

# The New Face of Humanitarian Aid and Intervention: China and Its Growing Role in the Realm of African Development

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## Abstract

*Despite being seen by western nations as an adversarial, confrontational and undemocratic nation, the People's Republic of China has been able to forge a large number of beneficial and lasting relationships with many nations, particular those on the African continent. To do so, China has sought not to distance itself from its international detractors by trying to remake their public image as being democratic but rather by using their knowledge and wealth accrued from rapid industrialization and a massive growing economy seeking new markets to create new and mutually advantageous relationships. To manage such a rapport, China has taken the traditional western practice of humanitarian aid and molded it to fit the Chinese government's way of operating; Operating not under the guise of solving human rights issues or exchanges of goods for pro-democratic reforms but rather by offering credit, infrastructure, knowledge and time in exchange for oil, mining rights or new and emerging markets. China's reinvention of the distribution of aid serves as a notice to all states, that traditional western aid might just not be as beneficial or in demand as it once was.*

## Key Words

Aid, Africa, China, development, diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy.

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In November of 2013, Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines causing massive amounts of damage in terms of both property and lives. Winds were recorded at 195 mph and waves as high as 5 meters crashed onto shore.<sup>1</sup> In response, the U.S.S. George Washington and the H.M.S. Illustrious, aircraft carriers of two of the five permanent U.N. Security Council members, the United States and the United Kingdom, were deployed to the Philippines with cargo holds full of supplies designated for humanitarian disaster relief.<sup>2</sup> In addition to this force, regional support was promised from Japan, in the form of a large naval force and over US\$ 30 million. Yet the world's second largest economy at the time and neighboring country, the People's Republic of China, had initially only offered US\$ 100,000.<sup>3</sup> A recent news report released by UNICEF shows that even after China increased its aid package to US\$ 1.6 million,<sup>4</sup> the Swedish furniture maker IKEA, was still donating a larger monetary donation to the Philippines relief effort.<sup>5</sup> Why then is the Chinese aid package so small in comparison to the tens of millions of dollars donated by other countries,

especially those countries that have a similar geo-political stake in the region like the United States and Japan? The real answer may never be known but this paper will attempt to shed some light on not only the reason for which the P.R.C. donated such a small amount but also and more significantly on how the P.R.C. determines when and where to use humanitarian assistance.

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The friction between China and other nations in eastern Asia is well known; over the past few years, territorial disputes over strings of islands have erupted between not only China and the Philippines but also between the Chinese and Japanese. Clashes over the ownership of the Nansha/Spratly archipelago in the South China Sea<sup>6</sup> and the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands (Chinese/Anglicized spelling) in the East China Sea are just two examples among the recent tensions between China and its neighbors.<sup>7</sup> China has always been fiercely defensive of its territorial claims, yet this attitude is not necessarily the reason why China gave what was considered a small aid package. The perceived lack of aid to the

Philippines and the ensuing criticism, which eventually lead to an increase, came forth by an international pressure to do so, not as a result of China's willingness. When China does engage in the act of humanitarian aid, it is not out of pressure but rather out of a willingness to engage in a mutualistic agreement with the other nations; unlike the paternalistic agreement so often associated with the western humanitarianism model. They engage not in aid giving but rather in Humanitarian Diplomacy.

Mary Douglas, in the forward to Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* writes, "There should not be any free gifts. What is wrong with the so-called free gift is the donor's intention to be exempt from return gifts coming from the recipient. Refusing requital puts the act of giving outside any mutual ties.... For all the ongoing commitment the free-gift gesture has created it might as well never have happened...A gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction".<sup>8</sup> The act of humanitarian aid giving, in the traditional non-Mary Douglas sense, is a selfless act by both individuals and NGOs. It is not often that a quid pro quo arrangement appears in interactions between an NGO and those populations they are trying to help. While the type of aid being delivered can be controlled by both the NGO and the recipients, little is often specifically mandated to be returned as a form of payment or thanks. However, the smaller scale of individual donors and

organizations greatly differs from that of the macro level, the level at which states can act as both as donors or as recipients. It is important to note before going forward that there is a vital distinction between states and governments. The government of a country is a moral body composed of people that have feelings and emotions, while the state is defined by a lack of moral conscious; it has no feelings, and as such, states have the utmost desire to make humanitarian aid into a more reciprocal agreement. Traditionally, states have only used aid as leverage when addressing human rights issues. However, a new form of the reciprocal nature of humanitarian aid has been becoming more prominent and utilized by non-traditional donor states like China, who, in recent years has been on the forefront of economic growth and stability. It is predicated to become the world's largest economy in the next decade, a feat it has met according to some sources, and its growing influence in the developing world has been scaring the traditional economic powerhouses.<sup>9</sup> Parallel to the growth of China, has been the rise in the importance both politically and economically of Africa. After massive colonization and then a period of rapid decolonization, Africa has just recently again begun to see a larger portion of the world's attention, especially due to its abundance of untapped natural resources and industrial potential. Western nations traditionally view most

of Africa as a continent full of failing states needing social reform. China, on the other hand, is outperforming the success of western nations when it comes to aid, gaining both political allies as well as economic partners due to its ability to understand and deliver what Africa needs most. China has begun the process of transitioning the idea of 'aid' from the western norm of non-reciprocal charity donations to the now increasingly more evident and more mutualistic process of reciprocal aid giving and thereby China has become a much larger player in the realm of humanitarian diplomacy. China gave aid to the Philippines because it was what was required of the second largest economy in the world, not as a way of gaining favor from the Philippines. Yet old ways are fading. The new model will show that what dictates China's and increasingly other nations' aid giving, is the idea of what they, can gain- not from giving the gift, but rather from engaging in humanitarian diplomacy, in other words, using aid to increase relations and ties between the countries.

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Traditionally the People's Republic of China has held very strong convictions on state sovereignty. Jonathan Davis, in his article "From ideology to Pragmatism China's Position on Humanitarian Intervention in the Post-Cold War Era" argues that China's position is a result of the frequent infringements on China's own sovereignty during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These included U.S. involvement in the Taiwan Straits and in Tibet, which eventually led to the principles included in the Chinese constitution as a part of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence".<sup>10</sup> However, as the author later explains, this policy was not set in stone; "... the PRC also began to develop a nascent policy on permissible foreign interventions including the position that target state consent was a *sine qua non* [an indispensable and essential action] for the legality of any intervention".<sup>11</sup> The policy on non-intervention continued to decline in prominence and support, until Tiananmen Square, when any trace of liberal views on sovereignty was squashed.<sup>12</sup> However, while the actions of the government in response to the protests were summarily expressed by the West as being repressive, African nations quickly supported the acts, ending what had been a decade of neglect between the two.<sup>13</sup> After a decade of little involvement in setting the reach and scope of humanitarian assistance (especially its role in the Gulf War), China became actively involved in the issue of R2P

(Responsibility to Protect), arguing against humanitarian intervention and proposing the concept of "humanitarian assistance" as an alternative.<sup>14</sup> While China eventually made concessions on the R2P doctrine, it still held considerable power when dealing with the issue of humanitarian intervention and aid, especially when Africa was involved.

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The crisis in Darfur has been considered one of the worst humanitarian cases in recent years. While intervention seemed inevitable, China ensured that their principles of intervention would not be compromised when military action was ordered. China demanded that Khartoum had to consent before any operation took place and that consent be obtained via "a greater willingness [on the part of China] to use its influence over the Sudanese government to secure that consent".<sup>15</sup> China's firm reluctance to move forward without the support of the Sudanese government not only

reflected their position on the scope and practice of humanitarian intervention but also thereby strengthened their relations with African nations. China's role in intervention has not been limited to political agreements alone however. As of 2007, China has sent more peacekeepers on UN missions than the United States, the UK and Russia combined, with missions in the African countries of Western Sahara (MINURSO), the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), Ethiopia/Eritrea (UNMEE), Liberia (UNMIL), Sudan (UNMIS) and Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI).<sup>16</sup> China uses its peacekeeping forces not only to foster good international support, but also to show physical support to African nations, in return for support in their 'One China' policy and especially their energy futures.<sup>17</sup> China also uses the peacekeeping missions as a logistical training tool for their army personnel, to acclimate them to working in different environments in a non-simulated setting, and to prepare them for future combat situations.<sup>18</sup> Having Chinese peacekeeping officers in Africa provides African leaders with not only contact to the Chinese military but also serves to strengthen relations between the country and the continent.

The strong rapport between Africa and China stems from the issue concerning the recognition of the PRC as being the legitimate ruling power of mainland China. Chairman Mao was to have said

that the persistence of African states "made possible" the recognition of the P.R.C. by the United Nations, and therefore the opportunity to become a member of the P-5 on the Security Council.<sup>19</sup> In return for this acceptance, China has given a large amount of aid in a variety of forms to African states.<sup>20</sup> While China's involvement in humanitarian aid has grown in both scale and investment, the reason for which has not been one of altruism but rather realism. Li writes, "China's main objective in Africa is to develop and nurture its geopolitical influence on the basis of a practical instrumental imperative that underpins its future growth through globalization".<sup>21</sup> This approach, while common in most forms of diplomatic arrangements, is uncommon in the environment of humanitarianism. Little, outside of human rights, has been asked for in return for aid or intervention, but China has decided to capitalize on this opportunity. While potentially seen as morally wrong, states have no use for morality and therefore can proceed to leverage their support for African intervention issues in return for positive relations and therefore growth.

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While China mainly seems to use the politics of humanitarian intervention as a means of diplomacy, humanitarian aid serves as an economic tool. However, such a statement is too one-sided; China is not the sole beneficiary of this aid. May Tan-Mullins in her article “Redefining ‘Aid’ in the China-Africa Context” quotes Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo as being highly in favor of the style of aid China gives, “... the emergence of China is a ‘golden opportunity for Africa’, offering the continent a ‘win-win’ alternative to the scenario of an ‘aid-dependent economy’ by focusing instead on trade and investment and by providing the infrastructure that will enable Africa to ‘move up the development curve’ ”.<sup>22</sup> While Western donors generally give cash, this practice creates, in Moyo’s argument, dependency on an influx of currency. China’s aid on the other hand is centered on “...discrete projects; the rationale being that projects are less prone to corruption and generally produce quick and tangible results”.<sup>23</sup> To outsiders of this arrangement, i.e. western nations, Chinese aid is very hard to distinguish from other forms of economic assistance, as it lacks transparency, thus building on the fuzzy definition of what ‘aid’ is.<sup>24</sup> Up until the point when China became more active in ‘aid’ giving, aid or Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) was given a specific definition by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.<sup>25</sup> However, as China does not use OECD definitions, it “...

therefore does not distinguish ODA from economic cooperation or investment as long as the intention is to build local capacity of recipient countries”.<sup>26</sup> What does this mean for the notion of humanitarian aid? Potentially it means that the monetary value of aid given as ‘humanitarian aid’ is over-inflated, or, with economic co-operation now becoming a new form of humanitarian aid, it thus opens the category of ‘aid’ to entirely new routes of delivery. However, Chinese aid is not given solely for economic gain, or at least not initially. After decades of intense civil war, Angola began moving towards reconstruction in 2002. As financing this project would be impossible for Angola alone, the government turned to the IMF and the West, which agreed to conditionally finance the project as long as Angola “...adopt[ed] a staff-monitored programme (SMP) demonstrating good performance against certain criteria that would lend credibility to Angola’s economic policies”.<sup>27</sup> Such stringent conditions and a constant big brother overseer would not have suited a project of this capacity and importance, in a war-ravaged county. Pragmatically, China stepped in to negotiate an offer of aid under the conditions that a line of credit would be exchanged for 10,000 barrels of oil per day.<sup>28</sup> The Chinese-Angolan deal offered the best of both worlds to the two nations, Angola received desperately needed cash flow that could be used without too many concessions and, as

discussed later on, China received oil to help meet its growing energy demands.

While the difference between the amount of aid China gives and that given by western nations is large, if one were to include economic investment into the calculation, there would be no large apparent differences. However, what differs between the aid or investment is what makes China's aid all the more unique. Chinese economic assistance to Africa, which is growing rapidly, also has a unique focus. Apathy or in some cases tensions between some African nations and the West have sometimes prevented aid from being delivered. China, however, is not so boxed in by its poor relations in Africa. It "often promotes economic projects in countries, geographic areas and sectors that developed-country governments and multinational corporations have avoided because they have determined them to be unfriendly, too arduous or infeasible".<sup>29</sup> Lum, in his article published in the *Congressional Research Service* notes other impacts of aid to Africa that are relatively unique as compared to comparable levels of western economic assistance. He notes that Chinese aid is available to be used relatively quickly as it lacks most of the constraints that Western or OECD nations impose.<sup>30</sup> He also notes that many of the projects funded by Chinese aid are accompanied by summit meetings that symbolize friendship, and that the Chinese projects, like stadiums and cultural centers, tend to

be very visible, which provides short-term tangible benefits.<sup>31</sup> Lum also makes note of the difficulty of pinpointing the exact value of Chinese aid. It could range from US\$ 1-2.7 billion as "aid" alone, but the "infrastructure financing" as estimated by the World Bank could bring the total close to US\$ 7 billion, with this additional funding making up the majority of funds spent on railroads, roads and power projects.<sup>32</sup> So why the interest in Africa? In addition to the strengthening of diplomatic ties, China hopes to gain many economic advantages, principal among these are oil and mineral rights.<sup>33</sup> Not only does oil play a key role in the world economy but also it now seems to play a key role in humanitarian aid.

While the search for greener, renewable energy sources is at an all-time high, the demand for oil has not been halted and the need to locate new sources of oil, whether undertaken by unearthing new oil fields or by expanding into untapped markets, is a must for any growing industrialized economy. This is especially the case for China if it hopes to sustain the same amount of economic growth that has propelled it this far in the past half century. The oil need may even have a bearing on issues that do not immediately seem related, such as that of various disputed islands. Both the Senkaku and Spratly islands hold significant military positions, with the Senkaku islands being positioned north east of Taiwan and close to Okinawa



allowing for greater naval monitoring of American, Japanese, and Taiwanese forces as well as lying in the middle of rich fishing grounds.<sup>34</sup> The Spratly islands are even more contested by not only China and the Philippines but also by Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and, Brunei.<sup>35</sup> The Spratly, like the Senkaku sit in the middle of highly trafficked shipping lanes and could provide the Chinese navy with a base from which they could expand their ability to operate away from mainland China.<sup>36</sup> Yet it is not the military access or fish that draw so many nations to these island chains. Rather, both the Spratly<sup>37</sup> and Senkaku islands sit on what is believed to be large untapped undersea oil and gas fields, to which the owner would have access to millions of barrels.<sup>38</sup> However, with so many nations in play and so much potential oil and revenue at stake these territorial disputes are unlikely to be resolved in the near future. China has therefore had to turn its sights to other locales, mainly those where oil is known to exist but has yet to be either fully developed or monopolized by other oil hungry powers, mainly the United States and Europe: in other words, Africa.

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**The West is further disadvantaged in its humanitarian aid and work in Africa by the exchange of people between African nations and China.**

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In an article published in *International Affairs*, Ian Taylor describes the role oil plays in China's attitude and actions towards Africa. The article, titled "China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa," begins by describing the mutual distrust held by both Africa and China of western nations. This distrust is founded upon the west's intent to promote liberal democracy and human rights.<sup>39</sup> Taylor notes that China uses this distrust to form a wedge between the west and Africa, thereby drawing China and its more similar views on human rights into the mix.<sup>40</sup> The author notes that some take a simple view as to why China had to look to Africa for oil, stating, "Chinese companies must go to place for oil where American and European companies are not present".<sup>41</sup> However, this view can be seen as outdated when the nature of the Sino-African relationship is taken into account. Taylor writes that China is not the only gainer in quest for oil, noting that because Chinese oil companies are state-run, they have the ability to outbid most competitors and in the process increase the profit margin of the African nations.<sup>42</sup> Yet, these trades for oil are not all good (good in the moral western sense). Oil for aid in Angola has helped consolidate the power of the dictatorial elites in Luanda by allowing the siphoning of funds, as China has a policy of 'non-interference'.<sup>43</sup> The situation is worse in Sudan, where China has also been heavily criticized for its extensive arms deal and involvement in the civil war. While it is not the motivating



factor for China's involvement in Sudan (that being greater access to the oil fields), the human right problems associated with the arms deals spoil the uniqueness and brilliance of Chinese 'aid'.<sup>44</sup> Despite such problems, China cannot be overly criticized for their strong relations with 'rogue nations'. In agreement with Lum, Taylor notes that,

In the short term, China's trade with and investment in Africa are of assistance to the development of the continent, if for no other reason than that little investment is forthcoming from other sources. China's investment in Africa's crumbling infrastructure *is* needed and is welcomed by most. Throughout Africa, Chinese companies are occupied in building hospitals, dams, government offices and stadiums and refurbishing facilities abandoned by western companies. In addition, China's demand for energy resources has inflated prices, bringing a windfall to African states' income.<sup>45</sup>

China's efforts are having a positive spin. As much as China can be condemned for its own human rights issues, not to mention those of the nations' dependent upon Chinese aid, it is still effecting positive change. More traditional humanitarian aid projects are also being undertaken, hospitals are being built and facilities are being constructed in locations where western nations will not work, whether that refusal is based upon safety concerns for western staffs as was the case in South Sudan and Somalia, where in 2013 the Polish Humanitarian Organization (PAH)<sup>46</sup>

and MSF suspended operations<sup>47</sup> or upon principle, like when 10 NGOs including Oxfam, Save the Children UK and Care left southern Sudan in 2000 over the issue of signing a memorandum which "among other things, demands a work plan from all NGO's working in its areas and their budgetary provisions for their respective areas of work".<sup>48</sup>

The West is further disadvantaged in its humanitarian aid and work in Africa by the exchange of people between African nations and China. Brian Sautman and Yan Hairong in their article note the significance the role of aid and development has had in China-Africa migration. They note that it occurs at levels that no western nation has reached; China sent "sixteen thousand medical personnel to Africa to develop hospital and clinics, and 240 million patients have been treated by Chinese health care workers".<sup>49</sup> The migration is not limited to medical staff, agricultural products and factories have been constructed by thousands of Chinese agro technicians, including building a farm that provides a quarter of all the rice eaten by Tanzanians.<sup>50</sup> However, it is not just a one-way street, "Africans go to China to learn how to build the infrastructure themselves or how to work in it as doctors, teachers, and officials. Some sixteen thousand African professionals were trained in China between 2000-2006; fifteen thousand will do so in 2007-9".<sup>51</sup>

This transfer of people is not always temporary in nature. Sautman notes that in 2001 it was estimated that there was 137,000 Chinese people living in Africa.<sup>52</sup> In 2011, that number had ballooned to one million people and that number is still climbing.<sup>53</sup> Those professionals that are temporarily working in Africa are pressured to “live more like their African counterparts... enjoy[ing] the same living conditions as the experts of the recipient country”.<sup>54</sup> This approach to a more African style of living goes a long way in creating a less paternalistic relationship and sets the workers at a more equal level. Even compared to their western counterparts, Chinese workers earn less on average, live in more modest housing and work at less prominent jobs, like retail or farming.<sup>55</sup> This requirement to live more like those that one is aiding represents China’s approach to aid giving in general, removing the pomp and circumstance and creating the best mutualistic relationship possible.

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**China responds to the needs of African nations more appropriately than western nations do as China is more developmentally linked.**

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Two plausible reasons as to why China acts in these manners vary from one another but are not mutually exclusive.

The first and less substantiated of the two is that China acts solely in its best interests, ensuring that any aid given yields some type of substantive return to the Chinese economy. The loans to Angola were only made to gain access to their oil fields or the pressuring of Sudan to allow in intervention forces was made to suit Chinese national policy. While these may be rational explanations for these events, another reason, used in conjunction or separately might express the justification of Chinese aid practices more thoroughly. China is still considered in the world’s socio-economic<sup>56</sup> and political spheres as a developing nation.<sup>57</sup> As a developing nation, it is itself the recipient of large amounts of aid and economic development.<sup>58</sup> A report created for the United States Congress lists United States’ foreign aid to China as being over US\$ 330 million dollars from 2001 to 2012.<sup>59</sup> Even Japan, China’s regional military and economic opponent, gave aid in the form of monetary assistance,<sup>60</sup> nearly US\$ 800 million dollars’ worth.<sup>61</sup> China places an emphasis on economic growth over economic stability, its standing on social issues is lacking, and politically, it is non-democratic. These characteristics mirror those of many of the countries China sends aid to, a commonality that has not gone unnoticed. Max Rebol notes in his article, “Chinese Aid to Africa: Filling the Gaps that Others Left,” that when western nations transitioned to

social based aid from industrial aid, China saw an opportunity and ran with it, establishing 50 special economic zones.<sup>62</sup> Being a developing nation, China did not have to worry about the same issues that concern developed ones. In 1994, USAID prohibited any foreign investment that would lead to U.S. job losses, investments that African nations desperately required to begin to expand their job markets and economy.<sup>63</sup> To confront some of the problems that Western nations were facing with their aid system, they instituted the Paris declaration on aid effectiveness, which called for transparency and aligning donor interest with that of the recipients.<sup>64</sup> China, not being a developed nation, had no requirement or need to agree to such a declaration and proceeded to operate in the same manner as they had been. To this issue of aligning interests, Rebol quotes Dr. Sesay, a former Sierra Leonean government minister as saying, “The Chinese will simply build a school, a hospital, and then supply a team of doctors to run it. The World Bank will say: ‘You must not have so many teachers on your payroll. You must employ some expatriate staff. You must cut down on your wages.’ The Chinese will not do this. They will not say ‘You must do this, do that, do this!’”<sup>65</sup> Another issue that arises is tied aid, funds that are required to be spent on goods from the donor nation. As a developing country, China understands the pressure of buying

items as cheaply as possible better than developing nations who are more concerned with protecting their own interests. In 2001, 92% and 68% of aid from Italy and Canada was tied, while loans from China were capped at 50%.<sup>66</sup> It comes down to China being in a more similar position to the African problems, so they can better understand the needs and complications that face their nations. The Sierra Leonean Foreign Minister put it best; “There is a difference, and it is huge. What [China] wants to help you with, is what you have identified as your needs. With Britain, America, they identify your needs. They say: ‘Look, we think there is a need here.’”<sup>67</sup> China is better suited, better equipped and more able to suit the needs of Africa when it comes to aid giving.

The traditional western perspective on humanitarian aid is that of feeding centers, hospitals and disaster relief. It is this western centric view that has partially allowed China to become such a player in Africa. China responds to the needs of African nations more appropriately than western nations do as China is more developmentally linked. China acts in accordance to the principle set forth by Mary Douglas and Marcel Mauss, gifts are contradictory if not returned by something else, whether it is for oil in the case of Angola or for closer ties that lead to more advantageous trade agreements, as the Chinese-Sudanese trade relations demonstrate. While

the developed western nations and especially the OECD member nations seem shocked at the classification of Chinese economic development in Africa as aid, the question arises that if not aid, what then should it be called? Those that classify aid as being primarily geared towards social issues and disaster relief issues are neglecting the power created by having stable jobs and a growing economy and its effect upon a population. While China is seen as a military threat to many western scholars and nations (a valid view given China's fierce defense and claims to islands in the East and South China Sea), its major confrontational aspect lays primarily in its economic ties and closeness to other

developing nations not the size of its military. China offers the alternative to the liberal democracy and human rights agenda that western nations push, offering economic growth with little outside control. The success of China's new 'aid' giving to Africa and its popularity within African states, must give some pause to all western humanitarians as to if they are actually doing their job as they should be. The old age of giving aid is over, and if this method is not researched further by western scholars, than China may corner the market on humanitarian diplomacy and shut out other nations from engaging in the same lucrative and relation building practices that it presently exhibits in Africa.

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