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Recommended Citation

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**Perception and Prejudice: Sino-Ghanaian Relations within the Service Sector and the
Wavering Perception of China on the Global Stage**

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ABSTRACT

Opinions on the impacts of China in Africa differ from one observer to the next, be it in media, academic, or elsewhere. While most general discourses have been nuanced and coherent, there is nevertheless a prevailing sentiment of unbridled fear and sinophobia, or anti-Chinese populism. Based on a two-sided study in Ghana, this research uses Chinese-Ghanaian employment relations as a way of entry to analyze and explore cross-cultural understandings, or lack thereof, that leads to conflict. From there, this paper examines the style of politicized media in broadcasting Sino-Ghanaian (Chinese-Ghanaian) engagements and its role in creating the anti-Chinese populism on the continent. Central to the culturally-grounded conflict is the lack of mutual understanding in socio-cultural interactions experienced by both parties in each of their distinct ways: punctuality, language, foreignness, vulnerability, and risk. This research fulfills previous research gap and sheds light particularly on Chinese employers' existence in a foreign environment and their financial and social risks, as well as vulnerability powered by the rising anti-Chinese sentiment. As past studies on Sino-African engagement have often been limited to large-scale aid, infrastructure, or manufacturing projects involving state-owned enterprises, this research complements the ongoing academic conversation by investigating Chinese migrants working as employers in the service and catering sector of Ghana and their interactions with Ghanaian employees and the general public as it is the most common and prominent way of social interactions between people of both cultures.

INTRODUCTION

China-Africa cooperation, or Sino-Ghanaian relations, has been in the spotlight of recent global development discourse. Today, economic, social, and political development goals and

agendas are used as important tools for African countries to make progress towards political and economic stability. Within the development trajectory, it is necessary for the country to have the vision to invest and allocate resources in areas that are most fit and profitable. As opportunities continue to emerge as a result of globalization, China has manifested onto the international scene, providing a new development approach that apparently “exerts no political pressure” but is based on investment and bilateral exchanges (Frimpong and Nubuor 2013:118). However, multiple perspectives exist in regards to Chinese foreign policy towards African countries: while some claim that it undermines the previous global effort to increase transparency and good governance, others label Chinese policies as “neo-colonial”. Media often put the blame on Beijing for disrupting local economy and crowding out local employment opportunities. As the bilateral cooperation accelerates and intensifies, so has criticisms. The study concentrates on Ghana, one of the earliest African countries to form diplomatic ties with China but also one with increasing interaction with the eastern power. With increasing continental engagement comes a creeping phenomenon of anti-Chinese sentiments, or “sinophobia”, in different communities and economic sectors of Ghana (and other African countries) where financial and human capital imported from China directly competes with local development efforts. Below the blanket of global recognition and large-scale financial pledges are a large influx of Chinese migrant laborers seeking for a different life to settle in Ghana due to Chinese domestic labor and financial competition, as a result of the “going-out” policy. This research directly examines on-the-ground Sino-Ghanaian interactions, particularly within the catering and service sector, which has been crucial in laying the foundation of general Chinese-Ghanaian social interaction. It will investigate how sinophobia permeates through the society and how its emergence holds

important implications for China as a rising global power and for Africa as a promising region of the world for economic development through capital and expertise import.

History of Sino-Ghanaian Relations

Diplomatic relations between Ghana and China date back to 1960 when Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party became the first leader of the country. As he began to jumpstart his developmental plan for Ghana, especially in infrastructure building, the People's Republic of China became a supporter of Nkrumah's socialist statist political agenda. Capital came in from all aspects of the economy, including an interest-free loan repayable in Ghanaian exports at \$20 million in 1961, another \$22 million pledge by Zhou Enlai in 1963-1964 (Aidoo 2016:56). Technical supports and military advisors were also introduced to help strengthen the Ghanaian military infrastructure. It was not long before the Sino-Ghanaian relationship was put on hold when Nkrumah's administration was overthrown in a military takeover which lasted from 1966 until 1972. Then, there was a drastic shift in focus when the two countries re-established diplomatic ties: transformed from an engagement based on political ideologies into a market-oriented economic relationship where Ghana both politically and economically upheld the "One-China" policy. The policy requires partnering countries to recognize the People's Republic China as the only representation of China. Countries that recognize Taiwan as an independent country are not eligible to receive Chinese investment and aid (Frimpong and Nubuor 2013:118). Since then, a number of high profile Chinese officials have visited Ghana, and each time, their visits were incentivized with infrastructure loans and market exploratory missions to strengthen the bilateral relation (Aidoo 2016:56). Notably, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's seven nation-tour of Africa in 2007 led to the issuing of a joint communiqué on strengthening Sino-Ghanaian cooperation in trade, infrastructure, telecommunications,

education, health, and culture. This visit also led to the signing of six agreements, which includes a \$66 million loan agreement to expand Ghana's telecommunications network. This year, Ghana President Akufo-Addo witnessed another eight Agreements signing on his visit to China. Principal amongst the agreements lied a \$2 billion Sino-Sure Framework Agreement, which opens up infrastructure, road, and railway construction projects, enabled by Sino-Hydro corporation, as part of Power China. Another \$30 million in grant was committed by President Xi Jinping to assist the secure implementation of President Akufo-Addo's economic policies. Furthermore, infrastructural projects such as Cape Coast Sports Stadium expansion, Jamestown Fishing Port Complex, and the expansion project of the University of Health and Allied Sciences in Ho are all part of China's commitment to Ghana to finance construction to address the country's infrastructure deficit (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration 2018).

Modern China-Ghana Trade Relations

The Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has been in the spotlight for offering a platform to enhance Sino-African development mechanisms and direct future investments, as well as cultural educational exchanges and military cooperation. In 2015, China pledged \$60 billion for new projects, and this price tag was matched again in 2018, with changes in its distribution -- \$20 billion in credit lines, \$15 billion in grants, interest-free loans, and concessional loans, \$10 billion in special fund for development financing, and \$5 billion for special fund for financing imports from Africa. There is another \$10 billion that will be investment spread over the next three years, coming mostly from Chinese companies (Benabdallah and Robertson 2018). Beijing's vow to implement more sustainable projects focusing on infrastructure development is echoed by African high officials, according to an article published days after the FOCAC, quoting words such as "deeply transformational",

“satisfied”, and “inspired” (Dahir 2018). Outstandingly, Ghanaian president Nana Akufo-Addo declared his new found interest in China as a path for developmental growth. His agenda was affirmed once again at the 73rd UN Assembly address, where he stated to transform the development practices used by African countries over the years that have not yet yield the desired rate of growth. He now looks to China to address the country’s infrastructure deficits.

While Ghanaian governmental elites have responded enthusiastically to China’s growing presence within the country, this voice does not resonate well with the average Ghanaian, who witnesses Chinese penetration into its market daily. Due to the increasing economic engagement between the two countries, the benefits of Chinese investments are often eclipsed by a rising competition with local businesses within the domestic market, and this competition often overshadows China’s contribution. Moreover, there exists what Margaret Lee describes as “globalization from below”. In her article, “Africa’s World Trade: Informal Economies and Globalization from Below”, Lee sheds light on human trafficking, prostitution, and increasing illegal mining activities in parts of the Ghana. Between criticisms and praises, there are also questions raised that need to be answered. Is China’s bilateral strategy of development in Africa really as bad as it often made to seem? What are the factors that contribute to the rising anti-Chinese sentiment in Ghana as well as on the continent? Facing such large-scale economic and financial assistance, should Ghana be more aware of potential political repercussions and implications that may come in the near future? This research focuses on Chinese-Ghanaian employment relations from the perspectives of their power dynamics, cross-cultural understanding that reaches beyond racially framed allegations, as well as culturally-grounded outlooks on work ethics and employment relations. Additionally, politicized media discourses in multiple perspectives will be examined to see how workplace conflicts are portrayed and

magnified in the media. Media, whether in print or digital, have been the primary outlet for popularizing dialogues on the growing presence of China within the country. By examining the role of the media and their responsibility in information dissemination on certain aspects of Chinese-Ghanaian relations, we hope to understand how Sinophobia popularized on the continent and how different dynamics of Sino-Ghanaian engagement can influence the broader context of future Chinese investment in Ghana. Often, anti-Chinese sentiment in Africa reported in the local media network enable and urge a growing sense of Sino-African pessimism without a clear emphasis on the connivance of local actors, making reports biased, forming a tale of foreign exploitation

Previous research has been able to address employer-employee relations, but not seeking its impact on the overall bilateral relations. By interviewing Chinese migrant employers, Ghanaian local employees, as well as general Ghanaians in multiple sectors of the economy, this research will fill the research gap on on-the-ground Chinese-Ghanaian interactions in the service sector and its implications on the grand scheme of Sino-Ghanaian relations, through the portrayal of different platforms of media sponsored by a diverse narrative.

Methodology

This research is designed on the basis of data collection on both Chinese employers, Ghanaian employees, people in the space in between, as well as general perceptions on the rising presence of China in Ghana. Data is mainly gathered from semi-structured interviews and field observations where field notes with thick description are produced. The qualitative aspect of this study is important because one can better express oneself through verbal communication. Nuances in employer-employee interaction can be better visually observed than analyzed and coded through questionnaires.

The independent variable in this study is largely Sino-Ghanaian trade and investment. This variable will not be numerically calculated but purely be based on the increasing engagement between China and Ghana in light of recent political events and decisions. It is assumed that this independent variable is experienced by all participants of this research, whether directly (interaction with Chinese foreign nationals in Ghana through business interactions or socially) or indirectly (through social media or word-of-mouth of others).

Perceptions of China, the dependent variable in this study, will be measured and analyzed based on the semi-structured interviews. Similarly, the response from participants will also not be numerically coded. Through interviews and observations, a specific sentiment will be felt or verbally communicated. However, in both Chinese and English, there are certain vocabulary with direct positive or negative undertone that can be used to make the argument of a shifting perceptions on China by the Ghanaian community.

In addition to the independent and dependent variables, there are other secondary variables that need to be taken into account. It will be selected and measured to discover whether it modifies or strengthens the relationship of the independent variable to the dependent variable or any observable phenomenon. It could also determine the extent to which the independent-dependent variables' relationship is influenced by secondary factors. In this study, the categorical variable of gender (man and woman, assuming it is dichotomous), age, and class (socioeconomic status) are the three most prominent factors in mediating the correlations between increasing China-Ghana engagement and people's wavering perceptions of China. The effect of these three variables will be further discussed in the analysis section.

Limitations and Ethical Implications

It is important to recognize possible ethical implications as well as limitations to this research. My physical appearance as a Chinese person might restrict or enhance the information received depending on the interviewee. Chinese participant, whom I speak their native tongue to, tend to feel more comfortable releasing certain information or using certain vocabulary in Chinese that have a specific connotation that could not be directly translated into English, nevertheless their overall sentiment could be observed. On the other hand, some might feel less inclined to release information to me because they suspect my intention of research, especially when there are conversations that involve discussing one's involvement in illegal activities or one's strong opinion towards a political system. Both scenario therefore would restrict the reception of information and data for my research. Therefore, it is important for me as a researcher to both go through necessary explanations and introductions prior to interviewing participants but also conduct debrief sessions to inform participants regarding confidentiality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As “China-Africa relations” become an increasing motif in global development discourse, many works have been done to examine various aspects of this newly emerging global trade network: public policies, infrastructure deficits and development, employment and workforce localization, local anti-Chinese resentment, and much more. For my literature review, I selected articles that cumulatively present an overarching evaluation and encompass diverse narratives on Sino-African relations.

Richard Aidoo (2016), in his article “The Political Economy of Galamsey and Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Ghana,” examines China's engagement in Africa, particularly in the dimensions of states, corporations, private and public ventures, individuals, and groups. He mentions that the insertion of Chinese power in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI) in

sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and natural resource extraction has lately shaped the discourse of anti-Chinese sentiment, especially in illegal mining (galamsey). Moreover, Aidoo depicts China's strategy of maintaining gradual control of Ghana through loans and reflects on the weakness of the Ghanaian government in their capability to maintain control in front of Chinese power. The author is highly critical of Chinese private-owned enterprises' (POEs) FDI for over-exploiting local natural resources, stealing local employment opportunities, and disrupting the local state-citizen relationship. However, the surge of Sino-Africa pessimism in the media has a lack of clear emphasis on the connivance of local actors, which makes report/research a tale of neocolonialism, foreign exploitation of powerless and voiceless African locals. While Aidoo might have articulated Chinese presence in Ghana in an overly negative way, his article is nevertheless useful for my research because it reveals the issue of Chinese FDI directly through the lens of the host country. It is important to notice that this article was published in 2016, and there has been, since then, an increase in the effort to quell illegal Chinese miners in Ghana. This article does not take into account China's recent economic investment pledges made at the 2018 Forum on China Africa Cooperation. Yet, the political and economic ties between China and Ghana that Aidoo presents in his article have not altered much since the time of its publication.

Decai Tang and K.B. Gyasi (2012) complement and further enhance Aidoo's analysis on Chinese FDI in Ghana. In their research, "China-Africa Foreign Trade Policies: The Impact of China's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Flow on Employment of Ghana", Tang et al. describe China's development model as an "alternative to western style" and "prioritizes stability of democracy" by "promoting product differentiation and competing in different market mechanisms" (Tang and Gyasi 2012:553). The authors' statistical data and graphs present a

remarkable steady increase in total local employment generation by Chinese companies that is accompanied by an escalation in the amount of investment flow from China. Still, there is a significant imbalance of sectoral penetration within the investment: Tang et al. discovered that 80% or more of investments from China have been mostly “concentrated in the Manufacturing, Building & Construction and General Trade sectors of the economy of Ghana” (Tang and Gyasi 2012:557). Therefore, a more efficient allocation of resources is crucial in further upgrading domestic operations. Though I concede that the article’s use of statistical data and graphs to illustrate the changes in Chinese investment vs. total investment, sectoral breakdowns of investment, as well as employment is fairly all-encompassing; I still insist that the authors’ statistical survey with limited geographical focus reveals a deficiency on this research’s ability to reflect on each of the sectors within Ghana’s economy. Furthermore, there is a significant lack of analysis in this paper for it to hold any ground in this space. This article could be used as supplementary to Aidoo’s article, but it does not hold notable weight itself.

To further the dialogue on Chinese investment in Ghana and its impact of local employment, Antoine Kernén and Katy N. Lam (2014) introduce the compelling concept of “workforce localization” which stems from Chinese state-owned enterprises’ (SOEs) high autonomy due to the lack of management control from the Chinese central authority. This contrasts dominant discourse on the China-Africa debate, where most argue that Chinese SOEs are closely linked and manipulated by Beijing. In their article, “Workforce Localization among Chinese State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in Ghana,” the authors effectively provide the historical context behind China’s economic reform and its role in the internalization of Chinese SOEs in Ghana. As well, Kernén et. al successfully evaluated workforce localization, in which Chinese firms employ a large amount of local workforce, and its significance in certain sectors of

the economy as well as its overall impact. Despite researching under a similar topic, Kernén et. al's analysis is more persuasive because it is based on semi-directed interviews as opposed to Tang et al. 's research where they solely analyzed existing data on Ghana's local employment statistics produced by the Ghana Investment Promotion Center (GINC). I fully endorse Kernén et. al's research approach because it is more flexible and human especially given the topic of discussion where words and expressions hold more weight than a numerical value. The authors conduct their analysis without bias, by evaluating the wins and losses of both parties equally. They believe that workforce localization is a key element for successful internationalization, and still remains one of the major weaknesses of Chinese companies. Kernén et. al explained why workforce localization is important amongst Chinese SOEs – 1) cost saving because non-skilled labor is cheaper domestically 2) required compliance to investment law (at least 10 Ghanaians employee is needed for setting up a business by foreign investor in Ghana) 3) Business reputation where Ghanaian foreman can ease communication barriers but also help increase business reputation for future growth 4) training of local technicians and engineers which is popular among telecommunication firms. As well, the authors thoroughly presented a strong argument that integrated social, cultural, and historical contexts of the internationalization of Chinese SOEs. While Aidoo focuses on factors that fuel sinophobia and Tang et. al (2012) analyzes the fluctuations in statistical data on employment in Ghana as a result of Chinese investment, Kernén et. al incorporated historical frameworks that influence investment decisions and policies that regulate employment decisions. These three articles work together to pave a strong background for my research, which will be based on the issue of employment and employer-employee relations but with a widened angle to evaluate such relations' implications on a wavering public perception of China and its impact on future investment decisions.

Karsten Giese and Alena Thiel (2014) in their paper “The vulnerable other – distorted equity in Chinese-Ghanaian employment relations” incorporate a two-sided ethnographic study in Accra to analyze factors such as “psychological contract, cross-cultural equity expectations, and foreignness” and their contribution to Chinese-Ghanaian employment relations (Giese and Thiel 2014:1108). Giese et al. argue that both Chinese employers’ and African employee’s perception of vulnerability and risk play a central role in their interactions: Chinese employers’ vulnerability lies in their risk to become victims of social and political conflicts that could potentially jeopardize their investments whereas Ghanaian employees are, in comparison, materially more vulnerable, younger, and marginalized socially. The authors’ work fills the research gap of demonstrating how “mutual equity expectations are constructed under conditions of foreignness and how perceived equity distortions are mediated and addressed when shared normative frameworks are absent” (Giese and Thiel 2014:1103). Contrary to Kernen et al. 's argument that Chinese companies hire Ghanaian employees for cost-saving, reputation-building, and social communications, Giese et al. contend that the legal requirements behind employing Ghanaians are regarded as a “big (financial) burden and politically imposed barrier to market entrance” (Giese and Thiel 2014:1104). This difference will be compared to my own research in the analysis section, as different sectors of investment require different degrees of social interaction. Though I concede that Giese and Thiel (2014) devoted a lot of time and effort into explaining reasons behind potential conflicts between Chinese employers and Ghanaian employees, I still insist that their arguments are not backed by policy-driven evidence. It is too psychological-based, and it makes me question the content's transferability to my research. It does not take into account fundamental cultural differences in work ethics and appear to surround its argument on psychological contracts and “cross-cultural exchange” relations. While

its argument on risk and vulnerability make sense to the extent of which dealing with foreigners with a specific power dynamic impose certain risks on both parties, I struggle to support the idea as an ultimate factor in contributing to existing conflicts between Chinese employers and Ghanaian employees. Although there are dubious grounds regarding Giese and Thiel's research, I still acknowledge and appreciate their work and anticipate it would be of help in the analysis section of my own research, especially the section where the authors discuss the tendency to racialize employer-employee discourse because patterns of dissatisfaction and conflict which other authors did not discuss in their research.

To further evaluate the Sino-Ghanaian relations within Chinese investment in Ghana, it is important to go beyond the realm of employer-employee relations and examine African agency, Chinese incentives, as well as other components that contribute to a rising anti-Chinese sentiment within the country and on the continent. Samuel Kwadwo Frimpong and Savior Ayertey Nubuor study China's increasing penetration in global industrial markets and growing presence in Ghana and reflect on its possible political repercussions by discussing issues within this bilateral relation as well as external influences. In their article, "Research on the Chinese Investments in Ghana" (2013), the authors review Sino-Ghanaian diplomatic relations since the 1960s and explore present day issues surrounding current Chinese investment decisions in Ghana. Frimpong et al. did an excellent analysis focusing on China's incentive entering the Ghanaian market which was not discussed in any of my other literature review sources: their investigation stems from China's "one-China" policy and takes into account China's diplomatic relations with Taiwan. It focuses more on the political repercussions of such massive economic and financial assistance. Many other journal articles on China's engagement in Ghana or even Africa only tend to reflect on activities by SOEs and private flagship companies; far less

attention has been paid to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which “operate in a variety of sectors, from informal street trading to farming to manufacturing” (Frimpong and Nubuor 2013:120). SMEs cannot be overlooked because it is run by mostly Chinese migrants who are now close to one million in population in Ghana. They have much more flexibility with their stay, are not directly under the spotlight in Sino-Ghanaian engagement discourse, and attract little interest from government and agencies of the West as well. In their conclusion, Frimpong and Nubuor shed light on external (Western) accusations on China-Ghana trade relations, whose importance cannot be undermined in this discussion, given Ghana’s colonial past. I fully endorse the breadth of the authors’ analysis and appreciate their refreshing insight which will be incorporated in my own analysis.

A highly-debated topic within the Sino-African relationship is the incentive behind China’s engagement. The lack of transparency within the country’s political system makes analysis and research difficult. However, Linh Tran Huy, in her article “China-Africa Relations: At a Crossroads?” challenges the commonly portrayed idea of a one-sided Sino-African relationship: as China’s presence on the continent rises, African companies and entrepreneurs are seeking to expand overseas to China as well. This interesting Sino-African relationship was only presented in this paper. Moreover, the author introduces an interesting relationship between demographic shift on the two regions and its effect on their trade relationship: China has a growing aging population while Africa’s fertility rates are high. Fewer jobs will be created in China whereas more employment opportunities are in demand in Africa. China may have a slightly lower demand for natural resources with a decreasing population, but the progression of wages in China could result in an increase in consumption per capita due to lifestyle changes which lead to a greater need for resources. Nevertheless, China is still increasing its investment,

particularly in the natural resources sector in African countries. This article is useful for my research topic because it offers two unique perspectives on the relationship between demographic shifts and natural resources demand in both Africa and China. It also shows the point of view of Chinese businesses and the extent they will go towards investing in Africa. China-briefing is not a state-owned media source, but they have been publishing information on business intelligence, tax, and operational issues in China from a practical perspective. It provides technical information to business executives and foreign investors. This magazine article reveals the growing economic capabilities of African countries attributed by China's investment and projects the future of the Sino-African relationship for its target audience.

Overall, the literature incorporated in my research encompass a wide range of aspects in regard to Chinese investment in Africa, particularly Ghana. There are many layers to Sino-Ghanaian social, economic, and political interactions. While many works have been done to evaluate the economic and political aspects of diplomatic engagement, little work is done to evaluate the shifting image of China on the continent. Given the importance of personal interaction, I aim to use Chinese-Ghanaian employer-employee relations in the service sector as a way of entry to examine factors that influence wavering perceptions of China in the country and assess pre-existing and potential efforts needed to bridge the gap of misunderstanding and misconception. This is intended to contribute closing a profound research gap concerning the role of on-the-ground Chinese-Ghanaian physical interaction, given its inevitable social, economic, and political power dynamic, and its influence on the overall sensitivity towards Chinese presence in Ghana, but also Africa as a whole. This research format will also be replicated in Beijing, with hopes of providing a dual perspective comparative research.

ANALYSIS

Chinese-Ghanaian Employer-Employee Relations

Within the last decade, China has emerged onto the global scene as the most ambitious and aggressive actor in Africa by inserting its financial and human capital, culture, and trade to reaching nearly every country on the continent. According to Mckinsey & Group's 2017 report, "Dance of the Lions and Dragons", since the turn of the millennium, Sino-African trade has been growing 20% annually with Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) rising at a faster rate of 40% (Sun, Jayaram and Kassiri 2017). Ghana, in particular, has become Africa's top supplier of students to the country, with 6,500 nationals studying in China for a population of 28 million. Economically, has surged to become Ghana's top trading partner where bilateral trade rose from less than \$100 million to \$6.7 billion from 2000 to 2017 (Piling 2018). However, statistics and data often fail to inclusively reflect on all aspects of Chinese economic penetration in Ghana. Particularly, backbone companies, such as large-scale state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and private flagship companies, who are strategic partners in critical sectors such as resources and energy development as well as significant infrastructure projects, are always accounted in figures and data while the now over-one-million Chinese migrants working and living in Africa are often disregarded. Respectively, the eruption of Sino-African engagement and academic studies reflecting on China's growing interests and expanding role in Africa has largely turned to focus exclusively on large-scale projects. In fact, around 90 percent of the 10,000 Chinese-owned firms operating in Africa today are privately owned (Sun, Jayaram and Kassiri 2017). This questions the monolithic image of a state-centered investment that has been wrongly perceived by many. This research, therefore, pays attention to the large number of Chinese SMEs, precisely those operating in the service sector, and fulfills a previous research gap focusing specifically on

migrant Chinese nationals working as employers, interacting with local employees in the service sector.

While the activities of private Chinese migrant workers embed little direct influence on the overall government decisions in terms of future investments, they nevertheless hold significant implications for workers and consumers in Ghana who see these Chinese immigrant investors on a day-to-day basis. Their occupation in the informal sector has a much more explicit impact on the local communities. Individual efforts may be too micro to even be taken into account on the larger scheme of Chinese investment in Ghana, however, Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs are forming a growing chain of commercial ties between China and any African host countries: some export raw materials in demand in China, some import small consumer goods to sell for a cheaper price in Ghana, and some become intermediaries linking Chinese suppliers and Ghanaian consumers, or vice versa.

Chinese Migrant Workers: The Employers

Jobs in the service sector of the Ghanaian labor market, particularly those headed by a Chinese employer, are usually those that require minimal or no training, which implies that these low-responsibility jobs are rarely attached to high social status. Participating employees, therefore, do not possess education degrees beyond high school. Occasionally, some have vocational training in fabric printing or carpentry. Regardless of education level, most employees were between twenty to thirty-five years old, and there was an even divide between genders. Within the service sector of the local economy, most Chinese migrant investors choose to participate in catering services, notably opening restaurants or small-scale grocery supermarkets. From interviews, we learned that typical Ghanaian employment relationships, in general, are characterized by power distances between the employer and the employee, and this dynamic is

generally demonstrated through loud talk, strict demands, and exercise of power that is largely accepted as a norm and a necessity in the functioning of a business. Though Chinese migrant workers are not as heavily influenced by the mechanisms within the Ghanaian labor space, they are still informed by a similar logic of obligation and social power within the Ghanaian context, based on their experience in China either as an employer or an employee.

Based on empirical evidence, the power that Chinese employers exude is often based on a sense of frustration and vulnerability that stems from the sense of being a foreigner and a lack of a normative framework that cohesively bring together this cross-cultural employment relation. While there seem to be no strict laws enforcing small-scale private non-Ghanaian owned restaurants hiring ratio, the incentive to hire Ghanaian employees is strong amongst all Chinese owners. Unlike works in the technical or construction space where most companies bring skilled Chinese workers in the beginning because 1) it takes time to build up a skilled-team 2) Chinese workers can train Ghanaian workers until independence 3) possibility of avoiding local labor issues in an unfamiliar socio-political context, those in the catering space tend to hire locals mostly for cost-saving purposes. One participant, restaurant A, was operated by an entire family that has emigrated to Ghana. The family business involves sisters and their partners as well as the parents. The restaurant only opened for evenings and they served two simple dish – Chinese hotpot and Chinese street barbeque, both of which do not require chefs in the kitchen. The simple job was to wash and cut the food and serve as the customers will be doing the cooking themselves. It seemed as if having 6 people working for a restaurant that seats about 30 would be plenty, but nevertheless the owner decided to hire 3 extra Ghanaian help. When asked why, the owner mentioned for a sense of security both economically and politically. Also, for the fact that now that he is the boss, he wants to have people working under him that is outside his familial

network. This being said, most of the Chinese interviewees of restaurants of relatives were convinced that with regard to the scale and simplicity of their business, they could operate perfectly fine without hiring any local workers. Employing Ghanaians is therefore regarded as a way to overcome specific political and economic barriers. Politically, the absence of a common language makes communications difficult. Most Chinese migrant workers do not speak fluent English until arriving in Ghana. Therefore, this lack of understanding becomes a source of work inefficiencies and conflicts. At the restaurant A, where workers' hours are 9AM-12PM for produce preparation, and 3PM-9PM for serving and waitressing, all three employees were taught basic Chinese terms on the menu for easy communications while all their other dialogues were in English. The owner and his family mentioned their effort to learn English and speak it "the Ghanaian way" when they first arrived, and over the past two years, they have been able to improve and finesse their communications skill to a degree where conversing with the beer bottle collectors and produce deliveries was no longer an issue. Despite all efforts made towards embracing this linguistic gap, during my observation of having a sit-down meal with a fellow Chinese friend at restaurant A, the frustration the mother-in-law (roughly 60 years of age) towards one of the workers was clearly observable. While the Chinese owners of restaurant A actively acknowledge the importance of maintaining a positive and special relationship with local employees, they nevertheless still carried their frustrations visibly. One of the incidents included a Chinese table of businessmen ordering a plate of sliced potatoes for their hotpot: they ordered in Chinese and assumed that the Ghanaian waitress' language proficiency would be sufficient to understand simple names on the menu which she has been previously taught. However, the plate was never delivered to the table and the incident concluded with the mother-in-law of the owner yelling the name of potatoes in Chinese repeatedly to the waitress, at this

point which she turned to me, and said in Chinese “This girl, no matter how many times you teach her something, she can never learn. She is slow in speed and slows in learning...” It is important to note that such employment dynamic is also visible within the Chinese working culture, based on my experience observing in Chinese restaurant settings in China. Calling an employee derogatory terms such as “stupid”, “dumb”, or “slow”, at one point becomes normalized within the power dynamics and relationship. While normalization does not make such behavior ethically or politically correct, it still provides an explanation for some of the actions employers project onto their employees, and it gives insight to the causes of potential conflicts.

Theorizing Sino-Ghanaian Employment Relations

Within existing academic research, little effort has been afforded to cross-cultural employment relations, and more recent work usually limit their scope to employee’s equity. Therefore, very minimal attention has been paid to employers’ perspective in this interaction.

Lack of mutual cultural understanding

So what are some factors that contribute to the production of derogatory terms projected from the employer? Theoretical and empirical findings suggest that cultural differences and the absence of a shared normative framework are two major components that embody Chinese-Ghanaian employment relations.

Time perception and punctuality are extremely important in China, in fact, it may even be considered a virtue. The country prides its work ethic, which is based on the Confucian Principle of respect for the elderly and achieving perfection in work, as a key contributor to its status as a global economic superpower today. The culture firmly believes that excellent work ethics begets

greatness. However, efficiency is one area where Chinese and Ghanaian perceptions often differ. For local workers, especially those providing unskilled or semi-skilled labor, a lack of clear communication links with their Chinese employers easily feeds into frustrations stemmed from differences in expectations. Chinese easily take offense to tardiness, and it is only worse in the workspace, where time management and efficiency blends into the social awareness of authority, hierarchy, and the value of respect. A repetitive conversation that occurs in every interview with Chinese restaurant owners is their annoyance towards tardiness. One owner, W, repeatedly emphasized his hiring policy: “skinny and young”, both of which boils down to efficiency. “If they are young, they are more energetic and they will move faster. The same thing goes with their size. I cannot stand having a fat woman working for my restaurant. They move too slow.” Contrary to the Chinese work ethic, it is common to arrive 10-15 minutes late for social functions in the Ghanaian culture. And this attitude often translates to different aspects of one’s life in Ghana. However, the lack of a common ground, coupled with the difficulty to communicate effectively, often paves the way for arguments and conflicts. For restaurant A, a waitress earns about 500 cedis per month (roughly 100 dollars). If they have been on time for every shift, they earn a 50-cedi bonus. However, if they have had 3 tardiness marked on their record, they will be fired immediately. “It’s restaurant. It’s a fast business. No one wants to sit around for 20 minutes before they can start eating. So if I need money to flow in quickly, the dish has to be on the table quickly.” The owner added.

The failure to reach cross-culture understanding and its equity expectations can, therefore, be dangerously transformed into racially-framed allegations of each other. Little efforts have been shown to bridge the gap between Chinese employers and their Ghanaian employees. They are often caught within their own framework of understanding on work ethics and pervasive

norms and are therefore blind to any cross-cultural adaptation. Accumulated tension and negative energy can lead to verbalization of discontent or act of destruction that is then ascribed to beyond just the individual but instead “the Chinese people” or “the Africans”. This eventually leads to a rise in resentment at a scale much greater than that of the restaurant. A similar concept applies across other investment sectors as well: Chinese involvement in unlawful and unregulated activities can be easily rendered into a monolithic trope that is diffused and served to fuel anti-Chinese populism across the continent.

Then, across the continent, while China takes a large share of the cake of African technological and socio-economic development, many of its migrant workers are under fire for mistreatment of local employees. This is not to justify illegal, racially-implied, or unethical actions committed by Chinese working in Africa, but a way to show how a few significant events, with the help of an omnipresent media, can effectively shape and develop a specific stereotype that is even more difficult to deconstruct. That being said, in order to allow successful and mutually-beneficial engagements on all levels, Chinese people need to be educated on cross-cultural/racial interactions while their African counterpart social actors should disrupt and constrain Chinese enterprises and enact their political and social agency.

Lack of mutual understanding on social relationships

Although China selectively pinpoints target countries that are resource-rich, and politically and economically stable, made-in-China services and goods permeate the entire continent. But this process of a Chinese embrace is only accompanied by creeping anti-Chinese populism, as Africans recognize that cheap labor and financial capital coming from the East becomes a competitor to local development strategies. Though sentiments of discontent occur often when foreign labor and capital come from overseas, the case of China is particularly

interesting due to the incentive of some migrant laborers as well as the political climate, social systems, and social understanding of human interactions of China.

One important aspect that many academic works focusing on a similar topic fail to take into account is the impact of the Chinese Economic Reform from 1978 to 1993 on the Chinese economy as well as its job market. It created space for individuals to start private businesses but also opened China to trade with the rest of the world. Self-established businesses promoted a strong incentive for individuals to work much more rigorously, but it also severed economic polarization between the rich and the poor. As market competition intensifies, many desired for change and tried to find their niche by migrating to countries where competition with fellow Chinese is less severe.

When efforts towards abridging differences and establishing common ground in terms of social interactions have not been made, increasing interaction can often turn into conflict. There is also a residential wedge between Chinese migrants and their host communities that play a role in the deterioration in social relations between the Chinese foreign nationals and the Ghanaian locals. The influx of Chinese products creates a fear that it will crowd out opportunities for local businesses. Language is nestled in work culture, and existing dialogues of anti-Chinese populism, therefore, become realized and materialized when frustration is bred over a lack of clear communication links between Ghanaian workers and their Chinese counterparts.

The strict work ethic embedded within the Chinese culture, however, is not the only source of conflict. Beyond superficial racial and cultural prejudice, the concept of vulnerability and risk, as Giese and Thiel discussed in their work, indeed play a crucial role in shaping employment relationship and mutual understanding, or lack thereof. For Chinese employers, their vulnerability is embedded in the idea of foreignness, and possible victimization of general

social and political conflicts that was established by a small group of Chinese who has previously committed illegal activities. The formation of this monolithic stereotype contributes to one's vulnerability, especially when there exists a risk that their substantial investments and decisions to leave their home country could be jeopardized. The owner of the restaurant C, located at the heart of the most popular district of Accra, discussed the frequent incidents of local food safety authorities coming to "pick problems". Owner Z said:

"Every time they come, they always try to pick problem. They don't do it to any other restaurants on this street. Just us. But really, they are all just here looking to start problems. They think Chinese is rich, so they really are here for the money. We give them 50 cedis and they just go away. But if they don't, they can wipe a countertop and if there's the slightest dirt they'll say it's a safety violation. All of our seating are outdoors, how do you expect there to not be dirt?"

To reduce the risk of social conflicts, Chinese employers often turn to their Ghanaian employees as communication links and a social shield to avoid dealing with issues in an unfamiliar socio-political context. On the other hand, many do not want to display the sense of vulnerability outwardly to the public, let alone their employees. When asked why they decided to move to Ghana out of all places in the world, no Chinese employer participant mentioned seeing Ghana as a place to significantly financially enrich oneself. This, however, cannot be translated into those participating in other sectors of the economy such as manufacturing, mining, or construction because the economic scale of those activities is much greater than that of catering. Chinese participants working in catering usually do not have a high education level in China. In fact, 40% of the interviewees began working full-time in China at the age of 16. Most others only have high school level education. As previously mentioned, as domestic employment and market competition escalate in mainland China, many look outwards and abroad. They expressed the sentiment that they would rather be their own boss than working for someone else. But when asked how long they would want to stay in Ghana before they return home, no one gave an exact

answer. Amazingly, every interviewee mentioned the social disconnect and lack of opportunities in China that would make lives even more difficult if they return. Therefore, the fear of having an even bigger set back when returning home and the constant battles with local resentment could potentially create a greater sense of insecurity and vulnerability. Except for the case of restaurant A, all other interviewees do not have other familial ties in the country. Many have kids in China who are being taken care of by external families. Their longing for comfort and the absence of social and material security is contrasted by their desire to succeed in this country. Frustrations develop when Ghanaian employees are not meeting expectations; they are frequently pitted against their Chinese counterparts that the employers have previously encountered in China, to the extent at which the Ghanaian employees are made to feel inferior. These fundamental factors -- foreignness, fear, and social-political unfamiliarity -- leave potential Ghanaian employees at risk of developing distorted perceptions of their Chinese employers.

While this research aimed to complement previous works that lacked the space to investigate Chinese employers' standpoint by providing a culturally-grounded empirical analysis, it is nevertheless crucial to offer a dual-perspective. Therefore, despite the fact that the majority of the above analysis is honed in from the angle of the Chinese employer, employees' attitude was still used in this research to compare and contrast both parties' perception on risk and vulnerability, though they may hold significantly different meanings.

Employee Perspectives

Approaching the interview portion of this research, based on general perceptions and research hypothesis, I predicted that the anti-Chinese populism would be most prominent amongst those who work for Chinese employers because the site of interaction would generate

the most crossover emotions. Contrasting the two-sided perspectives of this employment relations, a diverging vulnerability perception is formed from the employee's experience as well. Given Chinese employers' vulnerability stemming from foreignness, the similar sentiment amongst Ghanaian employees is derived from the threat of being antagonized, which is often formed through a lack of cross-cultural understanding, as previously mentioned in the employers' perspective discussion. However, misunderstanding could easily be translated into a racialized public discourse: such that of inhumane employment practices, the same way Chinese imported goods are denounced as cheap, counterfeit merchandise when other nationals' imports of similar qualities are less subjective to this allegation. While I found the sentiment and strength of this publicized discourse to be especially strong amongst the general public, it is, in fact, nowhere near as prominent amongst Ghanaian employees working for Chinese employers. The young Ghanaian employees usually lack both higher education and strong family support network within close vicinity of their employment site. This is contrasted by Chinese employers in the catering industry who often are organized by a sojourning group of extended families of friends, who internally create a social safety net. Therefore, due to a lack of access to other options to secure their financial and social wellbeing, Ghanaian employees' high demand for paid labor puts them in a vulnerable position because they are relatively more dependent on their employers than vice versa. In a way, employment conflict actually lies beyond that of mere cultural misunderstanding but commences from both parties' high demand for security and loyalty, which are demonstrated insufficiently through symbolic acts. Employee's desire for financial stability eventually turns into a form of reliance on their employer, which ultimately offsets any anti-Chinese populism. During the interview process, all Ghanaian employees working for Chinese migrant restaurant owners were not vocal about their outlooks on China-

Ghana relations. Instead, they spoke more fluently on their interaction with their bosses. Even so, they were much more indifferent and neutral about employment relations as opposed to their Chinese counterparts. “This is my job; I need to earn the money. They’ve been teaching me Chinese, but I wouldn’t have the job if they weren’t here” said one employee working for restaurant H. When asked about their perspective on Sino-Ghanaian relations and Chinese investment in Ghana, the answers across the board were either “I don’t know” or “I don’t think it is bad”. A major factor contributing to this collectively similar response is what was discussed earlier: the strong reliance on employers that in turn offsets any negative sentiments, or even a discomfort and lack of incentive to express any discontent in their workspace, where all interviews were conducted.

In any case, however, both parties often fail to gain a deeper understanding for each other that would eventually help smooth the relationship. Beyond culturally grounded expectations from both parties, what, then, are conducive to racially framed allegations of each other and disseminate anti-Chinese sentiments within African societies?

Role of Media and Image Perpetuation

Part of this research involved interviewing those that were neither Chinese employers nor Ghanaian employees as part of a controlled group. This controlled group was selected from different sectors within the Ghanaian society. One of which, most significantly, was a rural Ghanaian village two hours away from the city of Kumasi. Interviewees were educated persons of the village who have never had interactions with Chinese people in Ghana. This interview was kept semi-structured, guided by lead questions:

“What do you think of when I say the word China?”

“How do you feel about Chinese investments in Ghana?”

“How do you think Ghanaians perceive Chinese foreigners?”

“How do certain understanding of Chinese people get formed in Ghana?”

Collectively, words that describe China included “technology”, “leader”, “biggest power”, and last not but not least “galamsey”. To the second question, 25% of the participant echoed their answers to the first question by responding with “opening companies here” or “providing employment”, “lots of Chinese products”, the rest, expectedly, redirected the conversation with words such as “cheap goods” “bad quality products” “criminals hide their money here.” Those who saw China as a source of employment and development eventually all addressed certain Chinese’ continued illegal profiting by accessing local vital resources which incite local anger. One participant at one point mentioned that regardless of unlawful and unregulated activities, no other country has been able to help Ghana develop directly as China has been. When the recent \$60 billion financial pledges made at the FOCAC was mentioned, one participant aggressively responded with “Nothing comes for free. But we need to develop, and if China wants to build roads and buildings here. I guess we just have to close our eyes on the bad and open on the good to keep going.” Needless to say, though all answers were one-dimensional considerations, they offered an overall and relatively inclusive perspective to the ongoing discourse involving the wavering perceptions of Chinese engagement. Whether it’d be cultural misunderstanding, the absence of a grounded normative framework, residential wedge, local market threat, or racial ignorance, the emerging anti-China populism in Africa holds critical implications for China as a rising global power. As much as close proximity and observable Chinese presence support the growth of such sentiment, media also plays an important role in the dissemination of related information.

Local media source, coupled with the word-of-mouth phenomenon, speeds up any information circulation process. For those village participants who have never met a Chinese person or rarely delve into the multifaceted issue of Chinese investment in Ghana, their reaction towards the situation is likely to be supported by the way others around them speak of the matter. For many external parties, particularly Western countries against Chinese economic operations in Africa, it is not shocking for them to outpour pro-democracy, environmental protection, and labor rights discussions that put Chinese ventures in Africa as an anecdote of plundering resources, robbing local economy, and violating human rights. Negative media, therefore only intensifies anti-Chinese populism on the ground. Knowing this, I purposefully asked certain participants their perception of Americans/Europeans in Ghana as opposed to Chinese in Ghana. The most unexpected response I received was “Well, the Americans do not do bad things here. The Chinese do.” This understanding, without acknowledging its political correctness or incorrectness, shows the lack of understanding of the economic and political context of foreign investment in Ghana. Despite not requiring every Ghanaian or Chinese to understand the socio-economic implications and incentives behind Sino-Ghanaian/Sino-African relations, it is still necessary to evaluate how local media portrays this bilateral engagement and whether it contributes to the ongoing Sinophobia across the nation and continent.

The two major local news outlet I have selected are myjoyonline.com and GhanaWeb, both of which are accessible via the world wide web. In order to analyze the style and topic of reporting, I simply typed “China” into both search engines and reviewed articles that were published within the past 12 months in relation to “China”. Within myjoyonline, many articles discussed the recent Chinese-American trade war, or generally on the topic of globalizing Chinese development: ranging from oil price adjustments to “launching a fake moon into space”.

There, you see Ghana President Akufo-Addo's name appear numerous times, emphasizing his new development agenda that echoes China's previous development trajectory. The platform also welcomes many outside voices, most of which are experts in the field who tend to critique the China's policies or advocates of the potential negative impacts of Chinese investments. Surprisingly, a few articles also target the strict firewall enforcement in China's media accessibility, discussing human rights and rights to information. Nevertheless, most articles appear to be neutral, quotation based, and do not involve much of the reporters' opinion, unless it is an interview. GhanaWeb, on the other hand, have more coverage on Chinese-Ghanaian interaction as opposed to neutral reporting on China's activities as done by myjoyonline.com. However, a major difference is that GhanaWeb symbolically use Chinese investment in Ghana to represent metaphorically, on several occasions, pessimism and hopelessness especially in reports reflecting on Ghana's financial future. This turns the bi-national economic engagement into a figure of speech with a negative connotation. This pessimism was a running trend throughout the interviews of this research, particularly apparent among those that do not have direct interactions with Chinese investment in Ghana. Though view counts was not accessible from the website, the number of comments left on articles that discussed Chinese-Ghanaian conflict tripled other articles on Sino-Ghanian relations. This is a direct reflection on what the mainstream audience tend to "cherry-pick" from the overall discourse of Chinese investment in Ghana.

Overall, there is a large contrast between the number of articles and topics of discussion within major media outlets and the ones that the audience tend to chew over. There is a lack of opinion columns by experts in the field which creates spaces for the readers to interpret and form their own opinions. However, the little opinion columns that do exist are often single sided, thus also persuading the public to achieve a particular perception of China that is only reinforced by

the word-of-mouth phenomenon. Although not extremely prominent, the trend in style of reporting within major media outlets in Ghana nevertheless have the potential and influence to sway popular conception on a particular issue. This, in combination with the steadily increasing business presence in Ghana, have the tendency to traverse the conflict zones and encounter local anti-Chinese sentiments.

Research Findings

China, in comparison to previous Western powers, look to Ghana to offer an alternative model of development that prioritizes stability over democracy and promotes market mechanisms and commercial relations. As Chinese presence grows exponentially within the recent decade, global media often shine their spotlight on massive infrastructure or manufacturing projects. However, little research has been done on the one million Chinese migrant workers in Africa working for SMEs that inevitably create a direct link of import-export trade between the two countries. This research focuses on the service and catering sector, which provides direct and accessible way for the two cultures of people to interact. Employer-employee conflicts recently have become a popular topic of discussion within local media and this research delves into examining the factors that contribute to conflict within this cross-cultural relationship. In essence, lack of grounded cultural understanding such as punctuality and work ethics, coupled with language barriers, create conflict that can be easily reiterated into racially framed allegations. However, the recycling of this social relationship is constructed on the basis of vulnerability and risk where both parties inter-rely on each other without vocally expressing their needs or loyalty to each other. Chinese employers migrated to Ghana seeking a better life to escape domestic business competitions and to have more authority in their social enterprises, whereas Ghanaian employees look at Chinese employers as the provider of their financial well-

being. In facing pre-existing social perceptions and judgement, Chinese employers look to their Ghanaian employees as an easy pawn to increase their social mobility and capital within this foreign space. Media, which holds the power to magnify certain aspects of specific issues and broadcast them to the general public, therefore becomes the generator of the wavering perceptions of Chinese people in Ghana, and it has control over which single-sided perception to expose. Though operating on small-scale interactions, Chinese SMEs are important to investigate in the grand scheme of Sino-Ghanaian relations as it is the most observable, on-the-ground interactions between the two cultures of people and it is the most relatable to the average Ghanaian. In bridging the gap of misunderstanding, criticism, and conflict, this research hopes to provide grounds behind the cause of conflict and help pave a more stable path towards future Sino-Ghanaian engagement. It also leaves space and questions for future research: What is the future of small-scale migrant Chinese workers in Ghana? How can African countries adequately prepare for any unforeseen economic or political repercussions that come with the massive influx of financial assistance from China? Will developmental alignment to global superpowers ever be ended for African nations to develop on their own, or collectively as a whole?

CONCLUSION

Beyond Conflict and Criticism, Bridging the Gap

Opinions on China-Africa relations differ among observers. While no one really can break down China's ultimate incentive behind such a large influx of infrastructure and aid projects, contending arguments might help to navigate understandings. Some insist that China's claim of this mutually beneficial, win-win situation is a hoax mainly to provide a solution for China's domestic unemployment situation based on the country's large import of its own workforce in projects. On the other hand, others speculate that China's "going out" policy

encourages Chinese entrepreneurs to seek opportunities abroad and African countries happen to be the most qualified recipients in their opinion. Needless to say, some oversee the pre-existing economic power dynamics that place African locals inferior to Chinese entrepreneurs, and China's exploration in Ghana's informal economic sector drives competition between foreign and domestic entrepreneurs, and this tends to create conflict and accentuates the unbalanced power dynamic between both parties.

As previously discussed, China's historical economic reform in 1978 strongly targeted the country's state-owned enterprises. These firms were granted managerial autonomy in developing and enhancing market-oriented businesses. As Kernan and Lam discussed in their academic article, financially profitable businesses were absorbed into new SOE subsidiaries and social burdens and debt were trapped within original SOE while subsidiaries continued to grow their profitable business. The continuous poor performances led to a new policy initiated in 1996 to "keep the large and let go of the small" (Kernan and Lam 2014:1055). Letting go of the small meant that other than the largest SOEs, most were sold or undergone processes that transferred its status to be under the provision of provincial governments, making the role of the "state" in "state-owned enterprises" much less significant. Therefore, financial and political support from the state is also greatly diminished, thus increasing many SOEs' intentions to stay in Africa and not continue to develop in their home country. Essentially, while many still think that Chinese SOE's are directly linked and operated by the Chinese government, most in this case are not. However, this common misconception creates a direct impact on the rise of sinophobia as any wrongdoings committed by Chinese companies, of any scale but mostly those operating in larger dimensions, will expectedly falsely reflect the criminality of the Chinese government.

African Rising: Agency and Strategy in Dealing with China

Then, can we offer a coherent and structured plan that successfully bridges gaps and enhances Africa's political, social, and economic ties with China? Across different sectors of engagement: economic (trade and investment), development (assistance), education, and labor, China proves to offer a completely different development strategy that Africa's previous development partners. Therefore, given the successes and failures of previous interactions, the continent as a whole need to be more aggressive in promoting equal footing, needs, and respect for national sovereignty. This calls for responsive leadership that can separate and prioritize national goals before personal interests. It also requires a deep understanding of the social structure that can effectively develop a style of governance that is not directly copied and pasted from Western-style democracy. Though China's ultimate goal of heavy investment is not transparent to the rest of the world, its strategy and policy are clear. African countries should be united and collectively interact with China with a unified policy. China's overall development plan oversees Africa as a whole, and not each African country individually, though there are independent national projects that are distinct from each other. When each African country pursues the Sino-African relation based on their own needs and development agenda, their overall bargaining power weakens and positive effects of Chinese investment become diluted. Specifically, the informal sector of the economy needs to be strengthened since they are the least represented and face the harshest competition over other sectors. As this research suggests, private migrants and investments look for more long-term relations with Africa based on the nature of the interaction and a mutually-dependent relationship, however, their African counterparts do not show as much incentive, or are not as politically and economically motivated by the government. To minimize the gap, the development agenda uniquely targeting China

should be strengthened and implemented uniformly across the continent to absorb maximum benefit.

Lastly, there needs to be more consciousness and attention paid to the differences between Chinese investment projects. Exerting pressure to differentiate and separate investment and loans from interest-free loans and aid projects will not only help to formulate policies, but they also uplift stress responsibility delegation and promote transparency, and counteract domestic corruption.

In order to bridge gaps of misunderstanding and conflict between China and African countries, China needs to be more aware of cross-cultural understanding and be prepared to adapt to the socio-cultural nuances of various African countries. But equally important, African counterparts need to be more unified in analyzing and responding to Chinese investment decisions. This agency not only comes from the top-down but also bottom-up as well, and it starts with those like the Ghanaian participants of this research. Reinserting African agency into dominant discourse of China-in-Africa means to make Sino-African relationships more locally driven and publicly recognized. Development should not be a subscription-based connection grounded on value alignment, but a complete understanding of historical and current context as well as the relations between all factors

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