at which the relevant concept nation branding comes into play; the scholar Ying Fan addresses nation branding in his *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* article "Soft power: Power of attraction or confusion?" as he explains: "[Nation] branding [actually] concerns the

application of branding and marketing communications techniques to reshape the international opinion of a country. [Furthermore, nation] branding is in fact a cross-cultural communication process that very much resembles the advertising process: awareness-attraction-preference” (Fan 155). From this one can see that a state intent on building more soft power such as China may carefully brand itself in the best way possible to draw positive attention and even exact global influence, even if that means purposely leaving out its domestic issues; however, it is not just China as Fan states how “[the] world is increasingly like a [stage] on which nations are competing against each other for attention and affection” (155). This is a startling detail and shows how crucial soft power is for international relations.

The idea that soft power is important for international relations could be reinforced by its correlation with public diplomacy, according to the works of IR scholar Joseph Nye, Jr. In “Soft Power and Public Diplomacy,” Nye poses the idea that “[the] soft power of a country rests [on] three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home [as well as] abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (Nye, 2008: 96). Here, Nye suggests that it is not only cultural exports, but rather a combination of elements that include politics which soft power is based upon. This may hinder soft power in countries such as China that have complicated and controversial policies the international community may frown upon and not accept, which shall be explored later. That is not to imply developing soft power is impossible and will be elusive to countries with certain political systems: “The advent of the radio in the 1920s [had] led many governments into [foreign-language] broadcasting, and [even] in the 1930s, communists [competed] to promote favorable images to foreign publics” (Nye, 2008: 97). Here, one can see an example of public diplomacy that was used to push ideologies; it also shows that soft power is

important for policymaking.

The importance of soft power can be exemplified by how much a country can benefit from exerting it as well. In addition, Nye goes as far to posit that soft power can be a means to success in world politics, in his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. The world has become increasingly globalized as different countries engage in more interaction with others, and as aforementioned the Internet makes dissemination of information easier, further contributing to ongoing globalization. This paves ways for countries to capitalize on soft power, as government and NGOs alike can use the platform for national branding and public diplomacy, crafting a certain image evoking responses in hopes of gaining respect and most important influence. Furthermore, Nye states how the “[information] revolution is creating virtual communities [as well as] networks that cut across national borders. [Politics] then becomes [a] competition for attractiveness, legitimacy, and credibility. The ability to share information—and [also] to be believed—becomes an important source of attraction [as well as] power” (Nye, 2004: 31). This is yet another testament showing soft power’s great importance. It is also worth noting “[the] soft power that is becoming more important in the information age is in part a social and economic by-product rather than solely a result of official government action” (Nye, 2004: 32); through attraction methods and use of tools such as culture, actors vie for influence and hence success via soft power.

Nye’s points help highlight the relevance of soft power today, while also revealing how wielders are no longer limited to official government actors but open to NGOs actors as well. This is worth examining further in order to achieve a holistic understanding of soft power. As Nye argues, “[in] the information age [governments wanting] to see rapid economic growth find [they] can no longer maintain the barriers to information flows that historically protected

officials from outside scrutiny” (Nye, 2004: 91-92). This is indeed true and applies to countries like China that are known for censorship and tight control over information. Though the Asian country has undergone rapid economic growth and looks to advance even further, it has also taken many preventive measures in order to keep controversial or damaging information about certain policies from spreading. However, NGOs within Chinese society are breaking the norm and using soft power tools like nation branding and public diplomacy commonly linked with government actors, in order to shape global views of the Chinese government according to their own agendas. From this one can surmise “[that] the trends of the information age will increase the soft power of nonstate actors, both good and bad” (Nye, 2004: 97-98); this means that either nonstate actors’ ideals of nation branding and public diplomacy could coincide with those of government actors, and both work towards acquiring soft power for shared benefits, or they have different ideals leading to soft power struggle. Either way, this shows soft power is a crucial tool.

Nye’s arguments suggest that the indicators of soft power are basically found in three components: culture, political values and a country’s foreign policy. Nye’s works also imply that soft power could readily be seen and reflected in how such components are received by others. If a country has cultural, political and foreign policy elements that outsiders consider are acceptable, then the latter would tend to develop positive feelings of the former on their own volition and consequently support the country. In the case of China, soft power is more elusive as the international community has not embraced the country’s culture, political values or foreign policy, and hence there are very polarizing opinions on the country. However, this means just as there are some who view China in a negative light, there are some who view it positively like African nations.

## Research Question and Argument

The research question of this paper concerns why China's soft power succeeds in certain regions of the world. In particular, why is it that China's soft power is not a universally accepted, but works in developing nations such as those in Africa? It is common to see in western media and policy analyses negative portrayals of China's presence in developing countries. For example, *The New York Times* published an article titled "In Nigeria, Chinese Investment Comes With a Downside" by both Keith Bradsher and Adam Nossiter, which cast a negative light on China's activities in Nigeria. Indeed, *The New York Times* appears to adopt an anti-China stance with other articles like "China's Global Ambitions, Cash and Strings Attached" by Clifford Krauss and once again Keith Bradsher, implying that China is incapable of benevolent acts and solely looking after its own self-interest. Even China's activities in other regions such as Latin America are not free from criticism, as can be demonstrated by "China's Ambitious Rail Projects Crash Into Harsh Realities in Latin America" by contributor Simon Romero. Furthermore, *The Heritage Foundation* report by scholar Peter Brookes titled "Into Africa: China's Grab for Influence and Oil" depicts China's intentions as mysterious and not necessarily beneficial to Africa nations, but may in fact even be reminiscent of Western colonialism. These sentiments are continued with a *Fortune* online article titled "China's Growing Footprint in Africa is Potentially Damaging" by both Mark Esposito and Terence Tse, which hints at one-sided trade. This paper, however, makes the argument is that the constructivist idea of identity is instrumental in understanding Chinese soft power within the African region: that is, the key components of China's soft power reflect shared identities with the developing world (especially Africa), thus contributing to a better reception of China's soft power in Africa. That is, an ability to attract other actors such as nation-states using elements like culture, politics and also foreign policy,

which shall be explored further.

The prevailing reasons for the positive view, this paper argues, are the three components of China's soft power in Africa: public diplomacy, economic assistance and shared identities as victims of historical oppression. This argument provides a constructivist angle on understanding China's soft power. Constructivism would be the best framework for understanding China's soft power in Africa as it introduces a cultural element to the political analysis.

The realist school of thought can perhaps help to explain China's foreign policies when it comes to Sino-African multilateral relations, what with John J. Mearsheimer's ideas about anarchy and power, as well as Joseph S. Nye, Jr.'s ideas about power. The first scholar proposes that an anarchic system is the driving force behind a state's goal to maximize its power; in realists' world there is no governing order but anarchy, in which states fight to gain or protect their own power in order to survive. The Chinese may believe anarchy exists in the world system, and hence they can survive by maximizing power as well as influence through dealings with a variety of African nations, gaining both alliances and security. In addition, the second scholar Nye, Jr. argues that when it comes to identifying power, "[the] ability to obtain desired outcomes is often associated with the possession of certain resources, and so we commonly use shorthand and define power as possession of relatively large amounts of such elements as population, territory, natural resources, economic strength, [and] military force" (Nye 110). This again speaks to China's reasoning behind offering African nations aid and direct foreign investments—to help fulfill national interests.

The constructivist school of thought also may offer theories as to how China creates foreign policies in regards to Africa. The reason for China's activeness in Africa may be

attributed to culture according to constructivism. That is, unlike realism's arguments about the role of anarchy and liberalism's about democratic peace, constructivism attributes consequences from foreign policies to a nation's cultural, historical and also social constructs. The scholar Alistair Iain Johnston describes constructivism and namely strategic culture in an *International Security* article "Thinking about Strategic Culture," in which he argues the potential role of culture in influencing the behavior of states; strategic culture theory proponents claim "[that] strategic culture leads to particular strategic behaviors" (Johnston 32). Taking all this into consideration, China's foreign policies toward Africa according to constructivist theories may in fact be because of a strategic culture the Asian country adopted in deciding how to act around foreign powers that it desires something from; this culture informed and molded its behavior to be strategizing, as the Chinese government appears to be helping African nations build infrastructure and provide aid as an act of goodwill, when its deep and underlying motive is to procure natural resources for its own people.

### **China's Soft Power in the Literature**

The schools of thought mentioned above give different lenses on how China conceives its foreign policies aimed at African countries, but what are the indicators of Chinese soft power and academics' views on their implications? In Barthélémy Courmont's article titled "What Implications for Soft Power: Charm Offensive or New Hegemony?," the scholar describes Beijing's goal of accumulating soft power that began in 2007 during the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CCP: "The possibility of a 'post-soft power' [is] raised when Chinese leaders are questioning the best strategies to improve Beijing's influence and serve the Chinese power in the world" (Courmont 344). This demonstrates China has actively sought to increase soft power at least for

a decade, perhaps to strive toward a “Beijing Consensus.” This strategy has garnered mixed reactions from different IR scholars: “The non-Chinese experts differ on their side on the reception of [soft] power in Beijing. Bonnie Glaser and Melissa Murphy argue in particular that the concept has been well received since its introduction in China, while Sheng Ding and Li Mingjiang believe on the other hand that this text [actually] has had little impact” (Courmont 346). Indeed, although some believe China is making strides toward a positive and softer national image, others believe that its soft power remains inhibited by controversial events both current and historical (e.g. the Cultural Revolution, the 6/4 Incident).

The prospects of Chinese soft power do appear promising in certain regions such as Africa, but this is not universal. That is, according to “Sources and Limits of Chinese ‘Soft Power’” by Bates Gill and Yanzhong Huang, “[examination] of China’s soft-power resources in the area of culture, political values and diplomacy shows [while] China’s soft power [increases], Beijing faces [constraints] in translating these resources into desired foreign-policy outcomes” (Gill and Huang 17); it is no question the Chinese government does face struggles with implementing desirable foreign policies. However, that is not to say all soft power attempts have been fruitless or lackluster: “The post-Mao period of reform and opening (*gaige kaifang*) has [in fact] led to growing international interest in Chinese culture, while creating incentives for Chinese leaders to expand the nation’s cultural influence [as well]” (Gill and Huang 18); this implies that China’s soft power is budding and there is room for the fledgling process to expand and improve. In addition, Gill and Huang stress how China’s soft power is also based on domestic values as well as policies, like how outbound Chinese tourists behave and conduct themselves abroad: “The new Chinese tourists tend to cast a more positive image of a wealthier [and] more confident Chinese elite” (Gill and Huang 20). From these indicators it appears that

China's soft power is growing in terms of culture.

The above literature shows that certain facets of China such as its culture have attracted the interest of some outsiders, but facets like foreign policy have not gained traction globally (with some exceptions like Africa), as the Chinese government works on implementing policies that would. In "China's Soft Power," Hongyi Lai stresses how China "presented several formulations for its foreign policy to serve two purposes [in the recent decade]. One is to project a peaceful [as well as] benign image of a rising China. The other [purpose] is to provide an appealing Chinese alternative to the U.S.-dominated world order. The latter is often perceived by China and many developing nations as a forceful and indiscriminate imposition of western ideas, institutions, and interests" (Lai 500). The first purpose aligns exactly with what was proposed earlier, that China is trying to soften its image that has been characterized as aggressive and even threatening to certain countries; the second purpose is intriguing, as it ties in with China's soft power success in an array of African nations. That is, perhaps China's appeal is that it can serve as an alternative to Western norms for many developing nations, especially the ones that were once subjugated under colonial rule. However, as Lai accurately describes, China still faces challenges in changing its perceived global image.

Scholars have observed various aspects of China's soft power. One is diplomacy via alliances with other Asian countries. As Thomas Christensen argues, "In 1996 China [had] created the institutional foundations in Central Asia for what would later become the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In 1997 China inaugurated the New Security Concept in its diplomacy with Southeast Asia and began adopting a much less belligerent posture on various disputes with ASEAN states" (Christensen 118). Furthermore, David Shambaugh has observed that China is rising globally in many aspects (e.g. culturally, diplomatically, economically and

many more). These are ways of how China has sought multilateral cooperation in its rise to power, with the end result being a boost in its influence; also, aside from regional diplomacy China is starting to make a presence in global diplomacy. Formerly an isolationist country after negative effects of foreign interference, China has grown to become very active in both bilateral and multilateral engagements with countries, especially with many African nations; their exchanges are marked by “bilateral and multilateral diplomacy [and] developmental aid assistance” (Shambaugh 109).

Another key component of China’s soft power comes from its economic growth and along with it, economic aid. That is, its economic presence is also contributing to its rise in influence and power. Furthermore, Jing Gu and others argue that China already has and continues to have an impact on the global economy, as the Chinese economy had “accounted for 2.9% of global income in 1978, reached 4.7% of global income in 2004 and is predicted to reach 7.9% by 2020” (Gu 275); this is just a statistical example of China’s growing influence in terms of economy alone, and the Asian country’s far-reaching maneuvers are causing changes in global economic institutions and systems. For instance, according to Gu, “[the] OECD Economic Survey of China predicted that it will overtake Germany and the United States to become the world’s largest exporter by 2010” (276). This has already occurred as China assumed that position which Gu predicted eleven years ago, again demonstrating its incredible breadth at exerting its burgeoning influence. Furthermore, there is no secret China is a trading superpower. Shambaugh argues that “[China’s] government [in fact] privileged foreign trade as an important pillar of its overall development and growth strategy ever Deng Xiaoping announced the opening of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the early 1980s” (Shambaugh 157). Economic prowess is an integral part of China’s rise in influence and continues to be a testament to the Asian

country's hard and soft powers, as China's dealings take the form of trade and aid.

A third component of China's soft power is Chinese culture. The government has made cultural exports one of the significant elements, and has invested in spreading Chinese culture through copious amounts. According to Shambaugh, the Chinese government “[actually] has launched a concerted effort to improve its global image and ramp up its cultural presence around the world—pumping an estimated \$7 to \$10 billion per year into its ‘overseas publicity work’” (207). This shows a commitment to amplifying soft power in order to not only gain influence, but also acceptance and respect, which could translate into other countries’ willingly following along with China’s ideals and also policies, even if they may contradict or go against their own; the Chinese government as a result has implemented a strategic plan to spread Chinese culture, through way of various exports: heritage goods, books, film, television, radio, arts and more (209). Furthermore, Chinese cultural influence has spread due to increased global mobility of its citizens: many Chinese citizens travel abroad and significantly contribute to tourism, prompting some countries to change business models in order to cater specifically to Chinese clients. For China, soft power is creating ripples to an extent.

The steady rise of China in certain facets like diplomacy, economy and culture reflect the magnitude of its growing influence, as it continues having profound effects in the global arena. However, whether this impact is well received is another matter, for some welcome China’s rise while others are more apprehensive. There are different reasons for this mixed reaction and a common one is that China challenges regional and global orders. That is, there is a possible security dilemma concerning China’s rise which could exacerbate conflicts, especially with Asian countries like Japan that China is embroiled in ongoing territorial disputes with, and also the United States, as the traditional hegemonic power may find its position challenged by a rising

Asian power. In other words, for some anything that is attributed to China's rise could be perceived as contributing to both regional as well as global instability. However, certain actors welcome China's rise such as African nations, mainly because they benefit from China's trade and economic aid. It is hence safe to say that China's rapid rise evokes more feelings of uncertainty than feelings of universal approval. This could undermine the Chinese government's efforts at improving China's image as well as reputation. Indeed, the government has been spending more time and effort on elevating China's soft power, but it needs to know soft power cannot be forced or manufactured through government processes. The Chinese government's attempts at amassing soft power have led to varying degrees of success, which shall be further explored.

The remainder of the paper will primarily analyze China's soft power in Africa and examine three aspects particularly: foreign aid, shared Sino-African identities, as well as African perspectives. Foreign aid is a focal feature of Chinese soft power and hence will be explored to determine how much China contributes in the African region, for how long and to what African countries in particular. Furthermore, there is much to examine when it comes to the constructivist concept of identity, and so shared Sino-African identities' stemming from historical grievances and domestic noninterference will be explored. Lastly, African perspectives are important to grasp as they can either confirm or dispute assertions that Chinese soft power is successful in the African region. Sources used in the discussions below will include a mix of primary and secondary literature. The primary literature includes articles from a major newspaper of the African country, Nigeria, and survey results from Pew Research; additional sources include data from the China Africa Research Initiative.

## **II. CASE STUDY: China's Soft Power in Africa**

The Chinese government's soft power strategies in Africa may be viewed in three major dimensions: i.e. emphasis on foreign aid, shared identities and public diplomacy. This section will serve to detail each of these strategies.

### **Foreign Aid**

The presence of China's soft power could be seen in foreign aid according to the China Africa Research Initiative (CARI). To provide context, "Chinese foreign aid expenditure has [actually] increased steadily in the past decade, growing from US\$631 million in 2003 to close to US\$3 billion in [the year] 2015, with an average annual growth rate of 14%" ("Data: Chinese Foreign Aid to Africa" 1); this plays a part in Sino-African relations as China's government dedicates a significant portion of foreign aid to the region. Indeed, data from the China Africa Research Initiative indicates that such aid is given through a number of different ways, whether it is via contracts, investments, loans and/or also trade; it is evident that business is a major element in Sino-African exchanges based on the types of aid mentioned above, and according to CARI data, "the gross annual revenues of Chinese companies' construction projects in Africa [actually] totaled US\$50 billion... top 5 countries are Algeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Angola, and Nigeria. These top 5 countries account for 49% of all Chinese companies' 2016 construction project gross annual revenues in Africa" (1). The report describes the extensive Chinese labor force in Africa, but what must also be noted is that these construction projects are infrastructure-building projects' benefitting the abovementioned countries and are important sources of aid. In addition, China has provided foreign direct investments (FDIs) in a number of African countries: "[Between both] 2009 and 2012, China's direct investment in Africa [had in fact grown] at an

annual rate of 20.5%... 2008 was [the] only year in the past decade where Chinese FDI flows to Africa exceeded those from the U.S. The top 5 African destination of Chinese FDI in 2014 were Algeria, Zambia, Kenya, Republic of Congo, and Nigeria” (1). This reflects the level of commitment China has placed in giving aid to African partners. Loans are yet another way of showing such economic commitment, as the Chinese government had “extended US \$94.4 billion worth of loans to African governments and state-owned enterprises [from 2000-2015]... In 2015, the top recipients of Chinese loans were Uganda, Kenya, and [also] Senegal” (1). The African recipients of Chinese loans are hence potentially influenced to view China positively as a result of the available aid. Finally, bilateral trade is another essential component of Sino-African relations, as CARI highlights how in “2016, the largest exporter to China from Africa was Angola, followed by South Africa and The Republic of Congo” (1). From numerical data and statistics, one can surmise Chinese foreign aid contributes to soft power.

The foreign aid that China provides is perhaps one of if not the most prominent features of current Sino-African relations, again boosting many Africans’ positive perceptions of the Asian country as well as contributing to the latter’s soft power influence; there is much available data to support the notion that China does provide foreign aid globally and especially to Africa: “In Africa alone [the Chinese government actually] have completed 900 projects, built 2,233 kilometers of railroads, 3,391 kilometers of highways, 42 stadiums and 54 hospitals; [it] dispatched more than 18,000 Chinese medical and public health personnel and 350,000 technicians, trained 30,000-plus Africans from various sectors, and offered 34,000 government-funded scholarships to African students” (Shambaugh 204). These are extensive aid programs China has given African nations with no political strings attached, much to the chagrin of Western nations that deride the Asian country for aiding certain controversial regimes such as

Sudan; however, many African nations welcome China's foreign aid as they definitely gain much from it, and China itself focuses much of its aid toward Africa: "In terms of the [actual] distribution of China's foreign aid, [the] lion's share [does go] to Africa (45.7 percent)" (204). This demonstrates the amount of dedication as well as effort China makes toward ensuring that such resources and services are available to many African nations, which consequently respond with respect. Furthermore, after former president Jiang Zemin visited Africa between 1995-1996, he established the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (i.e. FOCAC), which African statesmen from at least fifty-three different countries attended; it opened the door for foreign aid in the forms of investment and development assistance, and the forum continues to meet every three years (109). This shows how China's multifaceted foreign aid toward Africa has existed for decades and is not going to disappear soon; the following will briefly explore select African countries that have benefitted from Chinese foreign aid.

### *Republic of Djibouti*

The Chinese are essentially committed to building developed and modern infrastructure that African countries need, and the lucrative aid on China's part could lead to the African countries' own economic growth and greater roles in the global economy (Youssouf 3). The Republic of Djibouti's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, has said that such aid could well boost Africa's economic security by creating a future scenario in which there would be more investors vying for African development opportunities (3). This attests to the idea that China's foreign policy plan in Africa is likely working. Indeed, Youssouf is an African government official who does not perceive China as a threat (i.e. possibly trying to consume all of Africa's oil supplies), but rather the opposite and embraces the country that has become

Africa's biggest economic partner; furthermore, one may look at both parties' histories with oppressive Western powers and gather that their shared experiences of humiliation may create a substantive bond. The China-Africa relations are built on an understanding for one another's goals and that without one the other cannot thrive: Africa needs China's aid to gain more economic security as much as China needs Africa's resources to gain energy security.

### *Sudan and Zimbabwe*

Though Africa constitutes a small part of China's global investments, it is a critical region that has natural wealth in oil that the Chinese did not have since the 1990s, and this makes China emphatic on forming good China-Africa relations. The Chinese use a differentiation strategy that revolves around noninterference policies and soft-power plays (Yin and Vaschetto 43) to convince African countries they are unlike Western powers who try interfering in African affairs and politics, or will only provide aid with conditions and strings attached; they stress their respect for sovereignty and their view of African countries as their equals by not undermining political structures. Instead they provide foreign aid and other resources without conditions. Furthermore, the Chinese are open to having relations with African countries like Sudan and Zimbabwe, which the West shut out. Even though China may be frowned upon for establishing relations with authoritarian regimes in Africa, it is via this way that does not stop them from securing contractual agreements and the natural resources they direly need at this point (49); through this method that the Chinese earn trust from various African countries that are convinced China respects their sovereignty and sees them as equal players.

### *Angola and More*

The good relations that have formed between China and Africa have resulted in China's ability to import oil and other natural resources from African countries such as Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo and Sudan as well (50). The Chinese have also successfully secured oil drilling rights and oil exploration rights throughout Africa with foreign contractual agreements (50); furthermore, since 2011 they have imported over half of Sudan's oil and a quarter of Angola's oil as well (50). In exchange for oil imports the Chinese have drastically improved Africa's standard of living by building infrastructure through structures like airports, railways, dams and factories; these may be built as convenient means of transporting resources all the way to China, but whatever the underlying reason, many African countries ultimately benefit. In addition to infrastructure the Chinese have opened the door for its African business and trade partners to export their materials to the Asian market; this helps African economies grow and develop as a result. The Chinese have not only managed to obtain energy resources in Africa through a combination of noninterference and soft power, but have also fostered good relations with many African countries and helped improve their infrastructure.

The level of commitment the Chinese have placed in their African policies may be concerning to competitors like the U.S., but many in Africa hope that China will continue providing aid to their African nations, be it through contracts and direct investments or foreign aid. The Chinese are instrumental in helping the African nations develop in a variety of ways, whether it is building infrastructure, increasing market competition and economic growth or even elevating the nations' international statuses (Tu 331). In turn the Chinese get energy security in African oil supplies and more export markets for Chinese goods as well; this helps their booming economy, which continually needs more foreign markets to export goods to. The China-Africa relations have become so that both countries gain from agreements they are in, and the Chinese

government also describes its relationship with developing countries such as those on the African continent in that: “great powers are the key; neighbourhood is the priority; developing countries are the foundation; and multilateral cooperation is an important mechanism” (qtd. in Tu 335). This shows the economic cooperation that China has chosen to develop with African nations and how China does value its relationship with said African nations.

The rise of Chinese global activity owes to the fact China is experiencing economic growth, and with increased economic growth comes increased energy consumption naturally. The Chinese need energy resources to meet demand needs that are constantly on the rise; they have since sought for resources in many countries abroad. It is important to secure affordable and stable oil quantities, because China’s economy is in fact tied to energy security and would be badly affected if energy sources were scarce; the growing demand for energy has led China to look for it in other areas, such as the African continent. The abundance of oil in African states makes the Chinese use strategic diplomacy to establish a mutual understanding and earn the abovementioned African states’ trust, so that China may have access to Africa’s natural reserves; the Chinese use economic aid programs and foreign contractual contracts to access oil resources and thus further China’s energy security. They help build infrastructure that advances African development as well as provides easier ways of moving energy materials to China; this has created a mutual win-win situation among China and Africa states as a result, strengthening China-Africa relations and showing China’s hard and soft powers.

The Chinese government uses its soft power in order to sway African leaders’ opinions of China toward a positive direction, and a fundamental part of this is accomplished through aid. Economic aid can be a pivotal factor in foreign policy, for in this case China stands to reap the lucrative rewards for dedicating copious funds toward African development and infrastructure,

namely voluntary influence as well as access to oil reserves.

The idea that China assists many African nations through aid, a form of soft power, is not lost upon the latter and thereby reception toward the former is consequently positive. Furthermore, there has in fact been a history of dealings among China and African nations; indeed, the Chinese government began giving aid under Mao Zedong, then with paramount leader Deng Xiaoping and continuing on to this day in full gear. This shows a deep commitment toward harnessing Chinese soft power in Africa through consistent diplomacy; in addition, Brautigam describes three distinct traits that show how China has wooed African nations with its offers of aid: “investment-for-resource swaps, ‘compensatory’ trade, [as well as] media hype” (48). The first refers to the direct investments China gives African nations in exchange for natural resources as was mentioned previously, while the latter two refer to trading of select goods, both positive press coverage as well as public relations, respectively—all strong tools that could propel developing African nations onto the global arena and provide them with crucial platform opportunities; there are also cases of how the Chinese Red Cross gave humanitarian aid to African nations during the 1980s to combat drought and famine (66), and perhaps it is this along with China’s checkbook diplomacy that has caused many African nations to view the People’s Republic of China (PRC) favorably, some even choosing to break relations with the Republic of China (ROC) or Taiwan (Brautigam 68). This shows the Chinese government’s ability to exercise soft power.

The amount of Chinese aid in the African region is a clear display not only of the Asian country’s rise, but use of soft power as it engages with African nations through diplomacy and funding, as a result garnering the approval of many African leaders. From factories to medical centers, China is helping advance Africa’s infrastructure through its aid projects: “[One] of the

promises made at the lavish November 2006 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit in Beijing was a grant of almost \$38 to supply artemisinin to the thirty malarial treatment centers China promised to construct across Africa” (Brautigam 72); this aid project is just one of many that China has initiated as it employs its burgeoning soft power to strengthen ties with African nations, with the goal of gaining influence and access to resources. In addition, it reveals a political element to China’s generous aid according to Brautigam (73-74), for China uses the programs as a testament of its continual engagement in foreign policy; it takes advantage of growing wariness toward traditional aid models and actively cultivates good relations with African nations for decades. Therefore, after much time and effort China may reap the benefits of its labor in the form of generally positive reception among African nations and their willingness to continue cooperating; the Chinese aid programs hence “reflect the lessons of all the experiments since Mao died [and also] the continued emphasis on aid as a lubricant for mutually beneficial cooperation” (104). They also demonstrate soft power.

The Chinese government also has incorporated debt cancellation as part of foreign aid to Africa, earning praise from the latter but at the same time drawing criticism from Chinese citizens. From scholar Yun Sun’s article “The domestic controversy over China’s foreign aid and the implications for Africa” one can ascertain how China’s foreign aid encompasses the generous aspect of debt cancellation for certain developing countries; it describes President Xi Jinping’s 2015 visit to the UN, followed by his announcement of “[pledging] \$2 billion to the new South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund, debt forgiveness for least-developed countries, [as well as] \$100 million [total] in military assistance to the African Union” (Sun 1). The African aid recipients for obvious reasons lauded Xi’s plans, but Chinese citizens became concerned about what was perceived to be excessive distribution of aid, when China itself is also a developing

country with millions still impoverished despite its rise; nevertheless, debt cancellation is another indication of China's goal to bolster relations with foreign countries and push for soft power. Furthermore, during the same year President Xi attended a China-Africa summit where he announced a "\$60 billion debt relief and financing package to African countries... China would cancel outstanding debt from African countries due [that year] but did not specify an amount [at the time]... In 2009, China cancelled debt for [a total of] 32 African countries" ("China Announces Debt Cancellation at African Summit" 1); this reveals that China has provided African countries foreign aid in the form of debt cancellation for almost a decade. It continues to do so despite domestic concerns from citizens, for the end products of soft power that include potential sway and influence over willing countries are important in foreign policy during the twenty-first century; having African countries' support can help soften China's global image.

## **Shared Identities**

The emphasis on shared identities with African countries is yet another key component of China's soft power strategy in Africa. To elaborate, these shared identities include those on historical grievances, domestic noninterference and also the appeal of non-Western development models, which this section shall explore.

### *Shared Identities on Historical Grievances*

The shared identities on historical grievances reflected in Chinese and African discourse refer to common experiences as victims of western colonialism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Essentially, because of these experiences, China respects sovereign equality of weaker countries and would not take advantage of these countries. Furthermore, at the other end the African

response to China's soft power and heavy presence in the region is characterized by positive and welcoming attitudes, as opposed to hostility aimed toward the foreign actor due to Africa's both long and tragic history with Western colonialism. However, as the name implies, colonialism mostly involved Western nations that had acted as brutal conquerors and imperialists in Africa (e.g. the infamous transatlantic slave trade and South Africa's apartheid, events that still have residual effects on the African continent), but not nations like China. The latter has not forcibly taken Africa's resources and imposed its policies or moral authority, but rather taken time and effort to establish relations with African countries built on trust, provide abundant economic aid with little to no strings attached, and perhaps most important of all not interfere with the African countries' state affairs especially in regards to human rights, thereby respecting said countries' sovereignties; this as a result convinces many countries in Africa to view China as a benefactor and not an imperialistic threat, hence increasing the Asian country's soft power in the region by willingly allowing it to continue its activities and policies. Indeed, the scholar Deborah Brautigam reaffirms the good reception in her book *The Dragon's Gift*: "[Many] African leaders were almost uniformly positive about the benefits of China's embrace" (Brautigam 3). This shows it is not a one-sided exchange wherein China is carving up the African continent like past Western nations, but instead is flexing its soft power to benefit everyone.

An integral part of the shared identities on historical grievances are in fact shared values on non-interference in the domestic affairs of another sovereign countries. On the one hand, China does not make judgments about the nature of political systems and regime types in Africa. On the other end, African countries also do not criticize or ridicule China's controversial policies and possible human rights violations as the West regularly does.

The Chinese actively support African development and show this through the aid that

they provide, which in turn foster approval as many African leaders reciprocate support through acknowledgment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the official government of China. Here, through a combination of aid and trade was China able to influence many African countries to receive the East Asian country with open arms, as opposed to the historical Western powers that coerced much of Africa into giving resources; indeed, when scholar Brautigam gave a talk to a group of African ambassadors in 2008, she noted how many ambassadors there had agreed to a fellow attendee's remark about how "China [actually] gives Africans more respect than they [otherwise would] get from the West" (68). This goes back to a historical analysis as IR scholars can see through a constructivist lens that perhaps a deep, shared identity among China and African nations is what also draws them together as allies; though from two different regions, both had endured Western imperialism that cause the developing nations to unify against the Western system of liberal democracy today. The Chinese government does not disrespect African nations by criticizing or questioning the legitimacy of their sovereignty based on certain issues such as human rights. In other words, noninterference on China's part earn the trust and admiration of African leaders, thus paving the way for a general positive reception toward China's presence in Africa today, as aid and trade are conducted voluntarily on both ends. Furthermore, international relations scholars should note that noninterference is considered a core concept to China: it is one of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These principles were established in 1954 not only by China, but both India and Myanmar, and they entail the following: "mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and [also] peaceful coexistence" ("About Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" 1); India, Myanmar and China were formerly colonized by foreign powers, and as a result it should come as no surprise that

their ideals would encompass noninterference in any domestic matters. However, these principles are not exclusive to the three Asian countries, because other former colonies such as African nations have dealt with Western interference firsthand, and are similarly opposed to foreign presence in state affairs; their ideals as a result align with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence's noninterference component, whether they are aware of this Asian model or not, hence resulting in shared identities. Even if African nations do not know about the model, their positive reception to Chinese aid sans political conditions demonstrate a mutual affinity to noninterference: although the African country Liberia broke off relations with China to recognize Taiwan in 1989, a private hospital run by China Heilongjiang Province International Economic and Technical Corporation remained open, despite political change (Brautigam 69). This most likely earned Liberia's respect as it was not pressured to align with China's government to retain medical aid.

The abovementioned discussions depict a mutually beneficial and strong relationship among China and African countries, implying that the latter approve China's use of soft power and fully welcome Sino-African exchanges.

#### *Shared Identities on Development Models*

The West may view China's expansion in Africa with wariness, but African leaders approve the Asian country's presence for the most part as it brings benefits and opportunities to many. Even though China's spending in Africa is tied back to its own domestic needs for energy and resources like oil, China does help African nations along the way by creating a host of job opportunities: "The overseas economic zones [are in fact] intended to foster Chinese investment in African manufacturing, [thus] enabling China's mature industries to move offshore in groups.

[In addition] they [actually] are creating employment for Africans” (Brautigam 308). The Africans also benefit by inviting Chinese investment as aforementioned, which could lead to aid and development of much infrastructure; in other words, both parties stand to gain from one another via diplomacy and trade, which China continues moving toward in its foreign policy that is marked by soft power. The future as a result looks promising according to Brautigam, who accepts and recognizes China’s presence on the African region, while hoping and expecting African government leaders to take advantage of the opportunities that arise from the many Sino-African exchanges; the scholar makes an intriguing and valid point in claiming “China’s own experiments have [in fact] raised hundreds of millions of Chinese out of poverty, [and] largely without foreign aid. They believe in investment [and] technology as levers for development, and they [apply these] tools in their African engagement” (Brautigam 311). The prospects look fruitful as China uses its soft power. Furthermore, what attracts many African nations to the China model is likely linked to their opposition to the Washington Consensus. Indeed, the Washington Consensus is a Western economic model designed to supposedly assist and reform developing countries that experienced crises, but has garnered mixed reactions: “Decades of controversy over the Washington Consensus have raised many doubts about whether the economic conditions that often accompany aid are always good for development; this [in fact] remains a heated area of debate” (Brautigam 149); these doubts have arisen due to the economic conditions that are tied to Western aid, and as former colonies African nations are inclined to be dubious of the West’s intentions, which clearly had not been in their favor or to their benefit in the past. However, they are attracted to China’s model as the Asian country had gone through extreme economic upheaval but emerged prosperous; as Brautigam describes in detail, China underwent countless experiments to develop its economic model that is instrumental in its rise.

This evokes awe and hope in African nations as they realize that there is an alternative to the Washington Consensus, that a formerly colonized country can rise and rival oppressors: “The Chinese [have said], ‘to end poverty, build a road.’ The ‘Four Modernizations’ China launched in the 1970s emphasized infrastructure. They built roads, ports, and rural power plants, modernized agriculture, [and also] invited in factories. They experimented with different approaches: special economic zones, for example. China’s ‘Beijing Consensus’ may [be] about embracing experimentation (what works?) and avoiding easy certainties” (308). To see a developing country rise from hardships is an inspiration for African nations that want to follow China’s footsteps.

The allure of China’s development model is another reason why Chinese soft power resonates with a host of African countries; in spite of Western media’s negative views of Chinese investment in Africa based on accusations such as possible ulterior motives, scholar Deborah Brautigam strategically debunks several myths that the abovementioned media had created with her *Foreign Policy* article “5 Myths About Chinese Investment in Africa.” For example, Brautigam argues that China is not only in Africa just for obtaining natural resources for its own interests, despite what others have speculated; indeed, the scholar explains that “[in] 2014 alone, Chinese companies [had] signed over \$70 billion in construction contracts in Africa that will yield vital infrastructure, provide jobs, and boost the skill set of the local workforce” (Brautigam “5 Myths About Chinese Investment in Africa” 2). This development model no doubt appeals to the African recipients, and regarding the local workforce, Chinese companies do hire African labor despite reports of said companies’ hiring mostly Chinese nationals. Indeed, according to Brautigam’s article, “Hong Kong-based academics Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong surveyed 400 Chinese companies [that are] operating in over 40 African countries. They found that while

management and senior technical positions [in fact] tended to remain Chinese, more than 80 percent of workers [actually] were local” (4). From this one can see how the Chinese development model resonates with many African countries; furthermore, one may argue that it is shared identities based on development that make China’s soft power successful in Africa.

The Chinese development model has been criticized by media reports, and yet this is not the case for African nations that not only receive foreign aid from the Asian country, but prefer an alternative that strays from the Western model and status quo (Washington Consensus). In Deborah Brautigam and Kevin P. Gallagher’s *Global Policy* article “Bartering Globalization: China’s Commodity-backed Finance in Africa and Latin America,” both scholars examine how China’s model resonate with developing countries, citing financial tools that range from commodity-backed to resource-secured loans; it has been established earlier that China distributes loans to an array of African countries, and according to the article, “Chinese banks have [actually] provided approximately \$132 billion in financing to African and Latin American governments and state-owned firms since 2003” (Brautigam and Gallagher 346). The majority of these come from resource-secured finance that is not opposed by African countries. Furthermore, despite claims that Chinese finance work in recipients’ disadvantage when it comes to commodity pricing and use of labor, Brautigam and Gallagher argue that “[countries] receiving [export] credits [actually] can be reassured that [there] is no evidence that they lock in low commodity prices, or mandate the use of Chinese workers [in said countries]. China’s package loans, while relatively rare, are attractive to recipients. Policy makers in competing countries might explore how they can use this model of project finance to reduce payment risks for their own loans” (346). From this one can understand why African countries identify with and prefer China’s development model.

Another aspect of the shared Sino-African identities is in fact an emphasis on individual countries' own path of national development, namely an indirect repudiation of the western model of development. In addition, when addressing the difference between China's aid model compared with the West's model, academic scholar Brautigam claims that: "The comparative performance of China, with [five-year] plans and emphasis on experimentation rather than certainties, [actually] stands as a rebuke to the Washington Consensus policies. Liberalization, privatization, and structural adjustment never [achieved] legitimacy as a development model in Africa" (16). Failure of Western aid policies in Africa could be attributed to an array of reasons, one possibly being African countries' choosing to adopt a model from a country like China that has a shared history of Western humiliation and grievances; indeed, a constructivist idea such as identity could well play a role in China's current success in the African region. However, that is not to say China is planning to dole out all financial resources: "As a country with deep poverty still clustered outside the shining cities of Shanghai and Shenzhen, China would be irresponsible to set aside larger amounts of funding for the sole benefit of other countries" (Brautigam 25). In spite of this idea, China continues assisting African nations.

### **African Perspectives**

The perspectives from African countries constitute a good reflection of the strategies and successes of China's soft power in Africa. This section will discuss scholarly findings of African perspectives and report original research of African perspectives based on Nigerian newspapers from January to March 2018.

The overall positive response from African countries toward China's increased presence can be reflected in survey results conducted by scholars. In Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong's

*China Quarterly* article titled “African Perspectives on China-Africa Links,” the two scholars perform random sample and university-based surveys to arrive at the conclusion that “African views are not nearly as negative as Western media make [them] out [to be]... differences among countries in attitudes towards China are primarily a function of the extent to which national politicians have elected to raise the ‘China problem’ and, secondarily, the extent of Western media influence in African states” (Sautman and Yan 728). This reinforces the notion that Africans are unlike the West in that most do not possess negative outlooks on China, and any differences could be accounted for in how open or susceptible the countries are to Western opinions or how their own politicians portray China. To add credence to the findings of Sautman and Hairong, survey results from the Pew Research Center can also demonstrate Africans’ amicable perspectives toward China. The findings show that China “receives mostly positive reviews in [sub-Saharan] African nations polled [Tanzania 77%, Kenya 74%, Senegal 71%, Nigeria 70%, Uganda 61%, Ghana 61%]” (“Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance and Drones, But Limited Harm to America’s Image” 1). In addition, the Pew Research Center reaffirms the notion that African nations accept China’s economic growth while others remain wary, which comes as no surprise considering how much China has invested in the African region. Even when it comes to China and individual rights that are a controversial subject matter, “many do not offer [opinions], although on balance in most of the African nations surveyed publics tend to believe that Beijing respects personal freedoms” (3). This could be understood as certain African nations like Sudan also have come under international scrutiny for human rights issues. In regards to China’s leadership and namely President Xi Jinping, “[many] in Latin America and Africa do not have an opinion about the [Chinese] leader, but among those who do, Xi [in fact] receives largely negative reviews in Latin America, while [results show] Africans give him

mostly favorable marks” (4). These survey results show that African perspectives range from neutral to positive, but rarely negative.

The survey results are undoubtedly an effective and reliable source to grasp African perspectives on China’s activities in the region, as they provide empirical data. However, another method to effectively measure African countries’ reception of China is to look at coverage of the Asian country in media outlets like newspapers; this is where a case study of one big African newspaper outlet comes into play, namely Nigeria’s *Vanguard News* that covers many topics about the country itself and the world, hence including news about China. In order to see how China is viewed by one of its biggest African partners, analyzing China-related articles at a micro level through *Vanguard News* during a span of the past several months is indeed an appropriate endeavor to pursue; this is vital as it can either affirm or disprove previous claims about African nations’ overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward China. That being said, from first examination it appears *Vanguard News* adopts a neutral stance that neither supports nor denounces China, instead just reporting how the Chinese President Xi Jinping had given a nationalistic speech that alluded to the One-China policy; indeed, from the article’s ambiguous title “China ready to fight ‘bloody battle’ to remain one,” one cannot quite say that *Vanguard News* views China’s rise with reverence nor with derision. This ambiguity and objectiveness does not reinforce nor refute claims that Africans view China positively, and for that more articles would need to be analyzed to discern an informed opinion.

The next article from *Vanguard News* is perhaps a bit more telling than the previous, as the publication is aptly titled “Cotton farmers accuse China over collapse of textile industries.” In the *Vanguard News* article, writer Gabriel Ewepu covers an address by Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer of Arewa Cotton and Allied Products Limited, Anibe

Achimugu, at the 16<sup>th</sup> African Cotton Association (ACA) in mid-March 2018; here the writer claims how “[cotton] farmers in Nigeria [accused] China over collapse of textile industries in the country following contraband textile materials smuggled and labeled made in Nigeria that [flooded] the market” (Ewepu 1). Ewepu’s work does capture the frustrations of Achimugu as it documents how the latter laments Chinese contraband that has placed African manufacturers at a disadvantage; this is in stark contrast to what was presumably Africans’ general glowing perception of China, as this is a testament that there are issues within Sino-African relations upon closer look. However, an intriguing observation is a reader’s comment that is not filled with anti-Chinese rhetoric, but rather defends China and implies Nigerians are at fault: “Is it the Chinese that are involved or dependent on mass importation and smuggling of textile materials into Nigeria? There is nothing as worse than a man telling himself lies. And the average Nigerian seems to thrive on this trade of lying to self” (5). These disparate and divided opinions from Achimugu and the reader show that Nigerians likely do not have a uniform positive nor negative view about China.

The indication that there are at least a portion of Nigerians who do view China positively can be demonstrated by Vera Anyagafu’s *Vanguard News* article “Africa remains indispensable for achieving China-Africa 2030 agenda – President Xi,” as it covers Xi Jinping’s hopes for Sino-African cooperation and evokes positive reception from readers. From the beginning Anyagafu describes how President Xi has said “that Africa remains pivotal especially in the goal of advancing the Belt and Road Initiative [i.e. development strategy]” (Anyagafu 1), and how Africa nations will “[actually remain] China’s foremost partner in its [ongoing] quest to build a global community with a shared future [together]” (1). This clearly reflects the Chinese government’s official stance on its relationship with its African allies, and although Anyagafu

maintains a neutral tone by not offering an opinion or response but solely reporting on China's statement, the article alone may be interpreted as an acceptance or acknowledgement of African nations' role in further boosting Sino-African engagement. Furthermore, the article has elicited a positive response from a reader who addresses China positively: "This is something [that I actually have] already known for at least 2 years now. With the help of Africa, China will dethrone the US as the largest economy and wealthiest country in the world in about 50 years" (6). From this one can surmise that perhaps an anti-West sentiment due to historical imperialism could be a factor in making certain Africans favor an Asian power like China over a Western one like the U.S.

The articles explored thus far have largely taken a neutral side when reporting on China, with the writers just providing factual coverage and not giving their own opinions of China. However, in a recent March 2018 article by Charles Onunaiju titled "The U.S, China, Africa: Issues in Sec. Tillerson's visit," Onunaiju appears to show both a pro-China and anti-U.S. view; indeed, the writer first covers what (now former) U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had said during a lecture at an American university regarding China, which was that although China could assist with African development, its strategies lead to debt. Instead of agreeing with Tillerson, Onunaiju almost instantly rebukes the former U.S. official's anti-China remark: "Not only does this fly in the face of reality but leaves one wondering if Mr. Tillerson was [even] adequately or properly briefed on issues of China-Africa cooperation" (Onunaiju 1); this short but strong statement likely hints at the writer's frustration on U.S. interference and ignorance of other countries' affairs, which may be shared by other Nigerians and Africans alike. Furthermore, Onunaiju proceeds to show positive examples of how China has helped African nations' develop, drawing a reader's likeminded response: "While China helps Africa [build infrastructure] which]

creates jobs and makes life better for [us], the Americans are here to seek [places] to build military bases to ‘fight’ terrorism” (Onunaiju 6). Like the last article implies, anti-West sentiment due to past imperialism may play a role in Africans’ preference for an Asian country with similar history.

The February *Vanguard News* article “Dollar oil futures contracts: The China challenge” by Sonny Atumah takes on a neutral stance when it comes to depicting China as a rising power, but at certain areas the author does seem to champion China’s efforts and possesses an encouraging attitude toward its endeavors. For the majority of the article Atumah adopts an objective tone and relies heavily on facts and figures when discussing “[how in] in the next four weeks the global international finance system would witness adjustments as the Chinese launch its oil futures contracts in its currency, the Yuan” (Atumah 1). The author addresses possible questions such as whether or not the Chinese are able to convince the international community to adopt the Yuan for oil contracts and mentions how it would have to go up against the United States dollar that is the dominant currency. In response to the *Bloomberg Gadfly* columnist David Fickling’s assertion that China does not have enough influence to gain favor, Atumah argues on the contrary, “paying in yuan [could] become part of President Xi Jinping’s ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative to develop ties across Eurasia, [which includes] the Middle East. [In addition,] Chinese participation in Saudi Aramco’s planned initial public offering could help sway Saudi opinion toward accepting yuan” (2). This combined with Atumah’s remark that Asian and other developing nations will surpass the U.S. hegemon in the near future implies some Nigerians view China more favorably than they do Western countries like the U.S.

The *Vanguard News* does not appear to endorse negative nor positive views of China but keeps a neutral stance when reporting on the Asian country. However, as some of the articles like

Ewepu's have shown, the publication does not shy away from the idea that perhaps Sino-African relations are not as mutually beneficial as some may be led to believe; this is evident in a recent February 2018 article titled "No job opportunity for Nigerians in China – Envoy" that describes how the Consul-General of Nigeria in China's Guangzhou province, Wale Oloko, advised Nigerians who are looking for prospective jobs in China to look somewhere else. Indeed, the official emphasized how "it [would] continue to be difficult for unskilled Nigerians to secure even menial jobs in China" ("No job opportunity for Nigerians in China – Envoy" 1); for two countries that are allies and close trading partners, and considering how China is actively engaged in African countries mainly for its domestic needs, this hints that Nigerians are not benefitting from Sino-African relations as much as they could. However, the article actually is not criticizing China for not creating job opportunities in the country for Nigerian migrant workers, as it responsibly clarifies how "[Oloko] said that China was currently favourable to Nigerians who would be visiting for studies, tourism and business purposes" (2); therefore, although Nigerians are dissuaded to locate jobs in China, they are encouraged to visit. This depicts China in a better light than what the eye-catching article title initially suggests.

The Nigerian newspaper *Vanguard News* has proven to have an array of articles about China, and while it is neutral reporting for the most part, some articles hint at good perceptions of the Asian country and draw similar reader responses. Even several articles with supposed bad headlines about China like the aforementioned "No job opportunity for Nigerians in China – Envoy" do seem to use the headlines more for baiting purposes, while the actual content does not actually have anti-China rhetoric; indeed, this method is repeated in a January *Vanguard News* article titled "China demolishes Christian megachurch in a 'Taliban-style persecution,'" wherein the writer borrows the term "Taliban" from somebody else and places it in the headline likely for

shock value, not because it is indeed the writer's own words that are used to condemn China and its handling of religion. Indeed, by reading the article one can see that the Taliban reference is actually used by the president of the US-based religious rights group ChinaAid Association, Bob Fu, to denounce China ("China demolishes Christian megachurch in a 'Taliban-style persecution" 2). However, a reader's comment does not share the same idea, as the reader instead praises China and claims how religion has negatively affected Nigeria (6). This shows that although *Vanguard News* covers a sensitive topic such as China's religious persecution, Nigerian readers are not easily swayed to disapprove of China, for both human and religious rights are more Western ideals that may not be regarded by Asian or African nations.

The literature from Deborah Brautigam and articles from *Vanguard News* appear to reinforce the notion that many African nations' reception of China is relatively positive. This could be attributed to China's use of soft power by applying aid and development to help build African infrastructure. Indeed, there are many academic journals and newspaper articles that show China's efforts in fostering cooperation as well as support with many nations in Africa, which subsequently earn the trust and approval of the latter. Furthermore, at a micro level Nigeria's *Vanguard News* provides insight into what a portion of Nigeria's populace thinks of China. Even though the articles are objective for the most part, they imply and elicit positive responses in regards to China. However, one must take note that *Vanguard News* articles reflect only its readers and writers, hence not the entire population or public opinion of Nigeria. In spite of this fact, one can see that even a small portion of an African country's population approves of China for reasons stated above. In addition to economic assistance, another reason why Nigerians and perhaps other Africans favor China is because of their shared identity as developing nations that had once endured Western imperialism. It is perhaps a deep-rooted

contempt for Western interference that has consequently helped to further unify China and African nations. From the various works analyzed, it can be inferred that China's rise and use of soft power are being received rather positively in African nations for economic and historical reasons.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **The Concluding Remarks, Research Implications**

The importance of soft power in international relations can be grasped by looking at a rising global power such as China's attempts at using it to get a desired result, most notably wide influence that is voluntary and not coerced (a strong tool in itself). This could inevitably lead to access to goods and resources for its own domestic needs; hard power on its own could not have the ability to sway other actors to behave on their own accord as well as free will, because instead actors often would be incentivized to accept or do things out of fear of economic or military repercussions, whether through sanctions or war. However, if soft power is thrown in the mix and applied in an appropriate manner, the attitudes and perceptions toward a country may become positive, with actors even partaking in certain activities they otherwise would not if they did not admire or respect said country. This is evidently playing out with China and African nations the former has dealings with, as China is winning over the favor of many African nations with soft power tools, namely economic aid and development that is helping build infrastructure. The paper has explored the Sino-African aspect of Chinese soft power through both a historical and a case study design, revealing shared identities among the developing countries that contribute to unity against Western imperialistic powers, along with a Nigerian newspaper's positive coverage of China that is not disparaging as is generally common with Western countries.

The shared identity that China and many African nations have traces back to Western imperialism both had endured and experienced. This has likely fostered mutual feelings of distrust and resentment toward Western ideals and systems (e.g. human rights, liberal

democracy). In the same regard Western leaders are wary of African and Chinese ideals that may be construed as the polar opposite of Western norms and hence not acceptable to them. For example, it is no secret the West does not approve of human rights violations in China and African nations. This could contribute to distrust on Western countries' end and an inability to accept China, even if the latter applies soft power in the West. For example, aside from Africa, China has attempted to flex soft power capabilities in countries such as the United States, albeit through more cultural exports such as Confucius Institutes and ads in urban areas like New York City's Times Square. However, the U.S. populace appears to rebuff these strategies as they fail to gain traction. In a starkly different outcome, African nations are aligning themselves with China over the West due to past colonialism they were subjected under Western powers, something China itself has experienced. Furthermore, from the start of the People's Republic of China, China had backed African nations' fight to liberate themselves from colonialism and imperialism (Shambaugh 109). This camaraderie along with China's current aid toward African nations are big driving forces behind Sino-African relations today that are also defined by anti-West sentiment.

The constructivist idea of identity plays an integral role in understanding Chinese soft power within the African region indicated above. It also provides a way to understand why Chinese soft power is not as effective elsewhere such as Western countries. It is because of cultural, historical and political identity differences between China and the West that have caused a gap that is difficult to bridge, despite China's soft power efforts. Furthermore, the West and especially the United States may also view China's rise as a threat to its hegemony or perceived *Pax Americana* ("American Peace"). However, what makes Chinese soft power succeed in Africa can also be explained through constructivism. The two have been in the

position of being oppressed and from this grievance came a relationship borne out of shared contempt for their former oppressor that is Western countries. Therefore, it is not just economic aid that has made an array of African nations receive China's soft power positively: it is also shared identity. The result is African nations' approval of China unparalleled in others parts of the world. Indeed, the former may be one of if not the biggest advocates for China's rise: "African nations welcome China's engagement, because increased trade, aid, investment, education, vocational training, and debt relief have [benefited] these societies. [In addition, public] opinion polling in Africa [actually] shows the most positive perceptions of China *anywhere* in the world" (111). From this it can be inferred that African nations may favor *Pax Sinica* ("Chinese Peace").

The historical design used to analyze Chinese soft power and its effects in the African region also works in conjunction with the case study design, which helps to narrow down and pinpoint certain examples of Africa's positive reception toward China. The case study for this paper was conducted by analyzing Nigerian newspaper *Vanguard News* and its articles about China during a three-month period in order to see what the general Nigerian discourse about China is; in spite of Nigeria being one of China's biggest African business partners there is a level of objectiveness in most *Vanguard News* articles about China, with no bias or favoritism. From articles that report on Sino-African cooperation to those about China's rise and other matters, the writers conduct factual coverage without divulging their personal opinions, an indication of good journalism for maintaining a neutral stance; however, while the writers do not express their views outright, readers leave comments that point to positive attitudes on China. For instance, in response to an article detailing how Chinese president Xi Jinping sees Africa as crucial in future cooperation, a reader praises China and anticipates its continued growth that

may soon surpass the U.S.'s; furthermore, despite being neutral overall, a Nigerian writer appears to defend China against a seemingly anti-China remark by former U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in regards to Sino-African relations, claiming the official is uninformed. This shows that at least a portion of Africa and namely Nigeria thinks of China in a positive, benevolent light.

The Chinese government actively employs soft power in African nations in order to not only gain respect and trust that would lead to unforced influence, but also so that natural resources like oil are accessible. In addition to China's rise and wield of soft power, this paper has also delved into incentives for the Chinese government's expansive foreign policy strategies, incentives that are domestically driven; energy is one of the main motivations for China to use hard and soft power as it goes to the African region to seek and secure oil reserves it needs. Its own supplies are limited and not sufficient to sustain the rising country's domestic growth, and as a result China combines soft power with the hard power it already is characterized with and known for; this may be done to not appear as a threat reminiscent of past Western imperialists. Through foreign direct investments as well as economic aid assistance, the Chinese are able to earn the favor and trust of many African business partners, benefitting China not only because it now has influence over a number of African nations, but because now that influence has in fact opened many coveted and lucrative opportunities to access reliable sources for energy; infrastructure building and development have both proven to be the ways China demonstrates its commitment to investing in African nations, which in turn is returned with both approval as well as trust from the latter. This leads to a mutually beneficial relationship between the two; in conclusion, the implications based on this research paper's analyses are that China's soft power at the moment and near future will remain selectively effective, meaning that it would resonate

more with developing countries such as those in the African region that have shared identities, and in order to broaden its scope of soft power China would have to be open to more universalist values, even if they are the complete opposite of the government's.

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