

A Neo-Colonialist Power or A Time-Tested Ally? A Comparative and Historical Study of  
China's Infrastructure Investments in Kenya

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## Introduction

“So when you start to examine this relationship as a whole, it actually starts to look a lot less like a loan and a lot more like a new kind of colonialism,” Trevor Noah commented on China-Africa relationship in *The Daily Show* in December 2021. In this episode of “If You Don’t Know, Now You Know,” he explained that the main motivations for China’s investment in Africa are to impose its ideological influence, exploit the cheap labor, and seize strategic assets as collaterals for its loan. The mix of curiosity and suspicion represented the typical Western attitude when first hearing about China’s increasing diplomatic and trade connections with Africa. Western scholars and commentators have been wondering the same question that Trevor Noah asked loudly in his show: “What is China even doing in Africa in the first place?”

Sino-African relations were established and deepened during the birth of a new China in 1949 and the independence of many African countries in the 1960s. China sympathized with and supported African struggles to gain national independence, and collaborated with these countries on a series of infrastructure and personnel training projects. The most well-known project was the Tanzania-Zambia Railway(also called the TAZARA Railway), which was both a strategic move to support Tanzania and Zambia’s national independence movement and a monument to Africa-China friendship. At the 26th UN General Assembly in 1971, African countries gave one third of the total “Yes” votes to the restoration of China’s legitimate seat in the UN despite pressure from the U.S. and other western countries.

China deepened its economic ties with Africa in the 21st century. In 2006, the first FOCAC(Forum on China–Africa Cooperation) was held in Beijing, China, where President Hu

announced \$5 billion worth of concessionary loans to Africa and the creation of the China-Africa Development Fund. FOCAC was an official forum between China and all African countries with the exception of the Kingdom of Eswatini with the objective of deepening trade engagement, increasing political cooperation, and strengthening Sino-African friendship. In 2013, China adopted the Belt and Road Initiative, a global infrastructure development strategy that currently involves 146 countries, including 43 African countries.<sup>1</sup> According to the official website, BRI aims to achieve policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bond. Chinese firms have secured more than \$340 billion in construction contracts along Belt and Road<sup>2</sup>.

The development of Sino-African economic and political ties resulted in criticisms from the West. One major criticism describes China's foreign policy as "debt-trap diplomacy." Debt-trap diplomacy refers to the practice that a creditor country extends excessive debt to a borrowing country to extract economic and political concessions when the borrowing country fails to repay the debt. The term was coined by an Indian academic Brahma Chellaney, who claimed that China's "one belt, one road" initiative "saddled" strategically located developing countries with more debt, "leaving them more firmly under China's thumb."<sup>3</sup> China's purpose, he argued, was to gain access to natural resources and open the market for its low-cost goods. The environmental impact of Chinese investment has also drawn criticisms from western governments, NGOs, and commentators. Chinese companies operating in Africa are frequently accused of extracting natural resources such as gold and coal.

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<sup>1</sup> "Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)," Green Finance and Development Center.

<sup>2</sup> Belt and Road Portal

<sup>3</sup> Brahma Chellaney, "China's Debt-Trap Diplomacy," *Project Syndicate*, January 2017.

These criticisms are all part of a larger discussion about how China allegedly revives European colonialism and imperialism in the twentieth century. In 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned against “new colonialism” in Africa in a television interview during her tour in Zambia: “investments in Africa should be sustainable and for the benefit of the African people. It is easy – and we saw that during colonial times – it is easy to come in, take out natural resources, pay off leaders, and leave.”<sup>4</sup> In a 2013 article titled “Africa must get real about Chinese ties,” Nigeria's central bank governor Lamido Sanusi wrote that “So China takes our primary goods and sells us manufactured ones. This was also the essence of colonialism. The British went to Africa and India to secure raw materials and markets. Africa is now willingly opening itself up to a new form of imperialism.”<sup>5</sup>

Scholars have been engaging in this discussion as well. Some scholars argue that China provides a different model that represents a refreshing break from the Western imperialist past. Their argument is based on Chinese principles of foreign policy. These principles were first laid down by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai during a state visit to Ghana in 1964. The most important principle was the principle of non-intervention: “In providing aid to other countries, the Chinese Government strictly respects the sovereignty of the recipient countries, and never attaches any conditions or asks for any privileges.” The principle of mutual benefit, which was echoed in President Xi Jinping’s proclamation of creating a “win-win partnership” with Africa, stated that “The Chinese Government always bases itself on the principle of equality and mutual benefit in providing aid to other countries. It never regards such aid as a kind of unilateral alms but as

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Interview on Africa 360*, 11 June 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Lamido Sanusi, “Africa must get real about Chinese ties,” *Financial Times*, March 11 2013.

something mutual.” Solidarity and common development was also a powerful rhetoric for Chinese positioning in Sino-African relations. During the first Ministerial Conference of FOCAC in 2000, China outlined four general principles of its Africa policy: sincerity, friendship and equality; mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity; mutual support and close-coordination; learning from each other and seeking common development. The root of China’s principles of foreign policies was traced to China’s history of being colonized, its struggle against poverty and colonialism lending itself to understanding Africa's dilemma and setting itself apart from the past colonizers.

These principles provide the basis for the argument that China’s model of foreign assistance and engagement with Africa is fundamentally different from that of imperialist Western countries. Suisheng Zhao in his paper “A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner” refuted the neo-colonialism allegations on China by citing the principle of non-interference: “Constantly reminding its African partners that China will never impose its will on another country, Beijing requires no political conditions before signing business contracts. This is a welcome relief after years of Western investment and assistance offers inconveniently premised on high benchmarks about environmental damage, human rights, transparency and good governance.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, he also recognized that compared to Western powers, China has no history of enslavement and colonization, which gives it an edge in gaining agreement to build infrastructure projects. Madison Condon in “China in Africa: What the Policy of Nonintervention Adds to the Western Development Dilemma” also emphasized China’s principles of nonintervention and respect for sovereignty and the priority China gives to mutual economic benefit in its involvement in Africa.

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<sup>6</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner? China's engagement and rebalance in Africa,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol.5, issue 90 (2014).

Therefore, she concluded that “The Chinese model, with no colonial past or explicit political agenda, is a legitimate challenger to the Western aid status-quo.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, Clemens Six in “The Rise of Postcolonial States as Donors” argued that the rise of new state donors such as China or India questioned the development paradigm practiced by the West as a whole. The fact that China did not share the same history of colonial and postcolonial relations and did not use the pseudo-emancipatory rhetoric to legitimize its interventions in developing countries alone distinguished it from the Western development paradigm; the principle of common development and prosperity placed African countries on an equal position, in contrast to the hierarchical relations with the Western countries; the idea of state sovereignty and non-intervention led to larger amount of policy space for the partner countries.<sup>8</sup>

Although China tried to distinguish itself from Western imperialism, some saw no difference between Chinese and Western models of imperialism. Mark Langan in his book chapter “Emerging Powers and Neo-Colonialism in Africa” observed that China only perpetuated (neo)colonial trade and production patterns in the two case studies of Zambia and Angola. China’s pursuit of energy and raw materials resembled European colonialism in the past.<sup>9</sup> Zambian politician Michael Sata even went so far as to say that the neo-colonialism apparently pursued by the Chinese was not tempered by any humanitarian aspirations with regards to Africa’s people.<sup>10</sup> Marcus Power in “Towards a Critical Geopolitics of China’s Engagement with African Development” doubted China’s self proclaimed principle of non-intervention. He

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<sup>7</sup> Madison Condon, “China in Africa: What the Policy of Nonintervention Adds to the Western Development Dilemma,” *axis: The Fletcher Journal of Human Security*, Vol.27 (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Clemens Six, “The Rise of Postcolonial States as Donors: A Challenge to the Development paradigm?” *Third World Quarterly*, vol.30, No.6 (2009).

<sup>9</sup> Mark Langan, “Emerging Powers and Neo-Colonialism in Africa. In: Neo-Colonialism and the Poverty of 'Development' in Africa,” *Contemporary African Political Economy*, (2017).

<sup>10</sup> Panos Mourdoukoutas, “What is China Doing In Africa?” *Forbes*, August 4 2018.

pointed out multiple circumstances in which China did not follow its principle; it would intervene when its interests were impacted by political changes. For example, it had maintained a relationship with Sudan for decades, importing oil and exporting manufactured goods. However, it had to confront domestic issues in continuing to trade with Sudan. As a result, China had helped in mediating the Darfur crisis and supporting the Sudanese government.<sup>11</sup> In “China’s engagement in Africa,” Tull has also noticed Chinese involvement in UN peacekeeping in African states and its intervention in local political processes in serving its economic interest. It helped President Charles Taylor of Liberia to stay in power in exchange for its import of Liberian timber.<sup>12</sup>

The Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway(SGR) in Kenya was part of China’s Belt and Road project in Africa and an epitome of this discussion. The initial segment of the SGR began construction in 2013 and was completed in 2017. As Kenya’s most expensive infrastructure project since independence, it was a symbol for the close economic, political, and cultural ties between Kenya and China, which became even more cordial after president Kenyatta’s election in 2013 and three visits to China after his election. The project was considered to be a revitalization and expansion of Kenya’s transportation system and a vital component of the Kenya Vision 2030. However, it caused a lot of controversies regarding its cost and cost-effectiveness. At a cost of US\$3.6 billion, the project added a significant amount of debt to the Kenyan government, which triggered new conversations around China’s “debt diplomacy.”

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<sup>11</sup> Marcus power, et al., “Towards a Critical geopolitics of China’s Engagement with African Development,” *Geopolitics*, 15:3, (2010).

<sup>12</sup> Denis M. Tull, “China’s Engagement in Africa: Scope, Significance and Consequences,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.44, No.3, (2006): 475.



The question is, did China revive the imperialist practice from the past, or did it provide a different model of collaboration and engagement with the developing world? This thesis intends to answer this question through a historical and comparative analysis. To do so, it will examine three infrastructure projects conducted by two actors in East Africa: the Uganda Railway(1896-1901, Britain), the TAZARA Railway(1970-1975, China), and the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway(2013-2017, China). The historical study of China's two infrastructure projects gives us a more complete picture of China's model of foreign engagement, while a comparative analysis of Britain and China's cases reveals the similarities and differences between the British and Chinese model. Two aspects of each country's foreign policy will be examined for this comparison study: motivations and local relations. The motivations for funding and building the railway in Africa will be discussed. The economic impact and investment return are not within the scope of this thesis since the calculation of these requires massive statistical undertaking. The perspective of the beneficiary, local African people, will be taken to fill in the gap in the present literature, which lacks the African perspective on the discussion of whether China offers a different model of partnership. This thesis argues that China's emotional connection with Africa gives complexities to China's motivations, and local people respond to China as a different player in Africa. Taken together, these two aspects suggest that China offers a distinctly different model of foreign aid than the colonialist powers.

## Chapter 1: The Uganda Railway

The Kenya-Uganda Railway, or the Uganda Railway, is an interesting case for comparative analysis as the railway, built 120 years earlier, runs side by side with the SGR in the present day. Its construction was started in 1896 and completed in 1902 in what are today Uganda and Kenya. It was a strategic endeavor by Britain to protect its interest from Germany and exert its control over its east African territory of Uganda. It should be noted that although Uganda and Kenya were both part of the East Africa Protectorate, the Kenya Colony was formed only in 1920. Thus, although a large part of the Uganda Railway lies in Kenya, Britain's territory in East Africa is referred to as Uganda and this railway as "the Uganda Railway." It was nicknamed "The Lunatic Express" because the project overcame many difficulties and incurred an exorbitant cost. It cost 5.5 million pounds and lost 60,000 pounds annually.<sup>13</sup> Diseases such as malaria, dysentery, tropical ulcers and pneumonia plag the workers and health of the entire labor became sick a month later.<sup>14</sup> The man-eating lions of Tsavo created panic within the work camp and was featured in Paterson's 1907 book *The Man-eaters of Tsavo*. After independence, the railway gradually fell into poor maintenance and many stations are currently in poor conditions or demolated.

In this chapter, we'll discuss Britain's foreign policy through the lens of its annexation of the East Africa Protectorate and the construction of the Uganda Railway. Specifically, we'll focus on its motivations in building the Uganda Railway and its power relations with the local population. We concluded that the main motivations of building the railway, which were political, commercial, and philanthropic, were solely to advance British interest and increase its leverage

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<sup>13</sup> Charles Miller, *The Lunatic Express: An Entertainment in Imperialism*(New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 396

<sup>14</sup> Miller, *The Lunatic Express*, 294.

in the competition among imperialist nations. The relation Britain formed with the local population, namely the dispossession of their rights and property, was also indicative of the imperialist practice of Britain. Thus, the motivations and local relations revealed the values behind and important characteristics of British foreign policy, which was imperialist in nature. As a classical case of colonialism, the British case will be compared with the Chinese case in later chapters. It should be noted that although the scholarly debate outlined above focused on China and neo-colonialism, the interests behind colonialism and neo-colonialism were similar. Therefore, the British case is worth studying as a colonialist model of foreign engagement.

### **Background**

Interestingly, the building of the Uganda Railway and the development of England's foreign trade were pioneered not by the British government but by a chartered company, Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC). It represented Britain's national interest and took on the government's responsibility to protect and expand the colonial possessions. Even before Britain had overseas colonies, British businessmen had been pooling their assets into such joint-stock groups as the English Merchant Adventurers, the British Eastland Company, and the Levant Company. By the seventeenth century, chartered companies began to rule the land that they had been trading on. The most famous example was the British East India Company, which governed India for nearly two hundred years. In Africa, Rhodes's British South Africa Company and Goldie's Royal Niger Company occupied spaces in South Africa and west Africa. The Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC), headed by Sir William MacKinnon, was established in 1887 with the aim to open up east Africa for British trade.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Miller, *The Lunatic Express*, 173.

The British government was reluctant to claim its east African colonies at the beginning. While Carl Peters, a German colonial ruler and explorer had been expanding Germany's East African possessions and preparing to impede upon the British land of Uganda, England had shown no interest in protecting its territory of Uganda: "The chief difference between the British and German territorial claims was that the former had been asserted primarily as a defensive measure against the latter; once formally established in east Africa, the Foreign Office seemed almost to lose interest in IBEA."<sup>16</sup> However, Carl Peters' move in Uganda alarmed the British government and transformed their attitude to Uganda. The Foreign Office in London began to prompt IBEA to deter Peters' influence in east Africa, and IBEA was increasingly seen as a government instrument.

The government recognized the East Africa colony and gave support to the railway project only after a prolonged debate in the House of Commons from 1892 to 1894. On December 17, 1890, Mackinnon submitted a long letter to the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, that urged the government to assist in building a line in Uganda in order to best utilize its resources. However, the government held an ambivalent stance as George Goschen, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, proposed that the government and IBEA share the cost of a survey expedition. The company did not have enough capital to fund the project and was on the verge of being dismantled. Finally, Frederick Lugard from the IBEA, the new Foreign Secretary Lord Rosebery, and Sir Gerald Portal from the Foreign Office came to its support. An agent of the IBEA who was serving in Uganda in 1890, Lugard heard about IBEA's potential retreat from Uganda and published a series of articles on *The Times* to elicit public support for the retention in Uganda.

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<sup>16</sup> Miller, *The Lunatic Express*, 175.

Lugard outlined the commercial, political, and philanthropic motivations for the retention of Uganda and the necessity of building a railway if the government wanted to fully gain control of this colony. As the key to the countries of Central Africa and rich in natural resources such as ivory, rubber, wheat and cotton, Uganda was deemed to have great commercial prospects. The political importance of Uganda lay in its key location as it commanded the line of communication to Central Africa as well as the Nile and Egypt. In the philanthropic aspect, the evacuation from Uganda would result in war and conflicts as well as the continuation of slave-trade as war captives were sold as slaves.<sup>17</sup> He also engaged in a series of debates over the question of Uganda with the politician Labouchère. Labouchère pointed out Lugard's use of violence to secure a treaty with King Mwanga, which legitimized his intervention in Uganda and ignorance of any objections from local people. He was also in fear of the "reslavery" of Uganda, and pointed out that any cultivation of crops in Africa would imply the servitude of slave labor. The commercial prospect was also very small because the cost of shipping goods was high and required the building of a railway, which was deemed an impossible project by Liberals.<sup>18</sup>

Editors from *The Times* voiced their support for Lugard as they heard about the company's potential withdrawal from Uganda: "[The company's] agents are, in the eyes of the native, the agents of England, and their failure or retreat would be construed throughout Africa as the defeat of British policy."<sup>19</sup> It was Sir Gerald Portal's report that finally reversed the government's attitude. Lord Rosebery had instructed Sir Gerald Portal to investigate in Uganda and report "on

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<sup>17</sup> Times, October 8, 1892, page 9.

<sup>18</sup> Times, February 7, 1893, page 11.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, *The Lunatic Express*, 252.

the best means of dealing with the country whether through Zanzibar or otherwise.” In 1894, Portal submitted the report to the government, which outlined the humanitarian, economic, and strategic imperatives of the British presence in Uganda.<sup>20</sup> The government made the decision in 1895 to dismantle the IBEA and establish a protectorate in Uganda. Uganda and a coastal strip— - later known as Kenya— was finally annexed into the East Africa Protectorate.

### **Motivations**

In a letter written to the editor of *The Times* arguing for retention in Uganda, Lugard had outlined the three main interests Britain had in Uganda: political, commercial and philanthropic. These were the main considerations of the British government in annexing Uganda into the British empire and building a railway from the coast to Uganda. With the intention to exert British political and economic influence on another country, these motivations were mainly interest-based and were features of Britain’s colonialist foreign policy.

#### **1) Political motive**

The primary interest was political. The imperialist drive to extend a country’s power and influence led to heated rivalry between the major powers of Europe, and the scramble for Africa movement only added to this frenzy. Britain was exceedingly attentive to the moves of Germany as well as Portugal, Italy, and France on the African continent. In May 1895, between the approval of the building of a railway and its actual construction, multiple members of the Parliament expressed the urgency of the matter as the construction was delayed: “It was really a matter between ourselves and our German neighbors.”<sup>21</sup> An article in *The Times* noted that other

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<sup>20</sup> M.F. Hill, *Permanent way; the story of the Kenya and Uganda Railway, being the official history of the development of the transport system in Kenya and Uganda* (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Railways and Harbours, 1950), 103.

<sup>21</sup> Hill, *Permanent way*, 130.

powers, Germany, Portugal, and France, had all built railways in Africa, which showed Britain's "backwardness" in the matter of railway construction.<sup>22</sup>

The strategic geographic position of Uganda also added to its political stake. To the south, Carl Peters' Colonization Society, the German counterpart of the British East African Company, was threatening Britain's hold on Uganda. Encouraged verbally and financially by Bismarck, Peter adopted the "hinterland" doctrine—that effective occupation within a sphere of influence could be legally carried beyond that sphere, as far inland as possible from any coastline, until and unless halted by the recognized boundary of another sphere—and planned to enter and occupy Uganda. He reached the eastern shore of Lake Victoria by 1890, which lay at the boundary of British East Africa. Britain's annexation of Uganda was thus a defensive move to counter Germany's influence in East Africa. In addition, Uganda's strategic geographic location also made it integral to British domination in India. Since the headwater of the Nile river was in Uganda, the control of Nile meant the control of Egypt, and the control of Egypt meant the control of the Suez Canal, which connected Britain and India, Uganda became essential to British control of the Nile river and consequently, rule in India.

## 2) Commercial motive

The second was commercial. The first reference to the commercial opportunities represented by the railway was made by Mr. Goschen, the Chancellor of the Exchequer: "Our obligations under the Brussels Conference, I think, are such that we are compelled to take some step, but independently of that I think the interest shown by the commercial world and in our manufacturing towns proves that they wish, through a survey at least, to understand whether

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<sup>22</sup> Gerald Portal, *The British Mission to Uganda in 1893*, (London: Edward Arnold), 1894.

markets cannot be opened in that region.”<sup>23</sup> While Britain also recognized that the monetary return for the new railway would be very small compared to the cost (“no hope would be entertained of Uganda being able, at least for some years to come, to defray the cost of its occupation” Sir Gerald Portal, the Agent and Consul-General at Zanzibar), many saw the commercial opportunities a railway might bring. Sir Portal in his report to Lord Rosebery supported the building of the railway based on business considerations: “I would remark that in Uganda there does exist already a distinct demand for European commodities... [The railway] would then drain the commerce, not only of Uganda, Usoga and Unyoro, but of all the other countries lying around Lake Victoria. The only means of effectively doing this is by a railway.”<sup>24</sup>

The expectation for commercial opportunities increased as the construction of the Uganda Railway was finished. In a news article written to celebrate the completion of the railway, the settlers expressed their excitement at the natural resources that promised commercial opportunities for Britain: “But its commercial value promises to be still greater. Endowed with a wonderfully fertile soil, a fairly healthy climate, and an industrious population rapidly acquiring the wants of civilised peoples, the lake region should develop into a splendid market for British manufactures, to be paid for by exports of produce.”<sup>25</sup> Again, observing German and Italian firms that had established trading channels in Uganda, the article expressed the hope for more British private enterprises’ involvement in Uganda: “We can only hope, therefore, that it is much more alive to its trading opportunities in the lake region than appears from the present disappointing accounts.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hill, *Permanent way*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> Portal, *The British Mission to Uganda in 1893*.

<sup>25</sup> *African Standard*, April 7 1903, page 4.

<sup>26</sup> *African Standard*, April 7 1903, page 4.



### 3) Humanitarian motive

The third was humanitarian. As the first European country to take step in checking and abolishing slave trade, Britain was determined to completely abolish the trade by involving international efforts and targeting the supply of the slave trade in Africa. In 1888, Lord Salisbury felt that putting an end to slave-raids required “international action by the Powers.”<sup>27</sup> The Brussels Anti-slavery Conference 1889-1890 stated the determination of European Powers to “putting an end to the crimes and devastations engendered by the traffic in African slaves” and put forward “the most effective means for counteracting the slave-trade in the interior of Africa.”<sup>28</sup> This conference and the call for ending the slave-trade were invoked by Mackinnon in his letter to Lord Salisbury, who expressed that the Company had “already anticipated the engagement of the Brussels Conference” by building a series of infrastructures such as telegraph-line, railway, roads, and a steamer.<sup>29</sup> This became a powerful basis for Mackinnon’s request for the government’s guarantee of a moderate rate of interest on the capital required to build a railway from Mombasa to the lake. Impressed by this argument, Lord Salisbury wrote to the Treasury of the potential effects of the new railway and the responsibility of the government to support the Brussels Act. On May 20th, 1891, Lord Salisbury made a speech at Glasgow in which he reiterated the objective of the Company’s activities in East Africa: “Its object, I believe, has been to deal a deadly blow at the slave-trade, the destruction of which has been, along with our won commercial and material progress, the animating impulse of English policy in those regions for nearly a century.”<sup>30</sup> He also stressed the significance of building a railway into the interior in attaining the goal: “There is no doubt that the slave caravans across that

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<sup>27</sup> Hill, Permanent way, 46.

<sup>28</sup> Hill, Permanent way, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Hill, Permanent way, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Hill, Permanent way, 54.

territory can be destroyed by one method, and by one method certainly, if that method can be applied. Sir William Mackinnon is doing his best to lay a railway from the coast to the Victoria Nyanza,”<sup>31</sup> because a railway would replace caravans, the main method of carrying slaves from the interior to the coast. Britain’s humanitarian cause stemmed from its sense of responsibility as a world power to spread justice and human rights to the rest of world, as exemplified in its organization of the Brussels Conference and in Mackinnon’s following words: “If we are able to pursue the evil to its home and kill it at its root, we shall not only have saved mankind from a fearful curse, but we shall have spared the Treasury of our own people and the lives of the gallant sailors who have themselves to the work.”<sup>32</sup>

The report written by sir Gerald Portal, which after all the considerations for the situation of Uganda and IBEA proposed the government takeover of the colony and the building a railway, summarized all three main motivations for building a more efficient transport system:

The whole problem of the development of East and Central Africa, the prospect of the creation of a profitable British trade, the suppression of internecine religious wars, the security of European travellers, the control of the lake district and of the upper waters of the Nile and, above all, I may confidently add, the only hope of really and definitely killing the slave-trade within a reasonable time— all resolve themselves into the all-important and overshadowing question of transport and communication.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hill, *Permanent way*, 54.

<sup>32</sup> Hill, *Permanent way*, 55.

<sup>33</sup> Portal, *The British Mission to Uganda in 1893*.

These motivations were mainly interest-based: Politically, the railway served Britain's purpose of deterring the sphere of influence of German East Africa colonies and reinforcing its hold in its Indian colony and the Nile river; Economically, Britain acquired a new market for British commodities and capital through annexing and strengthening the territory of Uganda. The humanitarian argument further justified and prompted Britain's imperialist drive. The organized anti-slavery reinforced the deeply rooted hierarchy that positioned European states as the moral and racial apex of civilization. It rationalized British colonial conquest as humanitarian missions to prevent other countries' enslavement of African people. Taken together, the three motives of political, economic, and humanitarian made the Uganda Railway a useful lens to study the values and characteristics of colonialism and British foreign policy.

### **Imperialism in Practice and Local Relations**

The occupation of British East Africa and the building of the Uganda Railway was a process of dispossession of the local people's property and rights to self-governance. In 1887, the British East Africa Association, the antecedent of IBEA, had concluded twenty-one treaties with native tribes in the hinterland, which secured to the Association sovereign rights within the British sphere of influence. This appropriation of native land was in the objective of the newly founded IBEA in 1888: "To acquire territory from native chiefs in the British 'sphere of influence,' by treaty, by purchase or otherwise... and generally exercise all the rights pertaining to sovereignty over acquired districts."<sup>34</sup> The acquisition of land and the exercise of the right to rule took away native people's economic factor of production and political right of governance.

Portal's report contains at the same time the respect for the native tribe's will and the deprivation of their rights and voices. On the one hand, Britain's invasion of Uganda placed the native

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<sup>34</sup> Hill, Permanent way, 11.

people under the protection of British law and governance: “The impression conveyed by the native chiefs and peoples was that, when they signed treaties and received in return the Company’s flag and protection, they were placing themselves under the protection of the Government of Great Britain”. On the other hand, Portal also showed a consideration of native people’s will to ensure peaceful collaboration with them: if Britain retreat from Uganda despite the treaties established with these tribes, their trust in English promises would be “so completely broken that any future extension of British private enterprises or trade in these regions would be impossible, except by force of arms.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition, the debate around the construction and the actual construction excluded the local government. As the previous sections had shown, the decision to fund and build the railway was made entirely within the British parliament, and the main interest in the railway was the advancement of British economic and political influence. The construction process involved mostly imported labor. The first batch of 350 Indian laborers arrived in Mombasa in January 1896 and 31,983 Indian workers were employed in total. African laborers were never regarded as a reliable labor force. They were unable to learn the rudimentary skills and tools, and only some learnt earth-moving. Besides, the population density of Africa was too low.<sup>36</sup>

The railway was a powerful symbol of colonialization because it made the actual appropriation and occupation of native people’s lands possible. Railways had always been a useful tool for colonialist and imperialist schemes. The relationship between railway construction and empire building was observed in Great Britain’s other colonies and summarized in the newspaper

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<sup>35</sup> Portal, *The British Mission to Uganda in 1893*.

<sup>36</sup> Miller, *The Lunatic Express*, 295.

article: “It is a well-known fact that one of the most successful means of spreading civilization is by constructing a railway into a little known country.”<sup>37</sup> Lugard also associated the railway with colonization: the rich pastures, good soil, and unpopulated lands were an alternative to the “congested and over-populated” districts” of India, and “Probably the success of any emigration schemes for Europeans would largely depend on the construction of a railway.”<sup>38</sup> In the case of Uganda, the white settler population did not exist before the railway; its construction allowed for the influx of white settlers and the actual occupation of land with sparse local population and fertile soil.

After the construction of the railway was completed in 1902, groups of white settlers began to enter the vast unexplored field that the railway passed. A news article in the local newspaper *African Standard* expressed the excitement of the opportunities presented by the new country and the impatience towards the disinterest of the British government at encouraging settlement: “Considerable interest continues to be felt in the City in the coming opening up of British East Africa and Uganda. We (Sunday Sun) say "coming opening up" advisedly, for the Foreign Office is proceeding in the matter with tortoise-like strides. The magnificence of the central plateau and the sublimity of the climate are things which few people yet realise.”<sup>39</sup> It also noted the agricultural opportunities in “the rich nature of the soil generally” and future European domination and colonization of “the extreme paucity of the population.” As only one concession, The East African Syndicate, Limited, had been granted to explore the country, and the article

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<sup>37</sup> African Standard, April 1 1905, page 9.

<sup>38</sup> Times, October 17, 1892, page 8.

<sup>39</sup> African Standard, March 17 1903, page 7.

expressed hope for more investment in Africa at the end: “It would be really interesting to learn what the Foreign Office proposes to do.”<sup>40</sup>

The railway succeeded in serving this purpose. The railway preceded and led the white settlement in Uganda: in 1902, when the railway was completed, the total number of white colonists was still very little. The railway sent group after group of white settlers from the coast to the hinterland, where they farmed on Kenya’s rich soil for subsistence and some profits. Other than profit, the settlers were also aware of and dedicated to the cause of serving the British empire. Their exports from Kenya would be exported to Britain and enhance its position in the world produce market. Furthermore, the government encouraged a local market economy that could contribute to the empire’s wealth.<sup>41</sup> A number of public works and agricultural improvement schemes were set in motion among various tribes. Cash crops such as cotton and groundnuts were planted and generated some profits, which “clearly demonstrated not merely the African’s potential as a source of agricultural revenue but his capacity for bettering his own life.”<sup>42</sup> The government departments multiplied and the number of white settlers increased significantly. The commissioner was the highest official, administering an Executive Council, which consisted of heads of various departments of judiciary, military, treasury, medical and other functions. Thus, the railway preceded the colonization of Uganda, allowing for full political control and occupation of native people’s land.

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<sup>40</sup> African Standard, March 17 1903, page 7.

<sup>41</sup> Miller, *The Lunatic Express*, 440.

<sup>42</sup> Miller, *The Lunatic Express*, 443.

## Chapter 2: the TAZARA Railway

The origin of China-Africa friendship was the TAZARA Railway, a railway in East Africa linking the port of Dar es Salaam in east Tanzania with the town of Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia. The construction of the TAZARA Railway started in 1970 and was finished in 1975. The 1060-mile-long project was built with financing and technical support from China amounting to over 400\$ million in the form of a long-term interest-free loan. Over 50,000 experts and workers were dispatched and over 1 million tons of equipment and materials were sent.<sup>43</sup> This infrastructure development project was a monument in China-Africa relations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted the TAZARA Railway as the symbol of the new era of all-round development of Sino-African relationship: “The most well-known project was the Tanzania-Zambia Railway. Under the heat of the burning sun, the engineering staff from China, Tanzania and Zambia together overcame tremendous difficulties and built this railway which stretches for 1860 kilometers. It is called the road to freedom.”<sup>44</sup> In 2013, President Xi Jinping chose Tanzania as one of the destinations for his first overseas visit since he became president, and made a special trip to the Cemetery for Memorable Deceased Chinese Experts Assisting Tanzania. In his speech, he stressed that China and Africa have always been a community of shared destinies, similar historical experiences, and common development tasks.<sup>45</sup>

As the beginning of Sino-African cooperation and one of the most well-known development projects China constructed in Africa, the TAZARA Railway is central to our understanding of

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<sup>43</sup> Jamie Monson, *Africa's Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 2009), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *China-Africa Relations*, 1 January 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Xi Jinping Delivers a Speech at the Julius Nyerere International Convention Center in Tanzania, Stressing China and Africa Will Always Remain Reliable Friends and Faithful Partners*, 25 March 2013.

China's foreign policy, and provides a basis for understanding the factors that went into building the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya 50 years later. The Eight Principles of Chinese aid, which were raised by Premier Zhou Enlai during his 1964 journey across Africa, laid the foundation for China's foreign policy since the 1960s. The principles of non-intervention, mutual benefit, and equality that Zhou laid out in the Eight Principles also shaped China's current method of foreign assistance as in the case of the SGR. So, by analyzing China's motivations in building the TAZARA Railway, this section shows that the current motivations and methods of foreign aid are continuous from the 1970s. It concludes that despite Western cynicism and confusion over China's motivation, China's incentive for building the TAZARA Railway was an emotional one that stemmed from the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles in the 1960s. This emotional connection with the recipient country was central to understanding the Eight Principles as well as China's foreign policies in the past decades.

### **Background**

China had agreed to finance and support the railway project in 1967 in support of the liberation movement in the south and the self-reliant economies in Zambia and Tanzania. In the 1960s, the liberation movement in the African continent had made significant progress, yet today's Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa, were still under white rule. Zambia, which gained independence in 1964, was a hinterland country with vast copper deposits. However, virtually all Zambia's foreign trade was carried by rail on the southern route; its traditional rail outlet to the sea ran across Rhodesia and Mozambique and to the ports of Mozambique, Angola, and South Africa.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Tanzania, which also gained independence in 1964, wanted to build a new railway that connects Zambia and the Indian Ocean. Since the two

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<sup>46</sup> Martin Bailey, *Freedom Railway: China and the Tanzania-Zambia Link* (London: Rex Collings, 1976), 21.



countries were relatively poor after independence, they sought external financial resources. After the West, the Soviet Union, and the World Bank had turned down their request for assistance, China extended a hand of assistance.

The railway was important to Tanzania and Zambia both politically and economically. The political importance lay in Zambia's need to reduce its dependence on rail links in the white South and to support the African liberation movement in the south. Economically, the railway offered the two African countries an opportunity for development and help to reorientate their economies from the distorted patterns they inherited from the colonial period. The Northern Province of Zambia was seen as an area with little potential for development partly because economic growth in Zambia had been concentrated along the original railway that ran northwards from Victoria Falls to the Copperbelt. However, the vast area between the Falls and the Copperbelt outside of the narrow strip was rather unexplored and had good agricultural potential. The new railway would incorporate this area into the national economy. Zambia also wished to strengthen the economic cooperation with Tanzania and East Africa. It would make exports to East African countries such as electric wires, cables, and woods. As president Kaunda of Zambia had said: "The whole of Africa will benefit from this railway. We shall benefit because it will strengthen Zambia and therefore strengthen the forces of freedom."<sup>47</sup>

Similar reasons had prompted Tanzania to build the railway. As the first country to gain independence in East Africa, Tanzania wished to support the national independence movement in the south, which had established offices in the capital of Tanzania. It also wished to open up

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<sup>47</sup> Bailey, *Freedom Railway*, 234.

the areas that were neglected by white colonists during the colonial period. Economic development in Tanzania had also been concentrated on the main railway routes in the north and center, and there was an urgent need to develop the southern half of the country after independence. It was found that the areas the new railway ran across had great agricultural potential. The Kilombero Valley was known as “the ricebowl of Tanganyika” and was estimated to bring 820,000 more acres of cultivated land by a UN Food and Agriculture Organization(FAO); The Southern Highlands had fertile volcanic soils and could grow cash crops such as tea, coffee and pyrethrum; Substantial mineral wealth, such as coal, iron ore, and limestone existed in south-west Tanzania. The railway “appeared to be an important move towards reorienting the economies of the two African states towards a more meaningful independence.”<sup>48</sup>

### **China’s motivations**

Since the 1970s, Western scholars writing on the subject of the TAZARA Railway had been trying to understand the motivations behind China’s decision to build the railway. Almost all scholars had correctly identified the primary reason as the ideological resistance to imperialism of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War era. By constructing the TAZARA Railway and promoting economic growth in the two African countries, China engaged Africa in the common “third world struggle” against the forces of imperialism and neo-colonialism and escaped from isolation of the two superpowers. In the 2009 book *Africa’s Freedom Railway*, Jamie Monson summarized the intellectual discussions around China’s motivation to build the railway: “The railway was part of China’s effort to

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<sup>48</sup> Bailey, *Freedom Railway*, 234.

combat what it termed the hegemonism and neo-imperialism of the two superpowers.”<sup>49</sup> The same motivation was also identified by British historian Martin Bailey and British journalist Richard Hall in their works. Bailey summarized the formation of Chinese foreign policy in the 1960s as such: “The United States, a capitalist imperialist nation, attempted to isolate China. The Soviet Union, which represents social imperialism, has been an increasingly dangerous enemy since the development of the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s.”<sup>50</sup> Finally, Hall also noted the containment of Soviet influence and “the struggle against imperialism” as one of the incentives for China to assist in building the railway.

Another aspect of China’s motivation that almost all scholars identified was reinforcing friendship with the Third World nations in Africa. Bailey believed strongly in this point. He dismissed the cynicism of pragmatic westerners that viewed Chinese talk of friendship as merely propaganda and believed that there was “a genuine spirit of solidarity” with the rest of the Third World when the Chinese ambassador made claims such as: “as we are poor ourselves, we know how the other poor people feel.”<sup>51</sup> Hall made a similar comment in his book that the ideological aspects of China’s approach in Africa is less important than its “behavior, intentions, competence, and generosity.”<sup>52</sup> For him, China had successfully cemented friendship in Africa and defeated Western criticisms through its selfless approach: “the myth of the oriental dragon snorting the flames of conspiracy and subversion has finally been laid to rest. Instead China has made many friends in the Third World and has acquired a reputation as an altruistic aid donor

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<sup>49</sup> Monson, *Africa’s Freedom Railway*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Bailey, *Freedom Railway*, 65.

<sup>51</sup> Bailey, *Freedom Railway*, 65.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Hall, et al., *The Great Uhuru Railway: China’s Showpiece in Africa* (London: Victor Collanz Ltd, 1976), 191.

and a first-class railway builder.”<sup>53</sup> American historian Kasuka S. Mutukwa also listed “Third World solidarity” as a major motivation behind the construction of the TAZARA Railway.<sup>54</sup>

Although the Western scholars reached agreement on some aspects of China's motivation, their accounts of China's motivations were still largely inconsistent and superficial. Monson and Hall revealed their skepticism towards their own analysis of China's motive to combat the imperialist influence of the United State and the Soviet Union. Monson hides her doubts in her objective wording, stating that this motive was China's self-declaration rather than her own opinion:

“China thus claimed to be part of a common ‘third world struggle’”<sup>55</sup> while Hall displays it more blatantly: “[China's] struggle against imperialism has continued in theory and in rhetoric at least.” They also provided little explanations to the reasons behind China's friendly attitude toward Third World countries. Bailey included a one-sentence summary in his book: “This friendship enables China... to reduce the strength of its enemies, the two superpowers.”<sup>56</sup> Hall gave a simple reason for China's extension of friendship and “the principal objective in Africa: “votes when she sought admission to the UN” and concluded that China was unlikely to need Africa to achieve any other “major political objectives in the future.”<sup>57</sup> Mutukwa also mentioned the motive behind China's solidarity with the Third World: “Africa, asia and Latin America could be vital allies in the unfolding world revolutionary struggle”<sup>58</sup> However, Mutukwa copied this statement from Marshal Lin Piao's “people's war” proclamation of 1965, who wrote that “the socialist countries should regard it as their international duty to support the people's

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<sup>53</sup> Hall, *The Great Uhuru Railway*, 191.

<sup>54</sup> Kasuka S. Mutukwa, *Politics of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Project: A Study of Tanzania-China-Zambia relations* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1979).

<sup>55</sup> Monson, *Africa's Freedom Railway*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Hall, *The Great Uhuru Railway*, 70.

<sup>57</sup> Hall, *The Great Uhuru Railway*, 192.

<sup>58</sup> Mutukwa, *Politics of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Project*, 142.

revolutionary struggle in Asia, Africa and Latin America.”<sup>59</sup> He basically copied the exact words of Chinese official documents but was unable to add his own interpretation to them.

Western scholars’ confusion over China’s true motivation can also be seen in their struggles to understand the altruism shown in China’s selfless assistance to Tanzania and Zambia. Hall was amazed by the simplicity and hardworking nature of the Chinese workers, who were all “dressed in shapeless grey cotton suits and wearing peaked uniform caps. Each man carried an identical blue fibre suitcase with double locks”<sup>60</sup> and had the same standard of living as the experts and workers in the recipient country. To his observation, the Chinese never expected the local labor force to do anything which they were not prepared to do themselves, and threw themselves into all the most exhausting and the most unpleasant work. He was clearly puzzled yet amazed by this spirit of selflessness and devotion: “In a sense, the Chinese seemed almost like missionaries in their apparent selflessness.”<sup>61</sup> He did not reserve his praise to Chinese workers’ hard work and rebuttal to Western claims that TAZARA was a propaganda campaign “the spartan work camps were visible proof that its aid workers were fundamentally different from those of any other nation.”<sup>62</sup> Bailey was clearly equally puzzled by China’s selflessness in contributing labor and resources to the building of the TAZARA railway, and he figured that there must be a long-term strategy in this seemingly altruistic move: “It is also probably true to say that the Chinese have a rather more long-term view of foreign policy than do many governments.”<sup>63</sup> Yet, neither Hall nor Bailey could give a sufficient account of China’s altruistic act of foreign assistance.

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<sup>59</sup> Mutukwa, *Politics of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Project*, 143.

<sup>60</sup> Hall, *The Great Uhuru Railway*, 122.

<sup>61</sup> Hall, *The Great Uhuru Railway*, 121.

<sup>62</sup> Hall, *The Great Uhuru Railway*, 143.

<sup>63</sup> Bailey, *Freedom Railway*, 130.

A look at the accounts given by Chinese officials, technicians, and workers in Tanzania would give a more holistic view of China's motivation in building the TAZARA railway. Their account showed that the major motivation was the emotional and ideological contest with imperialism and colonialism represented by the United States and the Soviet Union. To understand the ideological position of China in the 1960s, it is necessary to examine the historical background of the 60s, namely the domestic event of the Cultural Revolution and the international context of the Cold War. Cultural Revolution is mentioned in many western scholars' writings, but it is only viewed as a domestic disruption that affected China's foreign policy in a negative way: "The Chinese Cultural Revolution inevitably had some effect in slowing down negotiations with Tanzania and Zambia," "The Cultural Revolution affected China's relations with Africa in general: the Chinese were preoccupied with domestic issues, temporary economic disruption reduced the country's ability to provide foreign aid, and the activities of Red Guards often gave the country a bad image abroad."<sup>64</sup>

Mainly as a response to the threat posed by the Soviet Union and the U.S, the Cultural revolution was central to understanding China's foreign relations in the 1970s. It was a sociopolitical movement in China from 1966 until Mao Zedong's death in 1976. On April 28, 1969, Mao gave a speech that complained about the Soviet Union's calling CCP as a "petit bourgeois party" and its positioning as a leader of correct Communist ideology. Its verbal attack was put into the context of the newly released Brezhnev Doctrine, which proclaimed the Soviet Union's intervention in any threat to socialist rule in the Soviet bloc in Eastern and Central Europe. Mao also warned that the "imperialists and revisionists," the U.S. and the Soviet Union, would soon

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<sup>64</sup> Bailey, Freedom Railway, 70.

attack China, and that it should be prepared for war. With conflict breaking out at the border, the Ussuri River, in March 1969, the likelihood of war with the Soviet Union increased in 1969 and 1970. The Soviet Union moved nuclear weapons to the border, and China moved key economic and research installations were resituated inland. The fight against the “revisionist Soviet Union and the imperialist America” and the revival of core communist ideology were the central drive behind Mao Zedong’s initiation of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>65</sup>

Anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism were the key messages in the official statement that explained the reasons for the Chinese involvement in the TAZARA Railway. Fang Yi, Beijing’s official representative at the October 1970 ceremonies inaugurating construction of the TAZARA had said that “The governments and peoples of Zambia and Tanzania... oppose the imperialist policies of aggression and support the national liberation movements in Asia and Africa, thus making positive contributions to the cause of Afro-Asian people’s unity against imperialism.”<sup>66</sup> Zhou Nan, the former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, explained the strategic thinking of Chinese decision-makers: Mao had proposed the making of “the first intermediate zone” and “the second intermediate zone” to deter the influence of the two imperialist nations. The first intermediate zone refers to the developing countries that were seeking independence or had already achieved independence, mainly in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Encircled and imposed sanctions by imperialist countries, China viewed these countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as direct allies. Thus, the diplomatic strategy of China was to establish ties with the first intermediate zone by supporting their struggles for

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<sup>65</sup> Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the twentieth-century world : a concise history* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>66</sup> Mutukwa, *Politics of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Project*, 143.

national liberation. As Tanzania was the frontline of the national liberation movement of Sub-Saharan Africa, China supported Tanzania's independence movement with all its might.<sup>67</sup>

Anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism were not only the theoretical foundation for China's foreign policies in the 1970s but also lended emotional energy in the daily lives and commitments of average Chinese workers in Tanzania. *Report from the TAZARA Railway* was a collection of prose written by Chinese railway workers. Throughout the *Report*, the workers showed an understanding of the anti-imperialist and colonialist struggle they were taking part in. One of the prose described how local villagers in Tanzania assisted and built friendship with Chinese technicians: "Why are they cooperating closely and fighting heroically with the Chinese technicians, heart by heart, shoulder by shoulder, even when they never knew each other before? It's because people of Tanzania, Zambia and China were all under slavery by imperialism and colonialism. Fire of hatred toward imperialism and colonialism is burning in their hearts."<sup>68</sup> The entire *Report* contained many anecdotes of imperialist exploitation of people of Tanzania. For example, a villager told the story of his grandfather to the Chinese technicians:

I heard from my grandpa that during the colonial era, he ran cows for a family of ranchers. One day there was a heavy rain, and the herd was washed away. It was dark after the rain, and it was difficult to drive the herd back to the pasture. After counting, it was found that one was missing. When the rancher knew it, he was furious with his grandfather, whipped him in the head and said viciously: 'Damn it, if you don't get it back for me, you will risk your life!' How could grandpa pay for cows? He searched all night, walked all over the nearby forest and grassland, climbed hills and ditches, searched for a day and a night, and finally found it. But the ruthless shepherd said that he missed a day's work, the cows stayed outside overnight, and deducted three days' wages from him... Grandpa said that under colonialism, he was not as good as a cow. Now that he is

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<sup>67</sup> Department of Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Monument to China-Africa Friendship: Firsthand Account of the Building of the TAZARA*, trans. Feng Chen (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2015), 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Report from the TAZARA Railway* (Beijing: The People's Literature Publishing House, 1976), 67.



independent, he has to contribute to the construction of the country, so that day, the village chairman told him that the 'Freedom Road' urgently needed sand. Grandpa called my father, mother and I together and said: 'Now we are to contribute to the construction of the country. It's time to act!' Our whole family is looking for sand!<sup>69</sup>

The solidarity and friendship between China and Tanzania as well as the altruism displayed by the Chinese workers that puzzled the Western scholars could both be explained by this anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist drive. The concept of proletariat internationalism is important here, which was the main drive behind China's commitment and friendship with Africa. Proletariat internationalism was the perception that all the working classes were part of a single global struggle rather than separate localized events. The concept of internationalism was referred to many times in the accounts of Chinese officials and workers. Wang Mingcai, former technician of the TAZARA Project, talks about the inspiration from Mao and his little red book that everyone owned and carried during Cultural Revolution: "The training focused on Chairman Mao's discussion on patriotism and the spirit of internationalism, as well as contents about hardworking and discipline in his book, 'Quotations from Chairman Mao.'" <sup>70</sup> Sun Yongfu, former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, said "The Chinese government had stressed that our assistance in building the TAZARA was a way of carrying forward the spirit of internationalism. This idea was deep rooted in our hearts, and everyone had this magnanimity. So we never thought about how much money we should earn."<sup>71</sup>

Closely connected with the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggle, proletariat internationalism provided the basis for China-Africa friendship. The foreword of the *Report* also connected the spirit of proletariat internationalism with the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist

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<sup>69</sup> *Report from the TAZARA Railway*, 66.

<sup>70</sup> Department of Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Monument to China-Africa Friendship*, 137.

<sup>71</sup> Department of Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Monument to China-Africa Friendship*, 27.

struggle: “Chinese engineers and technicians who have been baptized by the battle of the proletarian cultural revolution kept in mind Chairman Mao's teaching that ‘China should make a greater contribution to mankind.’ Full of sympathy and admiration for the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles of the people of Tanzania and Zambia, they energetically embarked on the journey of fulfilling the obligations of proletarian internationalism.”<sup>72</sup> Throughout the *Report*, there were repeated accounts of the common struggle against imperialism as the basis of China-Tanzania friendship. One of the accounts recorded how local people and Chinese railway workers built friendship through singing revolutionary songs around a bonfire. Hearing the revolutionary lyrics, the author “felt emotions burning in [his] chest” because he saw “African brothers awakening and taking large strides in the struggle” and “the bright future of the African continent.”<sup>73</sup> As a previous quote had shown, the local villagers and Tanzanian workers “cooperate[d] closely and [fought] heroically” with the Chinese workers who they never met before because of the common hatred towards imperialism and colonialism.

For the similar reason, the Chinese workers showed a degree of altruism and emotions for the aid recipient country that puzzled the Western scholars. The faith in the anti-imperialist struggle that both China and Africa were engaged in inspired Chinese workers to put all their efforts in the project. Ma Wangen, former interpreter of the Chinese TAZARA Working Group, describes this sacrificial spirit from his personal experience of being separated from his wife for years and devoting the best times of his life to the TAZARA Railway: “I went to Tanzania in April, and my son was born in June. That means it was 2 months away from her giving birth to the child. It is also unthinkable for now. When I returned again, my son was already a year and a half. The

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<sup>72</sup> *Report from the TAZARA Railway*, 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Report from the TAZARA Railway*, 165.

experience I mentioned is actually not special. In those years, most of the people working with the TAZARA had similar experiences.”<sup>74</sup> Sun Yongfu recognized that the emotional energy that they felt at the time was incomprehensible by today’s people: “Today’s young people may find it difficult to understand what I said. How could the Chinese workers devote themselves wholeheartedly to the building of the TAZARA, regardless of how much they would earn and how far away they would live from their families for over two years? I believe it was because of the power of faith.”<sup>75</sup> The *Report* also contained an account of Chinese commitment in providing products with the best quality for Africans. The engineers had a debate regarding whether the Chinese team should fix a small crack in a building that did not have any influence. One engineer ended the debate with a powerful speech: “We need to leave high-standard and high-quality architecture and modernized facilities to the Zambian people. If the small crack grows into a big crack and we’ve gone back to our country, how should Zambian people deal with the problem? Is this in line with Chairman Mao’s revolutionary diplomatic line?”<sup>76</sup> The Chinese workers devoted their time, sweat, and energy to build the freedom railway and support the independence movement in Tanzania and Zambia.

## Conclusion

In the above accounts of Chinese government officials and average workers, we found that Chinese motivation in building the TAZARA Railway was not only strategic but also emotional. The solidarity with the Third World countries in the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggle fueled the emotional energy of Chinese people in support of their Tanzania and Zambian brothers. This emotional aspect was central to understanding the principles and motivations of

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<sup>74</sup> Department of Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Monument to China-Africa Friendship*, 133.

<sup>75</sup> Department of Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *A Monument to China-Africa Friendship*, 28.

<sup>76</sup> *Report from the TAZARA Railway*, 389.

foreign aid in Chinese official statements, the first and most important of which was the Eight Principles of Chinese Aid that Premier Zhou Enlai laid out during his 1964 journey across Africa.<sup>77</sup> These principles were embodied in the planning and construction of the TAZARA Railway and paved the way for principles of foreign relations in the future. The most important principles in the document are laid out and explained below:

The principle of mutual benefit: The Chinese Government always bases itself on the principle of equality and mutual benefit in providing aid to other countries.

The principle of mutual benefit was shown in the fact that China did not only seek its own benefit in building the TAZARA Railway. In fact, China received little economic benefit from the project. Although historians like Hall noted that China had become Tanzania's principal trading partner after the project, the interest-free loan that China provided showed that monetary return was not a major incentive. Rather, the common political agenda of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism was the central uniting force between China, Tanzania, and Zambia. China provided tangible benefits to the two countries through its support to political and economic independence.

The principle of non-intervention: In providing aid to other countries, the Chinese Government strictly respects the sovereignty of the recipient countries, and never attaches any conditions or asks for any privileges.

There were no privileges or political strings attached to the assistance or loans provided by China. In building the TAZARA, Chinese workers lived and worked side by side with local workers, asking for no special treatment. In addition, the cooperation among the three countries was conducted in accordance with the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. As former

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<sup>77</sup> A complete version of Zhou Enlai's principles can be found at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121560.pdf>

Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere pointed out at the handover ceremony, “A railway is a railway... this railway will be our railway. It will not be a Chinese railway. They have never at any point suggested that we should change any of our policies- internal or external- because of their help with this railway.”<sup>78</sup>

The principle of self-reliance: In providing aid to other countries, the purpose of the Chinese Government is not to make the recipient countries dependent on China but to help them embark step by step on the road of self-reliance and independent economic development.

In building the TAZARA Railway, China fostered the political and economic independence of Tanzania and Zambia and cultivated a group of technical personnels that mastered the technique. This principle of nurturing self-reliance and the fact that the Chinese model is intended to support independence rather than increasing the recipient country’s reliance is noted by Hall, Bailey, and Mutukwa: “Self-reliance has become the central slogan in Tanzania’s quest for economic development and independence.”<sup>79</sup>

The other principles were:

- 1)China provides economic aid in the form of interest-free or low-interest loans and extends the time limit for the repayment when necessary;
- 2)The Chinese Government tries its best to help the recipient countries build projects which require less investment while yielding quicker results;
- 3)The Chinese Government provides the best-quality equipment and material of its own manufacture at international market prices;
- 4) In giving any particular technical assistance, the Chinese Government will see to it that the personnel of the recipient country fully master such technique;

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<sup>78</sup> Julius K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development: A Selection from Writing and Speeches 1968-1973* (Dar Es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1973), 235.

<sup>79</sup> Hall, *The Great Uhuru Railway*, 197.

5)The experts dispatched by China to help in construction in the recipient countries will have the same standard of living as the experts of the recipient country.

The emotional connection between China and Africa was central to understanding these principles, which would seem as altruistic as the behaviors of Chinese workers in Tanzania and Zambia. The spirit of internationalism was the emotional basis for the heavy contribution in finance, human resources, and equipment that China had given to the two African countries. This concept originated from the idea of proletarian internationalism that underlay China's effort to liberate the socialist countries that fell under the exploitation of imperialist and colonialist countries. As the cold war ended and the U.S.-China relations improved after the 1970s, the ideological contest between communism and capitalism waned. However, the spirit of internationalism was transformed into a sense of shared destiny with the Third World and continued to be the cultural origin of Chinese foreign policy in the current time.

These principles and methods of foreign aid made China stand out among the different players in Africa, and a new model of development was recognized by many Western scholars. The principles of non-intervention and mutual benefit were most frequently cited as China's main difference from the interventionist policies of Western countries. Bailey put forward quite distinctly: "A new model of development had been opened up, an important alternative to the inherited concepts from the colonial period."<sup>80</sup> Hall has made a similar remark: "The Freedom Railway has become China's showpiece, her chance to focus the world's attention on China's development model. Peking is eager to project the image of China as another Third World nation

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<sup>80</sup> Bailey, *Freedom Railway*, 155.

which has a lot of experience to offer other underdeveloped countries.”<sup>81</sup> The principles of Chinese foreign engagement evolved but to a large extent remained unchanged in the past decades, and the emotional connection with the Third World countries was still central to understanding the principles of foreign cooperation in the current time.

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<sup>81</sup> Hall, *The Great Uhuru Railway*, 190.

### Chapter 3: The Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway

The Mombasa–Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) in Kenya connects the large Indian Ocean city of Mombasa with Nairobi, the country's capital and largest city. The Mombasa–Nairobi phase of the project began construction in 2013 and was finished in 2017. At a cost of US\$3.8 billion, the SGR is Kenya's most expensive infrastructure project since independence. The prime contractor was the China Road & Bridge Corporation CRBC, one of the first large-scale state-owned enterprises in China to enter the international engineering contracting market. CRBC introduced itself as an international infrastructure constructor who carried the mission of the Belt and Road Initiative: “[CRBC] engaged in large-scale infrastructure construction, investment and operation around the world, and an important participant and implementer of the "Belt and Road" initiative.” Over 5,000 Chinese workers participated in the project, while CRBC also hired 25,000 Kenyans to work on the railway. CRBC's holding company, China Communications Construction Company, was contracted to operate the line for its first five years. The project cost of the first phase of the SGR from Mombasa to Nairobi was 90% financed by the Export-Import Bank of China.<sup>82</sup>

It runs parallel to the Uganda Railway that was completed in 1901 under British colonial rule, making it a symbol of Kenya's independence from the old colonial power. China also hoped that the SGR would help Kenya achieve economic development and independence: “[China will] strengthen the construction of industrial parks along the railway line, drive the industrial and economic and social development along the line with railway construction, and provide support

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<sup>82</sup> Ian Gorecki, “Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway: The Promise and Risks of Rail Megaprojects,” *Africa Up Close*, September 24, 2020.



for the independent and effective operation of the railway with industrial development.”<sup>83</sup> It is a signature project under the Belt and Road Initiative, a plan that China offers the world for seeking common prosperity and development. It began in 2013 with two separate proposals, for a ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ and a ‘Twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road’ connecting under-developed border provinces with developing countries in the region. These regional partners now include sixty-four countries, involving projects with an approximate value of US\$900 billion. As a signature project under the Belt and Road Initiative, the SGR would enhance China-Africa friendship and create prosperity across the two continents.

This chapter continues to discuss the similarities and differences between the Chinese and western model of assistance to Africa. Western scholars and commentators have criticized China for its practice of “neo-colonialism” and “debt-trap diplomacy” in Africa. China was portrayed as a neo-colonialist power whose sole purpose was securing the raw materials and markets of cheap goods, and an excessive lender who overwhelmed developing countries with debts in exchange for strategic assets and political leverage. To understand China’s motivation as expressed in the official documents, we have put it into a historical context. We found that China’s aid to the developing countries had genuine emotions that have been building up since the era of the TAZARA Railway. This chapter shows that China’s principles of foreign aid have been consistent in the past decades, which reveal the fundamental differences between the Chinese and Western model of foreign engagement. We will also examine local responses of China’s involvement in Kenya. While many recognize that China was a distinctly different

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<sup>83</sup> China New Service, 1 June 2017.

player in Kenya, China also provoked fear of colonialism that had dominated Kenya during the imperial rule, suggesting that there were some ambiguities in China's foreign aid practices.

### **China's motivations**

In the last chapter on the TAZARA Railway, we have found that China's motivation for foreign assistance is not only ideological but also emotional. This emotional aspect of Chinese motivation was needed to understand China's foreign policy. Zhou Enlai's Eight Principles of Chinese Aid, the cornerstone of Chinese assistance to Tanzania and Zambia 50 years ago, has a remaining impact on China's foreign policy today. When examining China's cooperation with and assistance to Africa today, we find the same themes and principles as in Zhou's Eight Principles. The rhetoric for the Belt and Road Initiative and the building of the SGR was similar to that of building the TAZARA 50 years ago except that economic reasons are also cited heavily in the discussion around the SGR. Thus, understanding the motivations behind the SGR, especially its emotional aspect, requires us to both look back in history at the TAZARA project and trace the recent developments in foreign aid strategy.

The principles laid down by Zhou Enlai before the building of the TAZARA Railway formed the basis of China-Africa friendship, while the later evolutions shifted the emphasis on economic development. During the 1960s and 1970s, the preoccupation of China was supporting the newly liberated countries' independence from colonial control and increasing its bargaining leverage with the United States. Zhou stated explicitly in the first point of the Eight Principles: "Through such aid the friendly new emerging countries gradually develop their own national economy, free themselves from colonial control and strengthen the anti-imperialist forces in the world." Later evolutions in Chinese principles added economic dimensions. In 1982, Premier Zhao Ziyang

proposed four principles for developing China-Africa economic and technical cooperation during his visit to 11 African countries. These four principles emphasized equality and mutual benefit, practical results, variety of cooperation forms and common progress. The principles of equality and mutual benefit were a continuation of Zhou's principles, but the latter two principles were more economic-oriented in the background of Deng Xiaoping's economic reform and opening-up policies in the 1980s. This was an important shift in China's policy towards Africa from supporting Africa's national liberation struggles to advocating a more commercial-based interaction.<sup>84</sup> China continued to develop a more commercially based relationship with Africa. In 1996, President Jiang Zemin outlined a 'five-point proposal' for developing a long-term stable relationship between China and Africa during his visit to six African countries. Jiang's proposal included fostering sincere friendship, respect for sovereignty and non-interference, common development and mutual benefits, cooperation in international affairs and creating a more beautiful world.<sup>85</sup> The same theme of non-intervention and mutual benefits appeared again in Jiang's message.

The efforts to seek a commercially based partnership with Africa lay the most important foundation of FOCAC and Belt and Road Initiative. The emergence of the FOCAC in 2000 marked the formalization of China's 50-year relationship with Africa. The guiding values of the FOCAC stressed not only cultural and political solidarity but also economic prosperity between China and Africa, with China pledging \$60 billion in new financing for Africa in the 2018 summit and 40 billion in the 2021 summit. The Belt and Road Initiative traced its roots to the

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<sup>84</sup> Raymond Kwun-Sun Lau, "Africa-China Relations in the Context of Belt and Road Initiative: Realizing African-Chinese Dreams for Common Development?," In: Berlie, J. (eds) *China's Globalization and the Belt and Road Initiative. Politics and Development of Contemporary China* (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019).

<sup>85</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Estonia, *President Jiang Zemin's Visit to Six African Countries*, 17 May 2014.

principles laid out by Zhou Enlai. In the keynote speech at the opening of Belt and Road Forum in 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping referred to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that Zhou Enlai issued in the Sino-Indian Agreement 1954: “China will enhance friendship and cooperation with all countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence.” He stressed the principle of non-intervention: “we have no intention to interfere in other countries' internal affairs, export our own social system and model of development, or impose our own will on others” and the principle of mutual benefit: “What we hope to achieve is a new model of win-win cooperation.” Meanwhile, business partnership with Africa was also a big part of the forum agenda: “China will scale up financing support for the Belt and Road Initiative by contributing an additional RMB 100 billion to the Silk Road Fund, and we encourage financial institutions to conduct overseas RMB fund business with an estimated amount of about RMB 300 billion.”<sup>86</sup>

“China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era” published in 2021<sup>87</sup> showed the deep emotional connections with the Third World developing countries.<sup>88</sup> The ideological tone in the idea of proletariat internationalism was diminished and developed into a general sense of sympathy and solidarity with the developing world. In the 1950, the principle of internationalism led China to support other countries in their campaigns for national independence in spite of its own difficulties. The principle of internationalism took on a different connotation and appeared in the 2021 document: “The Chinese tradition of internationalism[is the origin of Chinese international development]. The Chinese people hope that other peoples

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<sup>86</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Full text of President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum*, 5 May 2017.

<sup>87</sup> State Council Information Office, *China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era*, January 01, 2021

<sup>88</sup> An English version of the document can be found at <https://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=233&lib=dbref&SearchKeyword=&SearchCKeyword=>

will also lead a good life while theirs is improving, and are willing to contribute as much as they can to other developing countries' efforts to satisfy their people's aspiration for a better life”<sup>89</sup>

South-South cooperation was also the main guiding principle of China’s international development: “China's development cooperation is a form of mutual assistance between developing countries. It falls into the category of South-South cooperation and therefore is essentially different from North-South cooperation.”

These principles were elevated into the vision of “a Community of Shared Future for Mankind”, as the mission of China’s international development cooperation. This concept was developed from the friendship and solidarity formed in the China-Africa relations. In a speech delivered during his 2013 tour in Tanzania, President Xi Jinping had said: “China and Africa have always been a community of shared destinies, and similar historical experiences, common development tasks, as well as shared strategic interests have bound the two sides together.” The idea of a community of common destiny was brought up in many speeches after that, stressing common development, finding solutions to common problems, and equality of all countries.

The same principles that Zhou Enlai laid out in Eight Principles were also contained in the document. In the section of “Principles for Development Cooperation,” the document reiterated the principles that had characterized China’s foreign policy: the principle of non-intervention (“no country should interfere in their efforts to find a development path suited to their own national conditions, interfere in their internal affairs, impose its own will on them, attach political strings, or pursue political self-interest”), the principle of self-reliance (“Providing

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<sup>89</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era*, 10 January 2021.

the means for independent development”), and the principle of providing best resources (“Doing the best we can to help”). Meanwhile, the document also stressed the importance of economic development. It included measures to increase aid to other developing countries within the Belt and Road framework and proposing cooperation schemes with developing countries through regional cooperation mechanisms.

Therefore, it is imperative that we read the Chinese official statements of foreign policy with a historical perspective. The main principles of foreign aid, while adding an economic dimension, did not undergo a significant change from Zhou Enlai’s era. Just as emotional factors underlay the construction of the TAZARA Railway and the formation of the Eight Principles of Chinese Aid, the bond that China forged with the Third World countries was also behind the recent initiatives such as Belt and Road and the Standard Gauge Railway.

### **Local people’s responses**

As a new player that started to gain influence in the past decade, China not only evoked curiosity, fear, and excitement among local reactions, but was also compared with traditional players in Kenya such as Britain and the U.S.. In the case of the Standard Gauge Railway, there were both parallels and discrepancies between the local accounts and the Chinese perspective of its foreign aid strategy. These local accounts allow us to understand how Chinese engagement in Africa is similar or different from the Western one from a new angle. They show that while the unique Chinese model of engagement is recognized, many aspects of this engagement provoked colonial anxiety of Kenyan people and reminded them of the past pattern of colonialism.

Many accounts viewed China's engagement and assistance, which stress mutual benefits, non-intervention, and cultivation of friendship, as fundamentally different from the Western one. This attitude was shown in the responses to China's president Xi Jinping's foreign visits prior to the SGR project. The newly elected president chose four countries as the destination for his first foreign trip: Russia, Tanzania, the Republic of Congo and South Africa, and Daily Nation commented that the visit to the Republic of Congo (ROC) is reflective of the fact that "China's engagement with Africa is fundamentally different from the path the West has adopted."<sup>90</sup> The ROC was not strategically important for either the West or the U.S., but China wanted to nurture its relationship with this country.

The theme of win-win partnership and China-Africa solidarity were picked up by the Kenyan government and media as the SGR project was initiated. Speaking in the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017, President Kenyatta expressed his faith in a win-win situation China and Africa can achieve together. China's vision of an interconnected world with enhanced trade supported the African desire for shared prosperity, as infrastructure projects such as the SGR helps Kenya to achieve its 2030 Vision of industrialization and prosperity: "the construction of the Standard Gauge Railway shows the tremendous potential for mutually beneficial strategic cooperation between Kenya and China... It will be a win-win situation when our people have the skills, assets and financing necessary to participate in the development of the infrastructure corridors that will enhance connectivity, support trade and reduce the cost of doing business between our countries."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Daily Nation, March 23, 2013.

<sup>91</sup> Daily Nation, May 15, 2017.

At the same time, the break from the colonial past was also observed in the symbolism of the SGR as an engine of economic growth and pathway to true independence. “More than any other country in Africa, Kenya signifies the demise of the post-colonial order in Africa. This process started in the wake of the new Constitution in 2010 but more effectively with the rise of Kenya's assertive foreign policy after Uhuru Kenyatta assumed power,”<sup>92</sup> a journalist wrote in *Sunday Nation*. It did so mainly through economic diplomacy and through this, the leveraging of economic resources, including the relationship with China and the funding of the SGR. President Uhuru also emphasized the significance of the SGR in numerous public speeches. At an infrastructure summit held in Nairobi in 2016, the president told the audience: “Infrastructure is a necessity if our economy is to grow and if we are to achieve the prosperity we desire as a people and as a nation.”<sup>93</sup> A journalist also noted the inefficiencies in the transportation system of Kenya, which impeded the economic growth and geographical expansion that had been taking place, and the need to build a new railway: “The solution lies in massive investment in the hinterland's railway transport system as a competing alternative mode of freight transport. The SGR project being pursued by Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda presents this alternative.”<sup>94</sup>

Despite this echoing of the Chinese principles of foreign aid and optimism for the SGR, many local responses also revealed anxieties inherited from the colonial past. This nervousness was seen in the discussion around how Kenya should engage with China, a new player in Africa. An article in *Business Daily* analyzed China's motive in entering Africa and gave suggestions to China-Kenya cooperation. It recognized that China's move is a convergence of economic

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<sup>92</sup> *Sunday Nation*, September 4, 2016.

<sup>93</sup> *Daily Nation*, August 8, 2016.

<sup>94</sup> *The Star*, February 6, 2014.



interests of the two countries and encouraged Kenya to explore possibilities of economic partnerships with the East. Although the article associated China's entry into Africa with the new era of post-independence and the development of an industrialized nation by 2030, it also warned that "[this generation] must be unwilling to witness or allow this partnership to degenerate into another form of colonialism as prophets of doom would want us to believe. While such safeguards are not a guarantee we must nonetheless remain engaged fearlessly, taking the protection of our economic interest as guiding principle."<sup>95</sup> Thus, although engagement with China was seen as a definite break from the past, there were worries that this engagement would repeat the colonialism that dominated Kenya before 1960. In addition, the president's hope for a win-win situation became less definitive as the trade gap between China and Africa remained large. Before an upcoming trip to Beijing in 2017, the president spoke of the goal he wished to achieve in the trip: "we will try to push for more African goods into the Chinese market so that we can have an opportunity for both of us to benefit." He also added: "If we are able to achieve those objectives, it is a win-win situation for us all."<sup>96</sup> Although still using the rhetoric of mutual benefits and win-win situation, words like "if" and "try" suggested more uncertainty in it.

Many controversies around the SGR were about its infringement on Kenya's national sovereignty. The first challenge of the SGR came from the questioning of the tendering process. Many critics argued that the process did not follow the Public Procurement Act which requires all projects above Sh500,000 to use open tender to pick suppliers. Instead, as a government-to-government contract, it was directly awarded to a Chinese company. The Attorney-General brought up the issue of national sovereignty: "In what appeared to be a call to respect Kenya's

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<sup>95</sup> Business Daily, January 27, 2015.

<sup>96</sup> Business Daily, May 10, 2017.

sovereignty, the AG (Attorney-General) further noted that ‘development partners - China in this case - should align themselves to the systems, standards, procedures and development priorities of recipient states in order to promote accountability.’”<sup>97</sup>

Another scandal also reflected this anxiety. In 2019, a rumor was spread that if Kenya failed to repay the loan that China had provided, China would seize the Mombasa Port. The contract as seen by Sunday Nation removed immunity from “arbitration, suit, and execution” from “any of [Kenya’s] assets.”<sup>98</sup> The contract also kept the initial SGR loan agreement secret. Therefore, Sunday Nation raised questions on the Freedom of Information requirements by the Kenyan Constitution and respect for Kenya’s sovereignty. The Treasury Cabinet Secretary denied such clause and Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying also said: “We have checked with the relevant Chinese financial institution and found that the allegation that Kenyan side used the Mombasa Port as a collateral in its payment agreement with the Chinese financial institution for the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway is not true.”<sup>99</sup> Law Society of Kenya Nairobi Branch Chairman Charles Kanjama said the secrecy clause is standard for such agreements. However, the sovereignty waiver on the assets raised the concern of the Kenyan society, who were reminded of the past control the imperial government had over its government.

The land issues caused by the construction of the SGR were suggestive of the land grab that European powers had done in the past. In 2014, some communities at the Coast were wary that the standard gauge railway project could make them lose their land. The residents accused the

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<sup>97</sup> Daily Nation, November 30, 2013.

<sup>98</sup> Sunday Nation, January 13, 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Chinadaily, December 29, 2018.

government of discriminating against them and said it should facilitate meetings with them to explain how the railway line will affect them.<sup>100</sup> Finally, the racial discrimination incidents that happened during SGR's operation also reminded Kenyans of the past colonial rule. The Chinese operator of the SGR stood accused of discriminating Kenyans in employment, assignments, salary, sitting arrangement, catering and personal hygiene services. A journalist at Sunday Nation demanded government actions to face the discrimination problem, asking the Transport Cabinet Secretary to answer the problem and the government to set up an ad hoc committee to investigate it. He wrote in anger that men and women in Kenya fought for the independence of Kenya and "for us to be rid of British racism." However, 55 years after independence "the heirs to independence are dithering over Chinese racism."<sup>101</sup> An explicit connection between China and the British empire was made due to the Chinese operator's discriminatory attitude towards local people.

Kenya's anxiety stemmed not only from its colonial history but also from its modern history of (under)development. After gaining independence, Kenya tried to achieve true economic independence and develop its economy. However, it struggled to do so while constantly looking for a model to follow. Maintaining a delicate balance between its relationship with the East and the West, it failed to copy either model while also unable to create its own way of economic development. We can see this struggle in the newspaper articles and opinions, too. Kenya has been maintaining a close relationship with the U.S.. With the visit of president Barack Obama in Kenya and the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in 2015, this relationship was reinforced: "Independent Kenya has enjoyed close ties with the US that have significantly contributed to

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<sup>100</sup> Daily Nation, March 13, 2014.

<sup>101</sup> Sunday Nation, July 22, 2018.

economic development. In fact, part of President Obama's history is the late senior Obama's study in the US in the early 1960s as part of preparing Kenya's post-independent leaders. As they say, the rest is history. Today, President Obama occupies a special place in Kenya as 'our brother from another mother', and his visit has understandably earned the homecoming tug."<sup>102</sup> Although Kenya tried to maintain a neutral stance when China increased its interaction with Africa, it clearly admired China's development in the past decades and wanted to develop deeper ties with China. In defending the construction of the Standard Gauge Railway, President Kenyatta cited the case of the Asian Tigers, which are Eastern countries like South Korea and Singapore who rose from poverty to prosperity as he emphasized the importance of infrastructure; To him, these countries' path to wealth was the one Kenya wants to look towards.<sup>103</sup>

Therefore, Kenya is still torn between the two worlds. On the one hand, China's unique development path and level of foreign assistance were attractive to Kenya: "Britannia ruled the waves in the 19th century and America held the top spot in the 20th. As for the 21st, ask anyone with bona fides in punditry and they will tell you that it is China's"<sup>104</sup>; at the same time, it still adheres to its traditional partners in the West: "We also live in a world created by the West, and one which will continue to be dominated by the West for the rest of this century."<sup>105</sup> As a result, it struggles to create its own development path: "We cannot continue to copy the extreme ideas of the West and paste them here in Africa. To leapfrog, we must develop our own shade of capitalism."<sup>106</sup> This struggle partly explains Kenya's anxiety towards the entrance of a new power and the uncertainty of the future to be shaped.

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<sup>102</sup> The Star, July 16, 2015.

<sup>103</sup> Daily Nation, August 8, 2016.

<sup>104</sup> Sunday Nation, May 18, 2014.

<sup>105</sup> Sunday Nation, May 18, 2014.

<sup>106</sup> Business Daily, June 18, 2014.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, China's model of foreign aid in Africa is fundamentally different from the Western powers in the imperialist era. China's principles and motivations of foreign aid is a product of a complex history that began in the 1970s, when China had just extricated itself from the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. The principles of non-intervention, mutual benefit, self-reliance, as well as the spirit of internationalism originated from the model of foreign assistance China had adopted in the construction of the TAZARA Railway. In the case of the TAZARA, these principles were not just theoretical frameworks used in official speeches and documents; rather, they were supported by genuine friendship Chinese officials and workers felt towards people of Tanzania and Zambia, who had suffered the domination of imperialist powers. Thus, putting China's principles of international development nowadays into a historical perspective shed light on the complexities and emotional meaning behind the announcements in official documents.

Although the Chinese and British motivations of infrastructure development had similarities, they were different in most aspects. China and Britain shared the same undertaking to uphold certain values of humanity. The moral arguments against slavery that justified Britain's conquest of foreign lands stemmed from its mission to save the humankind from an evil. Burdened with this grand mission, Britain not only abolished slavery in most part of the British empire, but also took on the responsibility to eliminate slavery at its root and improve humankind. The Brussels Anti-slavery Conference 1889-1890 showed Britain's effort to unite international forces to suppress the slave trade. A similar sense of responsibility for international development was the foundation of China's foreign aid. The spirit of internationalism inspired China to support the

colonized countries in the rest of the world in their struggle against imperialism and colonialism; even today, China stated “China’s sense of responsibility as a major country” in “China’s International Development Cooperation in the New Era” as an important cultural origin of its international development efforts. The rhetoric that China wants to uphold universal values such as “peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom” as well as its mission “to contribute more to humanity” echoed Britain’s calling to champion righteousness and justice for humanity.

However, China and Britain’s foreign policies were fundamentally different as Britain’s motivations were purely interest-based. The annexation of the territories of British East Africa as well as the proposal of building a railway to connect hinterland to the coast came out of British political and economic interest. The building of a railway not only increased Britain’s leverage in its political rivalry with Germany and its domination in India, but also provided a commercial opportunity of opening up the new market and settlement in East Africa. The railway was used as a tool to increase Britain’s international prestige and economic return, rather than a contract that respected local people’s will.

On the contrary, China’s principles of foreign aid distinguished itself as a different player than the traditional Western power. The principle of non-intervention denies China the ability to infringe other countries’ sovereignty, as opposed to British transgression on native people’s rights and the Western method of foreign aid with associated conditions. The principle of mutual benefit took shape in the practice of promoting economic growth in developing countries through infrastructure development, while interest of the local people was not considered under colonial

rule. Most importantly, the emotional underpinning for China's foreign aid made China distinctive from other players in Africa. Its sympathy towards African countries' past struggle against imperialism and the current struggle to achieve economic growth added special meaning to the plain doctrines announced in official documents.

Local responses also suggested China's uniqueness as a foreign partner and aid provider. Local Kenyans' account recognized that large infrastructure projects that China undertakes are key to stimulating industrial growth. The promotion of economic self-reliance, the emphasis on enhancing trade relations, and the vision of a win-win partnership differentiate China from the Western stress on loan assistance and governance. China's vision of creating a mutually beneficial relationship was also a stark contrast to British appropriation of native people's rights and property. Although China's behaviors provoked fear of colonialism in local people, evidence showed that this anxiety was a product of Kenya's colonial and modern history, which has been a continuous exploration of self-identity. It was subjected to colonial dominance and exploitation during British rule, and struggled to find its own development path after independence. Its insecurity of national identity fueled suspicion into the partnership with China. Except in the case of racism, the accusations toward China have no confirmed evidence. Although the warning on Kenya's debt sustainability was valid, it is important to note that it was African countries' initiative, not China's, to request for China's loan and technical assistance.

Thus, a historical and comparison study allows us to examine recent Western criticisms towards the Belt and Road Initiative, especially the SGR, with a more objective stance. The claims that China's sole incentive was to increase its political and economic leverage in other developing

countries through lending a unsustainable level of debt, and that China's private interest was to extract raw materials and expand low-end market as the past colonial powers, appear weak in light of the history of its foreign policy and the comparison with the British case. As compared to Britain's interest-driven engagement with Africa, the respect of local people's will and an emotional connection to other developing countries' struggle for independence marked China's relations with Africa. Its motivations and local people's responses suggested more nuances in Western commentators' simple claims.

In fact, the Western claims were based on their own anxieties about the change in international order. The discussion of imperialism and new imperialism has always been shaped around the rise and fall of major powers in the international arena. Imperialism involves the exertion of sovereignty, control and influence by one state or society over another. The first theories of imperialism that emerged in the early twentieth century described imperialism mainly as a practice for the states to secure control over foreign territories to channel its domestic surplus capital as a "product and corollary of capitalism."<sup>107</sup> The need to secure colonies as outlets of these surplus capital fueled the expansion of empires and competition and conflicts among the major European powers. The second world war caused the reorganization of international order, including the dissolution of the Eurocentric world order, gradual decolonization in its former colonies, and the rise of the United States. The theories of new imperialism emerged after this political and economic upheaval. They describe the characteristics of the U.S. foreign policy, which became "the world's sole remaining super(or hyper-) power." They centered on the rise of the United States as the new superpower and its use of economic and military power to

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<sup>107</sup> Steven Kettell, et al, "New Imperialism: Toward a Holistic Approach," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (June 2013): 244.



democratize and liberalize other countries. The new set of features they adopted include the changing nature of international capitalism, the shift of focus from state power, and the new emerging humanitarian ideas.

Just as the theories of new imperialism stemmed from the reorganization of international order after the Cold War, the arguments about China as a neo-colonialist power also came from China's recent ascension as a world power. Deborah Bräutigam, a professor at Johns Hopkins University, argues that the concerns about China's overseas engagement and the concept of debt diplomacy are resulting from human being's negativity bias based on fear of China's recent rise. She points out that the attacks on China's role in Africa only emerged around 2006, while the West largely ignored China's engagement with Africa since the 1960s.<sup>108</sup> The United States has also taken measures to contain China's global influence, as the extension of China's rising power, as exemplified in the Belt and Road Initiative, was perceived as a threat. As a direct response to China's Belt and Road Initiative, the Build Act of 2018 created a new U.S. development agency—the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (USIDFC) with a \$60 billion investment portfolio. President Biden's framework of an infrastructure financing mechanism, Build Back Better World, is also designed to provide an alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative. This analysis helps us to understand the origins of Western criticisms towards China's aid to Africa and question their legitimacy.

Realizing this is especially important in the current era of uncertainty and conflict. The U.S.-China relations quickly deteriorated after the election in 2017, and the pandemic only deepened

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<sup>108</sup> Deborah Brautigam, "A critical look at Chinese 'debt-trap diplomacy': the rise of a meme," *Area Development and Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 1(2019):3.

the suspicion between the two countries, who accused each other as the source of the outbreak and for disease control measures that violated human rights. Incensed nationalism diffused in social medias, resulting in violent incidents due to racial discrimination. These recent developments exposed our vulnerabilities and deficiencies as human beings, that we are prone to bias towards and imagination of a group of people we've never met before. We use labels, such as neo-colonialists, to categorize and understand new things we haven't seen before. However, using such simple categorization ignores the complexities of each individual in the group. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to remind us of our limitation of knowledge and appreciate the nuances behind the decisions of other countries and people.

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