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# China in Africa: A New Scramble

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# China in Africa: A New Scramble

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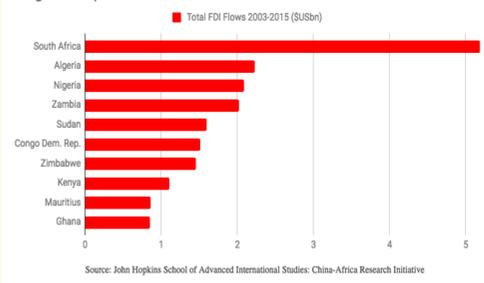
## Introduction

Over the course of this century, China has emerged as a significant economic and political influence on the African continent. In the midst of these relations, a wave of inquiries into China's motives have arisen. Among these, several publications have proposed that the nature of China's interest in Africa is reminiscent of European colonization of the continent (Hadland, 2012; Hanauer & Morris, 2014; Lumumba-Kasongo, 2011). Using examples and case-studies to examine the extent and limitations of such a characterization of the Chinese presence in Africa, this paper interrogates whether historical theories of Western colonization, imperialism, and dependency can explain the current context and conditions of China's role in Africa. Through a case study of China's role in land grabs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), I unpack the relationships between capitalism and incipient, contemporary forms of domination and resource control.

### Economic Gains for China

Hobson (1985) saw imperialism as the quest for labor, land and resources from the periphery to ensure the sustenance of capitalism in more developed countries. This pattern emerges in Sino-African relations with the extreme concentration of Chinese investment in resource rich African countries and the increase in China's exports to Africa thus necessitating the latter as a market for surplus produce. However, rather than exploit cheap labor in Africa, China exports its own surplus workers.

Largest Recipients of Chinese FDI Flows to Africa



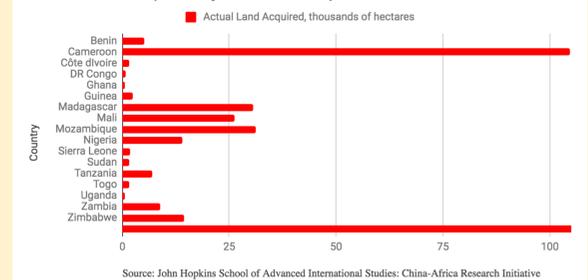
### Case Study: China's Land Grabs in the DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo has vast fields of arable land that is mostly uncultivated due to the country's lack of a viable transport system and a slow recovery from conflict in the region. As such, the DRC has had an expansion in acquisition of land by more developed countries. China is one of the largest investors in the DRC's agriculture sector. In the 2010 budget, 76% of DRC's total sectoral funding for agriculture was from Chinese loans (Putzel et al, 2011). In 2007, a 1 billion (US\$) contract was signed between the Chinese telecommunications giant ZTE and the DRC Ministry of Agriculture to develop oil palm plantations, which were reported to be located in abandoned plantations in Bandundu and Equateur. If this deal is concluded, China can be expected to profit from DRC land while local owners of land will be displaced. Other Chinese-led investments in the DRC have led to the displacement of local populations, and ecological devastation (Reisinger, 2017).

### Dependency/Unequal Exchange

The Dependency Theorists observed a persistent cycle of unequal gains to trade, investment and other relations between countries of the Global North and Global South. This pattern can be seen in trade between China and Africa. While the former mostly exports higher value goods like machinery, equipment and electrical produce, the latter exports raw materials, mineral produce and tropical goods, for which price and value fluctuates greatly and has a downward trend.

Actual Land Acquired by Chinese Companies in Africa, 1987-2016



### Political Gains for Africa

Luxemburg (2003) saw military expansion as largely characteristic of imperialist drives. The Chinese military has increased its influence in Africa both in terms of troop expansion and arms sales. Despite this, China's military presence lags behind that of the U.S. and other major powers. However, Sino-African relations has improved diplomatic ties for both China and Africa.



### Accumulation by Dispossession

Harvey (2003) saw accumulation by dispossession as a trend of capitalist expansion under the increased exploitation of land, labor and the environment. With the rise of neoliberalism, China has been able to dispossess African land, resources, and formerly African-owned firms. The exploitation of labor was of great concern to Lenin (1999). This is a pattern observed in the high rates of casualization, low pay, and poor conditions under which African workers of Chinese firms are subject.

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