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African Perceptions of Donor Agencies: Emerging developments in Sino-African relations

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that African perceptions of donor agencies such as China may differ from country to country, and are informed by elements such as the country of origin, the knowledge base and orientation towards China. China has been a longstanding partner of Africa since time immemorial through series of trade and cultural exchanges. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to inquiry, we collect primary data via social survey using google forms with questionnaires administered to participants of ten (10) and six (6) tertiary institutions in Ghana and Togo respectively. This is to give voice to participants from Francophone and Anglophone speaking countries on the subject matter. We give more meaning to the survey data using documentary evidence. Evidence from our frequency distribution of the weighted responses on the various dimension of engagement and that of our phenomenology and narrative tools indicate that there are no singular overarching African perception of China as a donor agent; as the African continent is a 55-state region with diverse conflicting political, economic and socio-cultural proclivities. Africans have embraced China as an emerging force but unlike traditional multilateral bodies, China prefer to deal with Africa on an individual level without going public on matters relating to debt reliefs.

Keywords: Multilateral Agency; Debt Reliefs; Sino-Africa Relations; Donor Agency; Foreign Policy; International Politics.

1. Introduction

Public health systems in Africa have witnessed pressure that is historically unparalleled amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. This phenomenon has trickled to other segment of the economy, giving an unstable outlook. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had projected that growth in Africa will shrink to an all-time low (1.6%) in 2020 due to a severe disruption in economic activities and falling demand on export commodities (IMF, 2020). Working in anticipation of this instability, stakeholders such as the World Bank, IMF, sovereign governments and think tanks have collectively called for some form of assistance through debt reliefs and aids to accelerate post coronavirus recovery. This clarion call has indeed been heeded to and in the early part of 2020, the IMF approved a \$500 million program that sought to cancel debt repayment for the next six months for 25 economies, with about 19 of them in Africa (Calvin-Smith, 2020; Forson, Buracom, Baah-Ennumh, Chen, & Carsamer, 2015).

It must however be emphasized that with this massive debt reliefs by players in the international community, failure to involve China could twat and truncate the benefit envisioned in conceptualizing such a relief program. This is against the backdrop that close to about 20% of all African governments' debt is owed to China (see Jubilee Debt Campaign, 2018). All these issues feed into the longstanding debate about the ever growing and dominant influence of China on the African continent, remarkably among scholars of the West and of

China. Albeit the glaring facts of China's numerous contributions to the development of African countries' economies, there still remains a troubling suspicion of China's real motives for engaging a whole continent. Hence the Chinese are inculpated as neocolonialists with the sole interest of milking the continent dry of its rich natural resources under the pretext of aiding its countries with their modernization and developmental projects and building their economies.

In the recent past, African perceptions of China have mostly been defined in a collective and generalized manner which is erroneous given the fact that even though China may have the same guiding policy towards the whole continent, it surely does not engage every African country on the same level. African perceptions hence are varied and are dependent on individual country dynamics and their unique relations with China. Therefore, there can be no one African perception (Awoonor and Forson, 2020).

In an opinion poll conducted by the Pew Research Centre in 2007, 10 African countries were surveyed on their perceptions of the World powers China and the US. Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda maintained a more positive perception of the US' influence in Africa than of China, while the opinions of Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa revealed almost a tie between the US and China; with Senegal, Mali, and the Ivory Coast reserving a higher and more positive opinion of China's influence than that of the US (PRC, 2007). In 2014, another research was conducted by the same institution. However, according to a more recent global Survey undertaken in 2014, China's most ardent supporters were Africans and was explained by the report to be inspired by China's economic engagements on the continent and its capacity of engaging all African countries with their different economic and political dispositions. The report also reiterated the fact that, despite the generally positive perceptions, China's image is yet marred by its violations of labour rights, low engagement of local labour force and the lack of transparency with regards its issuance of loans to countries in the region; which is believed to be exchange waivers for the acquisition of natural resources. To buttress this reality, Ado and Su (2016) emphasized the fact that there is little empirical work done on the views of Africans regarding Chinese engagement with respective countries except for the very few opinion polls available. This called to attention the purpose of this study, as it reflects the need for more focused and country-specific studies in order to discard the misleading and stereotypical notion of "African perceptions" and pave the way for a more authentic discourse (Awoonor and Forson, 2020).

The contribution of this paper is to demonstrate and bring to the fore the widespread Ghanaian and Togolese perceptions of China as a donor agent. Over the last 10 years, China has supported Africa through massive infrastructure development among other areas of engagement. This has improved the quality of livelihoods in Africa. These are often under-reported by the western media and other ideological western-type development agency. The gap being filled by this study has important implications as the global audience tend to hear the African story from natives themselves other than westerners. This will also erase the erroneous perception that, the Sino-Africa relation is not a one-sided affair but elicit a win-win situation for both the giver and receiver.

As of 2015, China's nominal GDP by Expenditure approach is 67.67 trillion Chinese Yuan (\$10.86 trillion US dollars). China's nominal GDP surpassed that of Italy in 2000, France in 2005, the United Kingdom in 2006 and that of Germany in 2007, before overtaking Japan in 2009, making China the world's second largest economy after the United States. But adjusting for purchasing power parity (PPP), China became the world's second largest economy as early as 1999 overtaking Japan, and has recently toppled the US to become the biggest economy since 2014 (Awoonor and Forson, 2020:3). As China's economic power gains exponential and

geometric increase, so does its risk appetite and requirement for prospecting for raw materials in nether lands to the extent that China is the largest trading partner of multiple sub-Saharan countries in double-digit billion US Dollar values (Maswana, 2009). The ensuing situation in no uncertain terms has called for concerns among westerners and African indigenes particularly those in the diaspora regarding Chinese presence on the continent (McKinnon, 2010). Questions such as is China a goodwill partner or an imminent threat to Africa has become inevitable. What will be the impact of African perceptions of China on its international relation going forward into the future? What is the role of China in the Covid-19 pandemic economically? These and other questions are form the basis of this research.

The study is organized as follows: we introduce the study in section one, with a motivation that warrant the present study. We review extant literature on the subject matter to identify gaps in empirical research and the theories that can drive our motivation from the introductory stage. Our methodology is explained in section three. We analyze and discuss our findings in section four. We conclude in section five with recommendation.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Perception and Image Theory

The psychological explanation for people's behaviours is drawn from Sprout and Sprout (1965) human behaviour. Regarding international relations, it is explained that state behaviour is determined by two main conditions: First, it is dependent on the external dispositions of the system to which it belong, e.g. how power and authority are distributed in the system and how each state in the system is affect by these conditions; Second, state behaviour is dependent on the internal dispositions within the state itself. Perception studies arouse from the failure of rational theories to explain the reason behind state behaviour; as they centered only on physical determinants for the causes of war and or how they are resolved. Many scholars, leaning more on the neorealist side agree that, determining how a state will behave hence the motivations for going to war should not only be focused on the measure of power states wield and their capabilities but also on how the states perceive others' power and capabilities; and what each state thinks are the motivations or reasons behind each other's actions.

However, perception in itself varies from country to country and even within countries. Richard Herrmann explains that the manner in which the US' actions in Iraq were largely perceived by the outside world (France and Germany) as being motivated by the US' selfish interests and the resolve to dominate the region while the internal or domestic American perceptions pointed to the belief that their country's motivations for the War on Terror was driven by imminent security threat that Iraq posed at the time (Herrman, 2013). According to Herrmann, state behaviour relies heavily on how it perceives a given situation or how that situation in the form of a state perceives it. Thus the image of oneself, one's image of the other and how one is perceived by the other (or how one portrays oneself to the other) is all crucial especially when it comes to decision making. Hermann focuses on the study of image as a tool for guiding the study of perceptions. Here, two core arguments are made: The first argument is on how relations are perceived or comprehended (i.e. the core motivations of states in a system), how they perceive and measure relative power and how they perceive each other's status or position in the international system. The second is of the view that perceptions formed then becomes images of what the other is or represents, thus leading them to act either on the offensive or the defensive. The third argument views the image formed as the basis of

stereotypical labeling of the other on which their belief and understanding is oriented and based.

2.2. *Perception of Threat*

In the words of Herrman (2013), scholars have studied threat historically and world politics has revolved around different manifestations of threat, yet the core aspect of threat, that is, how threat is perceived or how it comes about did not receive much attention. Janice G. Stein looks at threat as a phenomenon that can be “verbal” and “physical.” Verbal threats become utterances tinged with conditions, thus having the capacity to incite the expected reaction or the capacity to exact repercussions in the case of the absence of compliance; and these are also referred to as, “Deterrence Threats” and “Compellent Threats.” However, threats are not only issued verbally. Examples of these are the withdrawal of consuls from a threatening country, the amassing of economic and military influence, and the strategic positioning of military personnel on frontiers of the threatening country among others.

Further, threats are not necessarily understood and rightly interpreted, which is why there is the need for perception. Perception directs the determination of the threat with the use of the mental and sensory human faculties; and the ability to process and interpret what the threat means or represents. “Perception is the basis for understanding, learning and knowing, and the motivation for action (Herrman, 2013). Essentially, threat can be explained non-psychologically and psychologically. Non-psychological explanations of threat perception fall in line with the rationalist assumptions of threat perception which establishes that the cause of war or military engagement to be as a result of the misinterpretation of indicators and making of rush decision since there would be little incentive for the full-force engagement or aggression if states could accurately process and interpret their intelligence of each other, as this could assist in deterrence or prevent engagement in the first place.

The psychological explanation of threat perception came about after the Iraq war where the rationalist i.e. non-psychological assumptions of threat perception were deemed insufficient and defective when it comes to decision-making. Herrman (2013) concluded that, the rationalist assumptions needed to be complemented by psychological models for a more complete and efficient method for threat perception in decision-making; particularly as the act of perceiving threat is affected by “cognitive biases.” He intimates the cause of the Iraq war to be due to the cognitive biases of both the US and Iraq which was informed by misapprehension, stereotypical profiling of each other, all based on old information and ignited by the failure to undertake deeper inquisition about each other; exactly what is represented by the other over time, disposition and strengths. According to Jervis (2008) in his compelling book (*Perception and Misperception: New edition*), the cause of the Iraq war was due to a severe case of exaggeration in US decision-makers’ threat perception, their conclusion and decision being guided by inadequate intelligence of exactly what is posed by Iraq. Conversely, the Iraqi leader at the time, Saddam Hussein’s belittling and underrating of US intentions and capabilities and resolve. Thus, both sides were erroneous in their strategies, due to the misperception of the other. Nonetheless, the fact still remained the lack of accurate measurement of information for the guidance of threat perception. Thus, scholars delve deeper into how to resolve the issue of miscalculation and misperception of threat. The psychological dispositions to threat such as fear, humiliation, the case of risk and loss aversion, all form bases on which threat is perceived hence action. Therefore, the need for the employment of both the non-psychological and the

psychological assumptions as a complementary model for effective threat perception becomes necessary.

2.3 The China Threat Theory

China with its significant economic development and the unprecedented growth of its political influence on the world stage can no longer be downplayed. From its more active role in the UN and the Asian region to its powerful presence on the African continent, hence the change in rhetoric of the world order being dominated by the western hemisphere; as it is evident China represents the catalyst of change in the world order that has since the end of the Cold War, been dominated by the Western hemisphere of the world, notably the United States of America. The China Threat Theory developed as a result of this conspicuous and imminent change; as China's rise generated suspicion and fear perceptions detailing what its China's motives are and how its rise would affect the existing world order. Many scholars wrote extensively on this phenomenon and its implications for the position of the existing Hegemon (Kang, 2005; Navarro, 2017; Wang, 2000).

Thus the China Threat Theory looks at China's rise in two perspectives: (1) how China constitutes threat to the existing hegemon that it seeks to replace, as an argument that leans towards the Realist position and (2) how China as a power would function in the global setting. It should be noted further that the Realist argument seeks to determine whether China's behaviour constitutes a defensive or offensive one. However, it is evident that this claim with regards to China leans more towards the ideals of offensive realism. Gilpin (1988) outlines several characteristics of a hegemonic challenger as the following: (1) a country that exudes considerable economic development, (2) a powerful military, (3) a substantial population and is significantly influential in many spheres and regions; and (4) also wields outstanding technological strength and most importantly, seeks to alter its existing position in the international system.

According to Mearsheimer (2014), there are two elements that determine state behaviour in an international system. Firstly, that every state in an international system's basic instinct is to survive as a natural conditioning as the international system is made up of several states with anarchic nature, seeking their own self-interests. It is this basic instinct of survival and the conditioning of the international system that determines each states action - "The structure of the international system which all states must deal with, largely shapes their foreign policy" (Forson, 2020; Mearsheimer, 2001; Navarro, 2017); thus the resort to acquire more power in order to either maintain their present position, if powerful or to amass wealth, military and influence for their elevation to a position of power, they are in a weaker position. Thus the sense of survival is the first priority of states in an international system. Secondly, when there exists the absence of a stable authority that wields ultimate power to implement statutes and make states abide by them; and to defend weaker states in the event of aggression or threat in the international system. Due to wariness and distrust among states towards each other, there is the lack of solidarity among states as they all wield the possible capability of change and malevolence at any given time. This lack of assurance or trust is still considered useless even with the existence of a credible and powerful authority in the international system, as states instead of reliance on the protection of the authority rather become apprehensive of their powerful position and of the power at their disposal. So paradoxically, the presence of a powerful state in an international system does not necessarily guarantee security and protection to weaker states due to the strengths and military capabilities of the powerful state.

2.3.1 Why China is viewed as a Hegemonic Challenger

China's economic exploits and international influence lends it to the resemblance of a challenge to 21st century world order and of our modern times. Drawing from Gilpin (2004) descriptions of the characteristics of a hegemonic challenger, the following reasons fall parallel: (1) Economic Power - It has maintained a steady economic growth since its national economic revolution in the 1970s and has grown to economic prominence notably during the 2008 world economic crises; and became the second largest economy, only after the US, the current hegemon in 2009. At the rate of its growth, it was only a matter of time before it overtook the US' economy, which has already occurred in 2015, making China the world's largest economy currently (see Carter, 2014), (2) China has made great strides in the advancement of its military which is enabled by its economic abilities and technological advancement. It recently delivered a C28A Missile Corvette to Algiers (Lei, 2016). Also, its military influence is also spreading internationally, notably in other regions of the world like Africa as it is now a market for arms sales for militarization processes in various parts of that region, e.g. China engaged Robert Mugabe in a \$240 million arms deal for Zimbabwe in 2004, it was the main supplier of arms to the Khartoum government in 2006 which aggravated the Darfur- South Sudan conflict, as reported by Amnesty International and the supplier of arms to the Nigerian government forces during the Niger Delta clashes between civilians and the Nigerian Military (Taylor, 2007), Additionally, China's military gait is also recognizable on the international arena by the increase of its military personnel to the UN peace-keeping missions in some conflict -ridden regions in Africa (Xinhua, 2006). Nonetheless as reiterated by Deborah Brautigam in a response to a Norwegian Study on China's arming of autocratic regimes on the continent, the US's arms sales to the region far outweigh those of China (Jones, 2011), (3) As the US' influence wanes in crucial regions of the world like the Middle East, so-called Rogue States like Russia, Libya, Zimbabwe, so-called Failed States but oil-rich countries like Sudan, Congo etc., comes a boost to China's influence. China's soft power tactics and foreign policy have given it precedence and favour worldwide. In terms of its influence on both the political and the economic levels, Chinese President Xi Jinping's numerous state visits with its economic and political cooperation with states worldwide, sizable amounts of monetary aid and economic concessions to African countries, the spread of Chinese culture through the establishment of Confucius Institutes worldwide, its influence and leadership roles in the ASEAN region, its influence and leverage of its national interests.

2.3.2 Soft Power

The Soft power discourse was introduced by Joseph Nye in the 1980s but became widely recognized and popular in 2003 after the 9/11 terrorist attack on the US in 2001. Thence, it invoked attention as an essential tool for states' relations with others in the international system. Nye defines soft power as the, ability of, "getting others to want the outcomes that you want" (Nye, 2005). This he reiterates as an effective tool for attracting and arousing the desire for cooperation of the intended target instead of the use of force, i.e. Hard power - "A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness" (Nye, 2005). Thus soft power relies on a state's ability to direct the needs of other states according to its own political goals and ambitions. Essentially, there are various ways in which soft power is exerted: first, we must understand the fact that, soft power unlike hard power

which draws on military and economic capabilities is rather subtle and not necessarily physical assets. These assets can be political, ideological, artistic or cultural. To Nye, power does not necessarily only dwell on the use of persuasive tactics on the intended target but also should focus more on the ability to captivate, and ignite appeal from target states. When this is successful, then the resulting effect becomes complete accession and compliance to the state exerting the soft power.

From Nye's introduction of soft power in the 1990s, the discourse has gained increasing interest among various scholarly fields. Kurlantzick (2007) believes that, soft power is conceived as the idea that others will align themselves to you and your policy preferences because they are attracted to your political and social system, values and policies." This can be said of the US for example as it has gained acceptance from many states and their civilians through the projection of its culture and values by the Hollywood films, and the projection of its democracy as an exemplary one worthy of emulation. Further, the exertion of soft power has changed faces over the years to incorporate the input of the media, international monetary, medical and humanitarian aid, scholarships and economic investments. This is emphasized by Kurlantzick (2007) whose observance of soft power centered more on aid and trade investments.

Drawing from these studies, one is able to draw on two main mediums through which soft power is dispersed: First, by the efforts of a state, and second through the efforts of non-state agencies. The state medium bears on the use of strategies which are implemented through policies. Here, there is focus on both the use of diplomacy on the international level and on the domestic level. The agents of state-medium soft power are government agencies, NGOs etc. Additionally, international media agencies are also used by state governments as tools of exerting soft power. The second medium of exerting soft power bears on multinational cooperation, the initiatives of citizens, NGOs, can also promote effective dispersion of soft power. The activities of these agents, although are not affiliated to the state can indirectly generate the promotion of a good image of the state to target public or state. Mostly, the brand names, charitable initiatives, of these non-governmental agencies have long-lasting and positive effects on the people that totally surpass those initiatives orchestrated by government agencies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To address the study focus, we employed a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. We collated the various responses from our participants and had them weighted to present numerical views on the various dimension of engagement. The other part of the study, which is qualitative positioned uses both phenomenology and narrative design type to inquiry. In the words of Creswell (2013), narrative has many forms and uses a variety of analytical practices and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines. It encompasses the phenomenon being studied (e.g. illness, debt reliefs etc.), or the method used in a study, such as the procedures of analyzing stories told. This study resonates with the latter description of a narrative as a method in research, as it begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of an individual, a country or region. As rightly explained by Czarniawska (2004), narrative is a specific type of qualitative design in which it is understood as a spoken or written text

given account of an event/action or series of it. Phenomenology on the other hand describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. The authors of this study are Africans and therefore what is being told is their lived experiences through narrative.

3.2 Sample Selection and Data Description

With the help of social survey using google forms on questionnaires administered to participants of ten (10) and six (6) tertiary institutions in Ghana and Togo respectively. This allows the study to capture views from Anglophone and Francophone speaking countries. We bolster the primary data with documentary evidence to make meanings on the subject matter. We divided the study into two phases: (1) for the first round, 231 and 201 students were surveyed from Ghana and Togo respectively, (2) the second round captures the role of China on the global system economically through its involvement in debt relief initiatives and other forms of assistance.

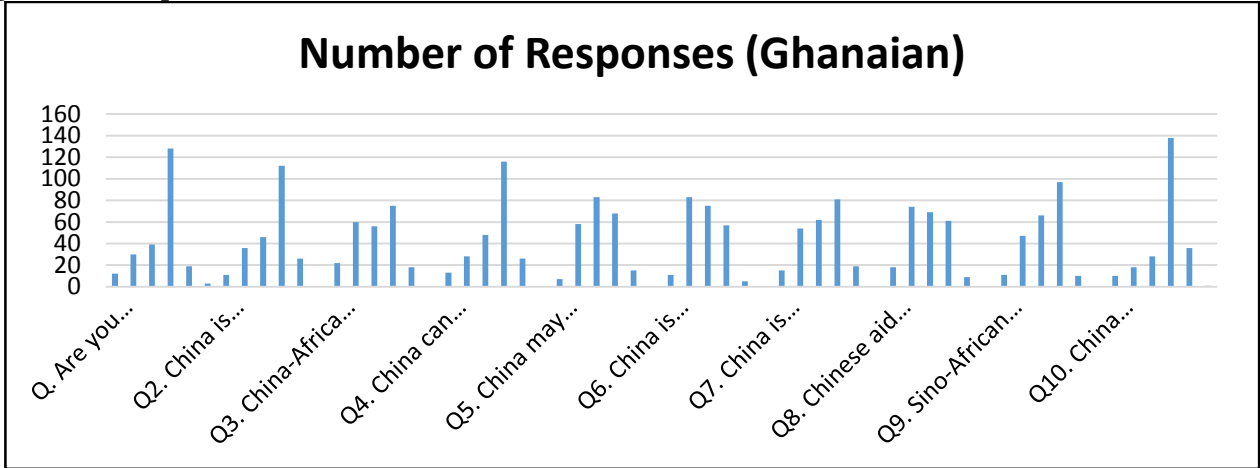
The Likert scale question type was used in this section to present statements concerning the subject matter. A total of 10 statements were provided to participants using likert scale responses as: *strongly disagree, disagree, indifferent, agree, and strongly agree* (see Response Summary in Tables A1 and A2 in appendices). The demographic elements generated here included gender, age as well as field of study.

An additional survey was conducted where the participants were allowed to provide YES or NO to some pertinent questions. In the first instance, 231 participants were asked whether or not they are interested in Chinese culture. 125 participants provided a YES answer while 105 participants provided a NO answer. We had a participant who did not provide an answer to this question. Again, the same number of participants were asked whether they would like to study in China. There were 163 YES responses and 67 people responded NO to this question. The number of participants who did not provide an answer in this case was also 1. In addition to this, participants were asked whether Chinese-themed education is important in their country.

4. Analysis and Discussion

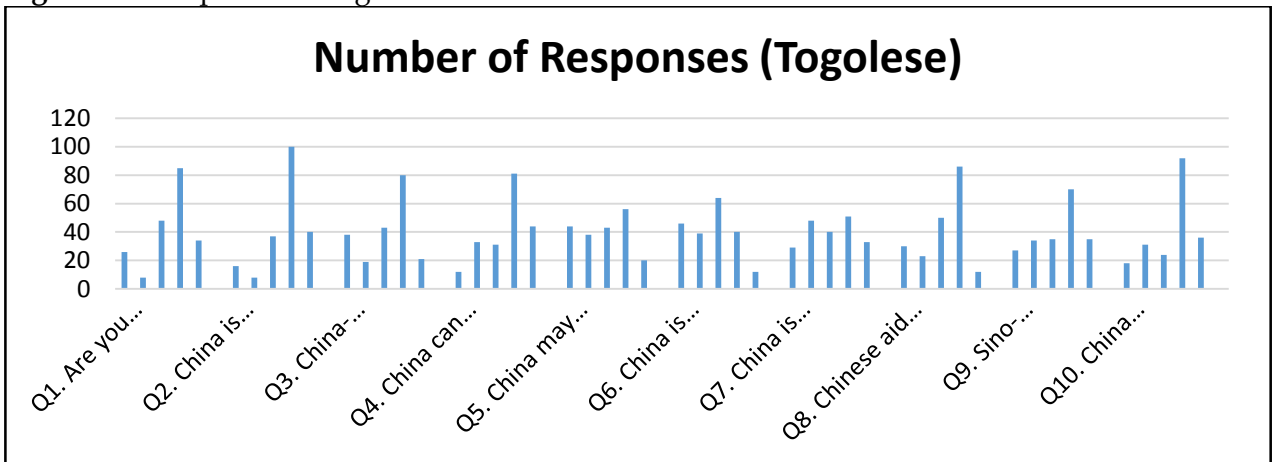
We discuss the most pressing question of the research paper that hinges on the perception of Africans on China as a donor agent. The overall responses of the research survey with insight from sections that border on image as perceived by Africans themselves on China on pre-identified dimension. Figure 1 and 2 collates the views expressed by Africans (Ghanaians and Togolese) of China focusing on various aspects of the Sino-Africa relations such as bilateral relations, socio-cultural, political, and socio-economic aspects. We then compare the weight of the responses that are in favour of China against the responses that denounce it, in order to decipher whether China is indeed a goodwill partner or a threat to Africa.

Figure 1. Perceptions of Ghanaians on Sino-Relation



Source: Authors construct based on data from Survey

Figure 2. Perceptions of Togolese on Sino-Relation



Source: Authors construct based on data from Survey

Impacts of African Perceptions of China on the International System

Ghanaian and Togolese perceptions form part of the base of African perceptions, hence their importance. The impact of their various perceptions, either positive or negative would indirectly affect Chinese influence in their domestic domain, the ECOWAS region, the African continent and the world system. Therefore, the study identifies the economic implications of the African perceptions drawing on the Ghana-Togo experience, and its consequential effect for China and the global economies.

Economically, positive perceptions of China may affect Western economies negatively. Although the Chinese economy is interconnected with western economies and the economies of other regions as promoted by the mechanisms of globalization, China’s own economic agenda, coupled with the positive perceptions it induces from other countries can invariably affect other economies. China has already attained the enviable position of Africa’s largest trading partner with an estimated total of \$85 billion (2013). In spite of the fact that this position does not necessarily include first-hand access to the markets of every single African country, its successful economic engagement and the positive results it has yielded in the economies of its

African partners will serve as viable incentives for other countries to fully engage China trade-wise. This would send a shock wave down the economies of the traditional trade partners of these countries, as they would potentially lose their trade positions over time to China as its economic influence expands across all the countries on the continent.

China recently became Ghana's largest trading partner in 2014, replacing the US who had held the position for many decades. It has since maintained this position as its current exports to Ghana stand at 32.6% in comparison to other notable exporters to Ghana such as Nigeria in second place with 14%, the Netherlands in third place with 5.5%, and the UK quite far behind at 5.4%. Similarly, China is Togo's largest trading partner with a 22% export volume barely surpassing that of Belgium at 20.3%, Netherlands at 11.9% and France at 6.6%. The implications of China's takeover of Africa's markets can be dire for other countries' economic survival in the world economy. With these grave resources finding their way to China, it is believed that in no distant time, the world economy may have to rely on China for industrial outputs. As a result, China may dethrone the US as the world's largest economy, being assured of improved growth potentials. Consequently, the Chinese economic wellbeing will greatly improve, and its poverty level shrink.

Going forward, China's own economic initiatives and engagements in the form of bilateral economic agreements and cooperation with various other regions around the world put it in a good position to either overtake the US' economic influence around the world or rub shoulders with it. This can be drawn from China's interest and engagement with countries, whatever their political disposition. For example, China is a dedicated trading partner of Zimbabwe and Angola, both of which are widely described as "rogue" states and dictatorships.

In sum, China's socialist economic market model could become the new benchmark for directing African countries and other countries' economies, if proven effective; thus a possible change from the largely capitalist western economic models adopted by many countries due to US' economic strength and influence, to the Chinese Model is imminent. China's internalization of its currency, the Chinese Yuan, which is already being used officially and stored in bank reserves in parts of Africa such as, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, Angola and Ghana will further consolidate China's gains and influence in the international scene. In the year 2015, a momentous agreement was signed between China and Angola towards the regularization of reciprocal currency exchange of both the Chinese Yuan and the Angolan currency in order to mitigate against the frequent shortage of dollars for foreign exchange transactions in the Angolan economy. According to the predictions of John Casey, a financial expert for sub-Saharan economic issues, Africa's financial landscape is in the process of rapid change where the year 2016 would represent the era of the "solidification of the role of the Renminbi in Africa" as "the dollar dominance is no longer a certainty" in African economies. Another big move in this regard was 20 governors of the central banks of Eastern and Southern African Central Banks converging in Tanzania to deliberate on the acceptance of the Chinese Renminbi as their banks' reserve, settlement and investment currency. As emphasized by the Governor of the Tanzania Central Bank, the banks buy more bonds from the Chinese banks due to their relatively higher profit level compared to European and US bonds (Awoonor and Forson, 2020:17). On the current global health pandemic that has affected economies, China continue to play an indispensable role in the debt management situation of Africa. Touching on the regions' indebtedness to China, the head of the Washington based Centre for Global Development (CGD), Mr. Masood Ahmed had observed that:

".....Africa debt to China is \$145 billion or so, over \$8 billion of payments is required this year....so that needs to be looked at".

Stakeholders have warned that any attempt to seek for debt reliefs without necessarily involving China could lead to some struggles (Mukoya, 2020). A group of Finance ministers headed by Ghana's Minister of Finance – Mr. Ken Ofori-Atta had called for a \$100 billion in assistance for a moratorium on all external debts and eventual write-off amidst the pandemic. China as a goodwill multilateral agent heeded to this clarion call and had accordingly responded in the affirmative. At a daily press briefing after the call, the ministry of foreign affair led by Zhao Lijian gave assurance that:

"China would communicate with relevant countries through diplomatic channels ... for countries who face debt difficulties, China will never force them, but will resolve it through consultation via bilateral channels".

Unlike the IMF, China has not been able to come out with any concrete plan on its debt relief programs except for what the ministry of foreign affair had said at the early stages of the global health threat. Finance ministers in the region are beginning to be apprehensive and have thus called on Beijing to do more for Africa. According to Uganda Finance minister, the debt stock of Uganda was in excess of \$80 billion in 2018 and a whopping third is owed to China (The Economic Times, 2020). In expressing worry over China's continuous silence on debt relief to Africa, Mr. Matia Kasaija remarked that:

"We have strong bilateral relations with China, but they haven't come to us saying anything"

But many analysts believe China would have no option but to be forced into rare act of charity akin to the ones by traditional multilateral agencies like the IMF, World Bank and EU. An analyst with the Uganda-based group Leo Africa Institute have predicted that:

"If there is a continental movement for debt relief, it would have no choice."

The many calls on China to intervene is a manifestation of the rising shift in the global influence away from the West towards China. Therefore, China's economic influence and dominance in Africa may not necessarily wreak complete havoc on Western economies, as they have economic stakes in other regions besides Africa. Nevertheless, as China's economic influence grows simultaneously in these other regions as well, the West would increasingly have to cede their positions to the desirable and powerful player that China is. China, at this year's FOCAC summit in Beijing had pledged support to Africa on debt cancellation. The much anticipated relief came in a pandemic summit addressed by the President of China. President Xi Jinping promised to delay loan repayment for 77 low-developing countries including those in Africa, as part of a G20 programme (Nyabiage, 2020). Speaking on debt relief, President Xi urged Chinese financial institutions to hold friendly consultations with African nations to work out arrangement for commercial loans with sovereign guarantees. Xi also said:

"China will work with the UN, WHO and other partners to assist Africa's response to Covid-19, and do it in a way that respects the will of Africa,"

In terms of political implication, China's economic prosperity comes with recognition and respect on the world stage as its economic advancements would gradually translate to political influence; as this would be made possible by China's capacity to exert its soft power simultaneously as its economic capacities increase. Chinese economic prosperity will undeniably enhance its military capabilities towards a possible overtake of the US' making it the world's strongest and largest military. In terms of arms trade, which is a very lucrative avenue of making economic gains, China would ungrudgingly replace the US in terms of this venture, as the largest and main supplier to the African continent. Also, China's role on the multinational stage as the new player in terms of securitization in conflict-torn countries would increase. Furthermore, successful and sustainable development in African countries based on the Chinese Model and directive policy initiatives that is in support of every member state of the FOCAC, be it a so-called repressive government or democracy, is a great factor to China gaining political triumph in the international system. Sustainable development of states based on the Chinese developmental model for the continent would reveal it as the best and most plausible contribution to the continent's overall development since independence from colonial rule; and would simultaneously disvalue the western models, and uphold China's Model to the limelight in the areas of science and technology to develop (see Forson, 2019).

Ultimately, African perceptions if generally positive and supportive of China would invariably translate to full political backing of China on the international stage, especially in terms of its "One China" policy and other stake-claiming issues of national interest in the international system.

5. Conclusion

We have demonstrated in this study that, African perceptions of China as a donor agent differ from country to country. As clarified in the analysis and discussion of the subject matter, African perceptions are dependent on the dispositions and the dynamics of the circumstances surrounding the bilateral relations between China and its African partners. In the ensuing global health crisis that has had a negative consequence on developing economies, China has demonstrated to be a goodwill partner of Africa in managing the continent debt situation. Nearly close to about \$ 8 billion in debt repayment for the year in question seem to be on hold amidst the Covid-19 shock wave on economies. This is something that will not go unrecognized by African governments on the continent should China come out with an explicit debt relief plan for the region. That notwithstanding, China's long held foreign policy is to deal with countries on an individual basis as opposed to mainstream donor approach in which there is a blanket program for all.

Yet, the activities of Chinese non-governmental actors, independent actors, and private investors have affected the efforts of the Central government in many African countries. In the case of Ghana, it has largely been the issue of Chinese illegal mining activities. Hess and Aidoo (2013) draws two important implications out of these illegal acts: (1) "...the saga of Chinese 'Galamsey' has created an image problem for China ...enables and encourages Sino-African pessimism". This refers to the incitation of negative image of China, mostly as a neocolonialist and exploiter across national, regional and international spheres. These clandestine activities also affect livelihoods and the developmental efforts underway by both sides. A vivid example is the abrupt cessation of work on the Bui Hydroelectric Dam by Chinese contractors funded by the Chinese government (see Aidoo, 2016; Baah-Ennumh, & Forson, 2017; Baah-Ennumh, Forson & Mmbali, 2020), (2) the deportation and apprehension of over 4,500 Chinese Galamsey operators

by the Ghanaian government in a bid to resolve the issue, from public outcry and pressure, resulted in strained diplomatic relations between the two sides (Xinhua, 2013). The Ghanaian government's reinventing visa requirement for foreigners particularly Chinese nationals was also ascribed to the same situation and described as the government's attempt to check on Chinese nationals desiring to enter the country (see Appiah, 2013).

Togo on the other hand have had a totally different experience which is moderately less serious. Most of the issues involving negative reputation of Chinese in Togo have centered on the emergence of low quality and cheap Chinese-made African wax prints and textiles flooding the marketplace. The Chinese are copying the designs of the cloth, producing more cheaply, and selling cheaper. They are undercutting the market. A law was passed last year to restrict people who are wholesalers in waxed cloth from also retailing; a Decree has been issued but it has not yet been implemented...'(Lyons and Brown, 2010). Many of the problems have been associate with the fierce competition of Chinese-produced prints with locally manufactured ones that are usually costlier. Another source of negative perceptions regarding Chinese presence in Togo, which is parallel to the popular perception in many African countries is the low quality of Chinese goods found on the African market. Evidently, the effects of such perceptions generated by non-state actors, private investors and petty traders have been known to be the undertones of the prevalent negative perceptions of China that become overemphasized and generalized, hence overshadowing the positives associated with Chinese presence. A crucial determinant in these matters is how government and leaders of civil societies respond to these issue.

China's Soft Power policy is effective according to the positive perceptions of Africans. However, it is judicious to note that, even though several similarities can be drawn between some African countries (e.g. Ghana and Togo) in terms of positive perceptions, quite clear-cut distinctions are glaringly observable. For example, Awoonor and Forson (2020:19) did state that majority of Ghanaians and Togolese perceivers generally welcome China's culture, education and initiatives; yet, it is worthy to note that, while a great number of Togolese would self-sponsor their education in China (even though their economy is less developed compared to that of Ghana), majority of Ghanaians would only study in China if assured of sponsorship. This implies that, China's efforts in Ghana's education domain may not necessarily be yielding results of common benefit for China; rather, it may be engendering a case of dependency on Chinese aid, which would not benefit either sides.

On the basis of the China threat theory, the study has observed that, China may lack the incentive to be aggressive towards the African continent. This is due to the image that it has projected of itself through its foreign policy towards the continent. In essence, from a political perspective, China's presence and increasing influence on the continent can be understood as a bid to balance Western dominance in the region. From an economic perspective, China is in competition with the existing powers for the acquisition of energy resources and robust markets for its commodities.

Ethical approval:

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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APPENDICE

Table A1. Ghanaian Perception

Ghanaian Perception of China	Response Type	Number of Responses
Q. Are you satisfied with current relation between China and Country	SDA	12
	DA	30
	INDIF	39
	AG	128
	SAG	19
	Missing	3
Q2. China is better Trade and development partner than the west	SDA	11
	DA	36
	INDIF	46
	AG	112
	SAG	26
	Missing	0
Q3. China-Africa relations is win-win affair	SDA	22
	DA	60
	INDIF	56
	AG	75
	SAG	18
	Missing	0
Q4. China can be a responsible superpower	SDA	13
	DA	28
	INDIF	48
	AG	116
	SAG	26
	Missing	0
Q5. China may be a Neocolonialist	SDA	7
	DA	58
	INDIF	83
	AG	68
	SAG	15
	Missing	0
Q6. China is Africa's political ally	SDA	11
	DA	83
	INDIF	75
	AG	57
	SAG	5
	Missing	0
Q7. China is best destination for higher education	SDA	15
	DA	54
	INDIF	62
	AG	81

	SAG	19
	Missing	0
Q8. Chinese aid promotes corruption & impedes sustainable development	SDA	18
	DA	74
	INDIF	69
	AG	61
	SAG	9
	Missing	0
Q9. Sino-African contact solely economic-based relation & non-ideological	SDA	11
	DA	47
	INDIF	66
	AG	97
	SAG	10
	Missing	0
Q10. China offers good human resource development to Africa	SDA	10
	DA	18
	INDIF	28
	AG	138
	SAG	36
	Missing	1

Source: Authors construct

Note: SDA = STRONGLY DISAGREE, DA = DISAGREE, INDIF = INDIFFERENT, AG = AGREE, SAG = STRONGLY AGREE, MISSING = NO RESPONSE

Table A2. Togolese Perception

Togolese Perception of China	Response Type	Number of Responses
Q1. Are you satisfied with current relation between China and Country	SDA	26
	DA	8
	INDIF	48
	AG	85
	SAG	34
	Missing	0
Q2. China is better Trade and development partner than the west	SDA	16
	DA	8
	INDIF	37
	AG	100
	SAG	40
Q3. China-Africa relations is win-win affair	Missing	0
	SDA	38
	DA	19

	INDIF	43
	AG	80
	SAG	21
	Missing	0
Q4. China can be a responsible superpower	SDA	12
	DA	33
	INDIF	31
	AG	81
	SAG	44
	Missing	0
Q5. China may be a Neocolonialist	SDA	44
	DA	38
	INDIF	43
	AG	56
	SAG	20
	Missing	0
Q6. China is Africa's political ally	SDA	46
	DA	39
	INDIF	64
	AG	40
	SAG	12
	Missing	0
Q7. China is best destination for higher education	SDA	29
	DA	48
	INDIF	40
	AG	51
	SAG	33
	Missing	0
Q8. Chinese aid promotes corruption & impedes sustainable development	SDA	30
	DA	23
	INDIF	50
	AG	86
	SAG	12
	Missing	0
Q9. Sino-African contact solely economic-based relation & non-ideological	SDA	27
	DA	34
	INDIF	35
	AG	70
	SAG	35
	Missing	0
Q10. China offers good human resource development to Africa	SDA	18
	DA	31
	INDIF	24
	AG	92

SAG	36
Missing	0

Source: Authors construct

Note: SDA = STRONGLY DISAGREE, DA = DISAGREE, INDIF = INDIFFERENT, AG = AGREE, SAG = STRONGLY AGREE, MISSING = NO RESPONSE