China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Africa: Infrastructure Development or Geopolitical Expansion?

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I. Introduction

Following the end of the Cold War, a number of African countries shifted their foreign policies toward the People's Republic of China (PRC), opening their markets to Chinese products and investment. This change has made China a major economic power on the continent, challenging the United States and the European countries, and made it Africa's biggest trading partner.[1] Beyond the commercial dimension, China's expanding power is broadly recognized to pose a direct threat to Western hegemony, with China employing soft power–particularly in the form of unconditional investment and infrastructure finance in pursuit of geopolitical interests.[2] However, the unconditional investment concept is challenged by China's real practice in dealing with African countries. As China-Africa relation deepens, the question of what drives African governments to prioritize engagement with China and the potential long-term implications of this partnership becomes increasingly relevant. In contrast to Western donors, which frequently condition aid on governance reforms, human rights

1 Larry Hanauer & Lyle J. Morris, "How China-Africa Relations Have Developed," in Larry Hanauer & Lyle J. Morris, ed., Chinese Engagement in Africa: Drivers, Reactions, and Implications for U.S. Policy (Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2014), pp. 19-44.

2 Ambrosé Du Plessis, "The Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, Ideas and Aid: National Interest(s) or Strategic Partnership?" *Insight on Africa*, Vol. 6, Iss. 2, 2014. pp. 113-130.

adherence, and transparency practices, China maintains a non-interference tactic in the political and policy affairs of the African states. This kind of engagement from China has been distinguished from North-South cooperation, or in other words, Africa-Western partnership.[3] It is this approach and model that have been particularly appealing to African leaders who wanted fast infrastructure development and economic growth without stringent conditions.

China's BRI, launched in 2013, has significantly influenced Africa's urbanization by financing large-scale infrastructure projects. After a decade of operation, the BRI initiative has attracted a significant number of participants from Africa. In 2023, 44 of 54 African countries had joined the initiative, with China investing 2.5 times more in African infrastructure than all Western countries combined. However, some high-cost projects risk becoming underutilized due to poor connectivity and financial sustainability. The BRI projects have not always been well-conceived or strategically chosen, leading to outcomes that fail to deliver the desired economic impact. Examples include Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway, which depends on extensions to Uganda and Rwanda for viability, and Uganda's expensive Entebbe-Kampala Expressway, which faces repayment challenges without sufficient toll revenue.[4] While infrastructure investment can catalyze economic growth, some BRI projects lack long-term planning, raising concerns about debt sustainability

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[3] Nele Noesselt, "China's African Dream: Assessing China's New Strategy," in Christof Hartmann & Nele Noesselt, ed., China's New Role in African Politics: From Non-Intervention towards Stabilization? (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 17-31.

[4] Astrid R.N. Haas, "China's Investments in Africa aren't Working as well as They Should for Cities: This Needs to Change," *The Conversation*, 2024, https://theconversation.com/chinas-investments-in-africa-arent-working-as-well-as-they-should-for-cities-this-needs-to-change-238046.

and lasting benefits for the local communities.

The central objective of this article is to analyse the increasing Chinese investment in Africa, with a particular focus on BRI. The African countries are seeking infrastructural investment and development partnership with China. Therefore, several issues require attention: African leaders in the post-Cold War period see an opportunity in China, linking their engagement to historical grievances inherited from colonial powers. African states did not develop during colonialism, and the post-colonial era too; instead, their resources and human capital were used to enrich colonial powers. For example, commerce deriving from Africa helped a great deal to strengthen trans-national links within the Western European economy, bearing in mind that American produce was the consequence of African labour.[5] This grievance shapes how African leaders deal with China, framing it as a development partner rather than a former colonial master that dictates terms or controls their fate.[6] The second point to note, which is also valid, is that some African leaders, unwilling to relinquish power, have shifted their political alliances to China to retain control and remain in power. African countries seek Chinese investment precisely because it is detached from political conditions. Western donors and liberal financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) tie funding to human rights, democracy, and multiparty politics, where China disregards these factors in its financial engagements. This highlights the crucial difference between China's transactional,

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[5] Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Dar es Salaam: Tanzanian Publishing House, 1973), pp. 127-142.

[6] Development Reimagined, "Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: All You Need to Know Before FOCAC 9," *FOCAC Introductory Brief* (London: Development Reimagined, 2024), https://developmentreimagined.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/FOCAC-Introductory-Brief-2.pdf, pp. 1-17.

development-oriented relationship with Africa and the West's value-driven, conditionality-laden approach.

This article does not purport to generalize the challenges of Chinese investment across Africa; rather, it identifies and analyzes a pattern of issues emerging in a number of African countries that have received BRI financing. Stories circulate about African countries trapped in enormous Chinese loans. One prime example is Djibouti, a tiny state on the Red Sea facing the Bab el-Mandeb Strait–a critical maritime chokepoint for global trade, particularly oil and natural gas shipments. Not only Djibouti, but also there are similar examples such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Angola. This article, however, examines the dualistic nature of Chinese investment in Africa under the BRI. Moving beyond a simple cost-benefit analysis, it interrogates whether the extensive infrastructural projects through BRI ultimately serve as a catalyst for African sustainable development or as a strategic instrument for expanding Chinese geopolitical hegemony.

II. The Chinese investment: Bridging infrastructure gaps or extending political influence

The drivers, patterns, and dynamics of Chinese investment both globally and continentally are numerous, multidimensional, and vary from one region to another, defying any single explanation or simplistic perspective. In Africa, while some scholars view these investments as beneficial for Africa's economic and social development, others perceive them as instruments of China's political, and geopolitical ambitions. This duality underscores the complexity of China's engagement with Africa, where economic cooperation and strategic interests are deeply intertwined.

One of the key drivers behind China's large-scale investment in Africa is the pressing developmental needs existing in many African nations, and the abundant untapped natural resources available in the continent.[7] High unemployment rate, and inadequate infrastructure–including highways, railways, ports, airports, energy, telecoms, and industrial facilities–have compelled African leaders to seek Chinese investment as a solution. From their perspective, Chinese companies offer much-needed capital and expertise to bridge these gaps. However, the adage, "there is no such thing as a free lunch," serves as a pertinent reminder and is thought-provoking in this context. "No country provides financial support without expecting something in return – whether it's political leverage, economic influence, or strategic advantage," an argument from a professor of History at the University of Juba in South Sudan. However, while these investments may address the immediate infrastructural deficits that African nations experience, they also come with long-term implications that extend beyond mere economic exchange. These include concerns like debt-trap diplomacy, environmental degradation, and social discontent, as well as concrete examples of problematic projects, such as Uganda's expensive Entebbe-Kampala Expressway.

A critical aspect of Chinese investment in Africa is its alignment with China's broader political agenda, which seeks to expand its geopolitical

[7] Christian-Géraud Neema, "What FOCAC 2024 Reveals About the Future of China-Africa Relations," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024), https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/11/what-focac-2024-reveals-about-the-future-of-china-africa-relations?lang=en.

and geostrategic influence not only across the continent but also globally. China's infrastructure projects and development financing are not purely altruistic; they function as strategic tools to deepen China's political leverage.[8] From Africa's standpoint, Chinese investments are a responsive solution to developmental needs. Yet, from China's perspective, it presents itself as an equal and neutral partner in Africa's development.[9] However, China's involvement in Africa represents a deliberate strategy to penetrate African political systems, influence policymaking, and secure long-term strategic advantages. The true cost of these investments–both economic and political– will become increasingly apparent.

This dual-purpose approach is evident in China's involvement with the African Union (AU), by funding and constructing the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa. China has embedded itself within the continent's highest political body.[10] Not only the AU Headquarters, but there are multibillion-dollar projects such as railways, ports, airports, and industrial parks built by China across the continent.[11] This move has demonstrated how an economic investment can translate into a political influence, allowing China to shape continental decisions in ways that align with its interests.[12] Such engagements demonstrate that China's strategy achieves two aims simultaneously: it secures access to vital natural resources by financing and

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[8] Hong Yu, "Motivation behind China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiatives and Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 25, Iss. 102, November 2016, pp. 1-16.

[9] Ibid., 6.

[10] Ilaria Carrozza, "China's African Union Diplomacy: Challenges and Prospects for the Future," *LSE Global South Unit, Policy Brief Series, Policy Brief*, No. 2, 2018 (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2018), pp. 1-9.

[11] John Akokpari & Primrose Bimha, "African Union's Role in Addressing Africa's Economic Development Challenges," in Andrews Atta-Asamoah & Wafula Okumu, ed., The African Union at 20: African perspectives on progress, challenges and prospects (Pretoria & Addis Ababa: The Institute for Security Studies, 2023), pp. 222-249.

[12] Ibid.

constructing infrastructure to fill critical gaps in Africa, and while advancing its own geostrategic interests across the continent. A case in point is the China's control over the Doraleh Multipurpose Port in Djibouti, coupled with the establishing the Djibouti International Free Trade Zone, and more alarmingly, China's establishment of its first overseas military base in Djibouti that signals a strategic expansion of the Chinese into the Horn of Africa which is a geopolitically significant region.[13]

However, the Chinese investment in Africa's infrastructure has its challenges and shortcomings. There are a number of challenges and obstacles linked to China's investment in Africa, such as debt dependency, as African nations risk accumulating unmanageable loans tied to Chinese-funded projects. In addition to that, many high-cost Chinese investments indeed have struggled post-construction; a case in point is the Addis Ababa Light Rail in Ethiopia. This project, is regarded as one of the initial infrastructure projects in Ethiopia linked with BRI, has faced operational challenges, including maintenance difficulties and a failure to transfer technical skills to local workers, leaving its future viability in doubt. A 31.6-kilometer electrified light rail system with over $470 million was inaugurated a decade ago. However, due to a shortage of spare parts, more than 23 of the system's 40 trains are now out of service, with repair costs estimated at $60 million.[14] Therefore, there are persistent challenges in China's African investment strategy–including project quality, local job creation, and long-term community benefits–that continue to raise

[13] Fahmida Alam & Samin Farhan Asef, "The Implications of BRI in Djibouti: A Critical Geopolitical Analysis," paper presented at the 18th International RAIS Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities (Princeton: Research Association for Interdisciplinary Studies, New Jersey, USA, August 17-18, 2020), pp. 277-283.

[14] Eyob Tikuye, "Fixing Addis Light Rail May Cost at Least $60 Million," *The Reporter*, January 21, 2023, https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/30044/.

significant concerns.

III. The BRI: A vehicle for development or a tool for domination

The BRI, also known as the New Silk Road, is a key component and driver of China's expanding engagement with African nations. This initiative is Beijing's flagship strategy for global economic and infrastructure domination. [15] Through targeted investments, trade partnerships, and infrastructure projects, China seeks to strengthen its geopolitical influence in Africa, fostering long-term strategic ties. While these efforts are framed as mutually beneficial development cooperation, they also align with China's broader ambitions to expand its soft power and secure access to critical global trade routes and resources. [16] Eventually, China's engagement in Africa serves not only economic objectives but also strategic geopolitical goals–counterbalancing American influence and positioning itself as a dominant player in shaping the future international order.[17] Through this economic diplomacy, China aims to cultivate political alliances, gain strategic advantages, and reinforce its role as a leader of global power.

According to Yun Sun (2024), China's financing commitments to Africa at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summits have grown rapidly since 2006, rising from $5 billion in 2006 to $10 billion in 2009, $20 billion in 2012, and $60 billion in both 2015 and 2018–with a notable surge in 2013 following the launch of the BRI. In the post-

[15] Ibid., 8.
[16] Ibid., 11.
[17] Ibid., 7.

pandemic period, China scaled back its commitments, pledging only $40 billion at the 2021 Dakar FOCAC, a decrease from previous summits. However, at the 2024 FOCAC meeting, while increasing financial support compared to the Dakar meeting, China also broadened its focus beyond large-scale infrastructure–shifting toward capacity building, medical assistance, and other sectors–marking a departure from its earlier focus on resource-backed mega projects like railways, roads, and bridges. This underlines China's strategic shift from hard infrastructure dominance to a more diversified engagement model.[18]

China heavily invested in Africa's infrastructure. These investments may not foster sustainable development due to several factors, including political interference in project selection–often prioritizing economically non-viable or prestige projects over those that address critical needs–and widespread corruption, which leads to substandard construction and short-lived outcomes. This practice challenges China's initial concept of non-interference and unconditional aid. Given the emphasis on these points, China is deliberately trapping African countries with unsustainable debt for the exploitation of their natural resources, which China needs to keep its industries running. For instance, more than 70% of Kenya's $50 billion debt is owed to China, where Nigeria recently borrowed $5 billion from China. Ghana is also considering mortgaging a conserved forest reserve to China to mine bauxite in return for a $4 billion facility for infrastructure projects. In Sierra Leone, China, through its BRI program, has agreed to offer the country $55 million to construct a fishing harbor that will cover an area of about 100 hectares. Details of this project sparked concerns after

[18] Yun Sun, "2024 FOCAC Beijing Summit: A New Chapter?" (Washington, D.C: The Brookings Institution, 2024), https://www.brookings.edu/articles/2024-focac-beijing-summit-a-new-chapter/.

it emerged that the project could destroy a nearby rainforest and Sierra Leone's promising tourism sector.[19]

At the far end of the East African region, countries like Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya have been described as hotspots of BRI due to their physical and strategic locations. As part of China's BRI, the Djibouti's Doraleh Multipurpose Port, the Djibouti International Free Trade Zone, and the Ethiopia-Djibouti Railway were built by the Chinese. The latter (Ethiopia-Djibouti Railway) is a two-nation investment, in which the two countries not only share in the railway venture but also the repayment burden is split between the two nations.[20] While the Djibouti authority insists on maintaining majority ownership in each Chinese funded project, the long-term costs of China's growing influence in the region could bring a burden to Djibouti's already fragile economy, dependent on port services provided to landlocked Ethiopia. The acknowledgement from Djibouti's officials proves the earlier argument. Officials underline that Djibouti's debt to China stands at 71% of the country's GDP. On the other hand, they argue that such investments were necessary to secure critical infrastructure development.[21] Critics of these investments argue that Chinese financing has resulted in unmanageable debt, which Djibouti cannot pay back, but will risk mortgaging its future to the ports intended to fuel its development.

Despite China's mixed records in Africa, Angola, a country located on the coast of southern Africa, is a recipient of substantial Chinese loans

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[19] Felix Akoyam, 2023 "The Impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative on Zambia: History of Development Aid from China to Africa," https://openairjournal.substack.com/p/the-impact-of-chinas-belt-and-road.

[20] Abdul Basit Khan & Amjad Raza, "Understanding the Impacts of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BR) over the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) (2013-2023)" *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2024, pp. 758-781.

[21] Ibid., 13.

and investments, and relies on resource-backed Chinese loans, with Angola's debt estimated at 75% of GDP tied to oil exports.[22] Angola received 258 loans totalling $45 billion from China, of which $25.9 billion was invested in the energy sector from 2000 to 2022. These loans from China amount to more than a quarter of the total loans to all African countries and make China the largest lender to Angola. In return, China has benefited the Angolan natural resources to meet China's high domestic energy demands.[23] However, the Angola's reliance on oil revenue and fluctuations of global oil prices pose significant risks to its long-term economic stability. Recent data indicate that Angola has halted taking new oil-backed loans from China since 2017, shifting its focus toward reducing dependency.[24] However, Angola joined under China-proposed BRI in 2018, where practical cooperation between China and Angola has produced substantial outcomes. Angola has become China's second-largest African trading partner, while on the other hand, China is Angola's largest trade partner. An increasing number of Chinese enterprises are investing and operating in Angola, actively participating in the country's economic diversification process. This strengthens China's economic influence in the region and pushes forward its BRI ambitions.[25]

On the contrary, the Lobito Corridor, backed by the United States and the European Union, is a strategic gambit to counter China's BRI and

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[22] Aleix Montana, "Africa's Debt Dependent Resource Producers Falling into China's Orbit," *Verisk Maplecroft*, 2021, retrieved from https://www.maplecroft.com/insights/analysis/africas-debt-dependent-resource-producers-falling-into-chinas-orbit/.

[23] Sumie Yoshikawa, "China and Angola: From the Pioneering 'Angolan Model' to a 'New' Relationship," *Asia-Pacific Issues*, Vol. 28, No. 170, November 2024, pp. 1-8.

[24] Adekunle Agbetiloye, "Africa's Second-largest Oil Exporter Cuts Oil-backed Loans from China Amid Market Volatility," *Business Insider Africa*, 2025, retrieved from https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/markets/africas-second-largest-oil-exporter-cuts-oil-backed-loans-from-china-amid-market/t2v6rqb.

[25] Ibid.

reassert Western influence in Africa. This rival trade route connects Angola's Atlantic coast to the critical mineral heartlands of the DRC and Zambia, explicitly aiming to recalibrate China's dominance over these crucial supply chains. More than just an infrastructure project, the corridor signals a new phase of global competition, where the United States is leveraging high-standard investment to challenge Beijing's entrenched position on the continent.[26]

Among African nations with Chinese loans is Zambia, a landlocked state situated in south-central Africa. This country is the second largest recipient of Chinese loans after Angola, and the largest number of different Chinese lenders are involved.[27] Zambia began a massive infrastructural drive in 2014 that saw the country put up nearly 20 huge infrastructure projects, mainly financed by China through a bilateral agreement through the BRI at a cost of about $9 billion. Chinese companies and experts undertook all these projects including expanding the country's largest airport, constructing a new airport, and building a new stadium. While low-skilled jobs were allocated to locals, the highly skilled work and the corresponding profits were retained by Chinese entities. Consequently, Zambia will spend years paying off debts for these projects, while a significant portion of the funds, which could have supported local professionals and circulated within the Zambian economy, was instead repatriated to China.[28]

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[26] Maria Adele Carrai, "The Belt and Road Initiative and Emerging US-China Rivalries in Africa: The Case of the Lobito Corridor," July 2025, Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.70055.

[27] Deborah Brautigam, "How Zambia and China Co-Created a Debt 'Tragedy of the Commons'," Working Paper No. 2021/51, *China Africa Research Initiative* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University, 2021), retrieved from http://www.sais-cari.org/publications, pp. 1-37.

[28] Ibid., 19.

The case of Zambia illustrates the potential pitfalls of heavy reliance on Chinese financing. Years of extensive borrowing for projects with limited returns such as a $65 million for stadium with 40,000-seats. The stadium reportedly barely attracts more than 5,000 viewers. The resulting spike in debt servicing costs has severely strained the country's finances, compounding a fiscal crisis.[29] China's resistance to Zambian efforts to renegotiate this debt challenges its official model of foreign aid, which is premised on equal partnership and unconditional support. Despite the promise of "win-win" benefits, the Zambian experience suggests that the relationship can be profoundly asymmetrical, leaving the borrower vulnerable to multiple fronts.[30]

Therefore, the Chinese investment in Africa is a burden on already shrinking and fluctuating African economies. On the other hand, China's engagements with Africa cannot be excluded from its political and strategic calculations and ambitions vis-à-vis its natural resources' exploitation strategy. The diplomatic exchange and discussions between the Chinese delegates and Somaliland's former president, H.E. Musa Bihi Abdi, following the establishment of Somaliland-Taiwan relationship in 2020, underscore China's strategic use of economic incentives to advance its geopolitical interests. In response to this, China reportedly offered multimillion-dollar infrastructure projects–including roads and airports–on the condition that Somaliland sever ties with Taiwan.[31] This proposal

[29] Solikha Makhmatova, "Strategic Restructuring Reforms and International Partnerships from 2024 are Driving Zambia's Economic Recovery," *ISS Africa Futures* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2025), https://futures.issafrica.org/blog/2025/Zambias-debt-turnaround.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Aleksi Ylönen & Nasir M. Ali, "Somaliland's Struggle for Recognition Since 1991: External actors and dynamics," in Aleksi Ylönen, Azza Ahmed Abdel Aziz, Clélie Nallet, Emanuele Fantini, Hassan Mwakimako, Jan Záhořík, Jean-Nicolas Bach, Jon Abbink, Patrick Ferras & Stéphane Ancel, ed., Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa (New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 98-109.

demonstrate China's broader strategy of leveraging investment to influence political alignments, integrate regions into its BRI project, and counter rival influences. However, Somaliland rejected the offer, refusing to compromise its diplomatic stance toward Taiwan. On another note, China considers Somaliland as a potential and significant region for its political, and strategic interests, in particular, China's BRI. However, Somaliland remains the only region in the Horn of Africa without Chinese investment– a deliberate exclusion reflecting China's discontent with Somaliland's relationship with Taiwan.

China's BRI in Africa serves as a vehicle for China to challenge Western influence, positioning itself as a preferred partner for developing nations. However, it is a double-edged sword. While it has delivered much-needed infrastructure and accelerated connectivity, it also poses risks of debt dependency, environmental damage, and geopolitical contestations. Africa stands at a crossroads: it can either leverage Chinese investment to fuel its industrialization and integration into global markets or risk repeating the cycles of exploitation that have characterized its engagement with external powers for decades. The most important thing is for the African agency to take the lead and ownership role in strengthening accountability and transparency, to reduce risk. In addition, the path forward requires vigilance, strategic negotiation, and a commitment to prioritizing long-term sustainable projects over short-term gains. By implementing the above strategies Africa can ensure that BRI becomes a genuine partnership for development rather than another chapter in its history of external domination and exploitation.[32]

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[32] Jana de Kluiver, "Africa Has Much to Gain from A More Contained BRI," July 24, 2024,

IV. Conclusion

The BRI represents a pivotal element of China's global strategy, with Africa serving as a key driver for its economic and geopolitical ambitions. Over the past decade, China has positioned itself as Africa's largest infrastructure financier, investing heavily in ports, railways, energy projects, telecoms, and industrial parks under the slogan of "win-win" cooperation. While these investments have addressed critical infrastructure gaps in many African nations, they have also raised significant concerns about debt sustainability, resource exploitation, and long-term economic dependency. The BRI's dual nature as both a catalyst for development and a tool for geopolitical expansion needs significant evaluation and assessment of its implications for Africa's future.

The Chinese investment offers African countries an alternative to traditional Western aid, which often comes with stringent political and economic conditionalities. By providing seemingly unconditional financing, China has appealed to African leaders seeking rapid infrastructure development without external governance reforms, in contrast to the Western financing systems. However, the absence of political strings does not mean to altruism. Many BRI projects are tied to resource-backed loans, ensuring that African raw materials such as oil, minerals, and agricultural products flow back to China as repayment. This dynamic has led to accusations of "debt-trap diplomacy," where African nations risk ceding strategic assets or political leverage when unable to service their loans. Countries like Zambia, Angola, and Djibouti now face mounting debt burdens, with China holding significant leverage over their

https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africa-has-much-to-gain-from-a-more-contained-bri.

economies.

Moreover, the BRI’s implementation in Africa has been marred by operational inefficiencies, environmental degradation, and a lack of sustainable local benefits. Projects such as Ethiopia’s Addis Ababa Light Rail and Kenya’s Standard Gauge Railway have struggled with maintenance issues, underutilization, and financial viability, raising questions about their long-term impact. Chinese firms often dominate construction and operation, limiting technology transfer and local employment opportunities. In some cases, BRI projects have prioritized China’s strategic interests such as securing maritime chokepoints or mineral supply chains over Africa’s developmental needs.

From a geopolitical perspective, the BRI serves as a vehicle for China to challenge Western influence in Africa, positioning itself as a neutral partner for developing nations. By financing high-visibility infrastructure projects, China gains soft power and diplomatic leverage, enabling it to shape regional alliances and international norms. This strategy has alarmed the United States and the European powers, who view China’s expanding footprint as a threat to their traditional sphere of influence. However, the African agency remains a critical factor in this equation. While some governments have embraced Chinese investments as a means of bypassing Western conditionalities, others are beginning to reassess the terms of engagement, particularly as debt distress and project failures become more apparent.

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中國「一帶一路倡議」在非洲：基礎設施發展還是地緣政治擴張？

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摘要

冷戰結束後，世界秩序呈現單極體系特徵——隨著蘇聯解體，美國及其西方盟友得以在經濟、政治與社會層面主導並決定全球事務。但是過去數十年，中國透過將市場化經濟改革融入中央集權的政治體系，已崛起為重要的經濟競爭者與強權。這種政經模式使中國開始挑戰西方霸權，重塑全球權力格局。作為全球擴張戰略的體現，中國日益聚焦於發展中地區——尤其是非洲——倡導「互利共贏」的合作模式與互惠經濟典範。問題是：中國與非洲的經濟關係究竟是利是弊？儘管中國在公路、鐵路、港口、機場、能源及礦業等關鍵領域投入巨資，卻導致相對低水平的發展。中國透過「一帶一路倡議」向非洲注入數十億美元資金，旨在促進非洲大陸貿易與互聯互通。支持者認為，此類投資為非洲注入亟需的資本、技術與就業機會，有助加速工業化進程並推動經濟多元化。然而，這種夥伴關係並非毫無挑戰。反對者提出批評，包括擔憂非洲國家因押注可能無力償還的中國項目貸款而陷入債務依賴。另有指控稱中國存在資源剝削、環境破壞及技術轉移不足等問題，這些都可能削弱真正具有長期可持續性的在地發展。從地緣政治角度，中國在非洲日益擴張引發西方國家憂慮，視此舉為戰略滲透他們的傳統勢力範圍。本文剖析中國經濟崛起及其與非洲日益緊密的聯繫，既探討此互動帶來的轉型契機，亦檢視潛在風險。透過權衡利弊得失，旨在提供平衡視角，審視中國參與終將賦能非洲，抑或加劇既有脆弱性。

Keywords: Africa, China, Debt-trap diplomacy, Infrastructure, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)