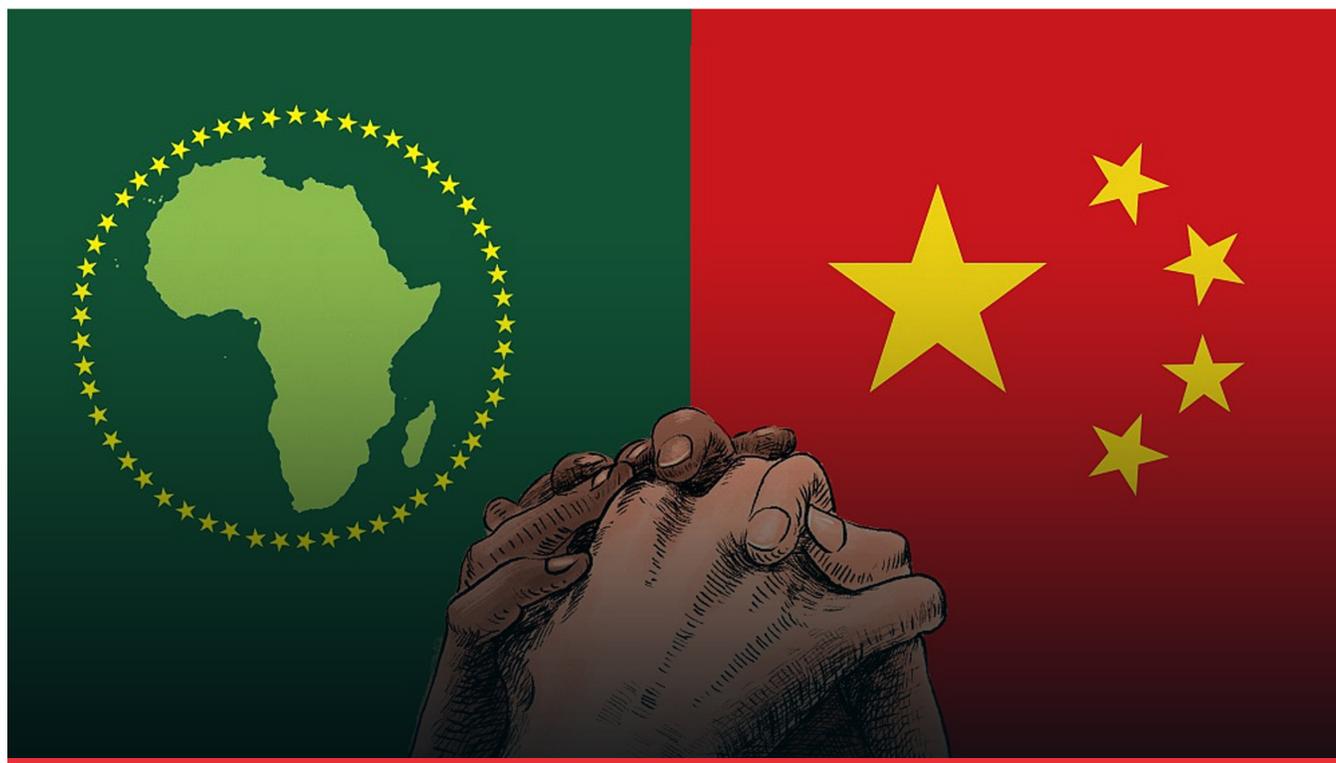


Unraveling the Truth: Dispelling Key Myths About Africa-China Relations.



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Few alliances have sparked as much interest and speculation in the complicated fabric of international relations as between Africa and China. The relationship between Africa and China has received a lot of attention and scrutiny from scholars, policymakers, and the media in recent years, prompting a lot of debate and, unfortunately, reinforcing certain persistent myths. The myths and misconceptions that have dominated the narratives surrounding this dynamic relationship frequently overwhelm the complicated reality.

As Africa-China relations continue to grow, so does the need to distinguish fact from fiction and obtain an in-depth grasp of the complexity involved.

Certainly, it is the opportune moment to navigate these misconceptions with a discerning lens and an unbiased viewpoint, bringing forth unwavering facts to challenge fictions and proclaim the profound realities that illuminate the true dynamics at play.

Myth 1: Africa is a Passive Player in the Relationship

Contrary to the belief that Africa is a passive recipient of Chinese influence, the reality is far more dynamic. It's often assumed that African countries have little power or control in their interactions with China and are simply passive recipients of Chinese investment and aid.

However, African leaders have not been mere bystanders in their engagements with China. Rather, they have adeptly utilized their relationships with Chinese counterparts to negotiate terms that align with their countries' development goals. Recognizing the strategic importance of these negotiations, African leaders have sought to secure more favorable conditions for their nations, ranging from economic investments to infrastructure development projects.

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) stands out as a testament to Africa's active role in shaping its relationship with China. FOCAC serves as a central platform for dialogue and cooperation, facilitating discussions on various fronts, including economic development, trade, and cultural exchanges. African nations actively participate in FOCAC meetings, using this platform to assert their interests and negotiate terms that they believe will contribute to their countries' growth.

Myth 2: China's interest in Africa is purely exploitative

One of the most common misconceptions is that China's engagement with Africa is solely driven by its insatiable appetite for Africa's natural resources. The continent's immense natural resource endowments are undeniably appealing to Chinese corporations, just as they are to those of the West like Shell, ExxonMobil, and Glencore, but there is more to this story.

Beyond natural resources, China's interest extends to infrastructure development, trade, investment, and technology transfer, contributing significantly to skill development, job creation, and technological advancements across diverse sectors.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, stands as a testament to China's commitment to Africa's development. Emphasizing infrastructure development, the BRI seeks to connect Africa, Europe, and Asia to global trade routes.

The BRI projects exemplify how Chinese-funded initiatives foster regional connectivity, facilitating trade and economic cooperation.

Myth 3: Debt trap diplomacy – China is burdening African countries (Ghana) with unsustainable debt.

The notion of 'debt trap diplomacy' suggests that China deliberately burdens African countries with excessive debt, which then gives China undue influence over them, potentially compromising their sovereignty and future economic prospects. However, it is essential to recognize that debt sustainability is a shared responsibility between lenders and borrowers.

While it is true that some African countries have faced challenges with debt repayment, the issue cannot be solely attributed to China. Debt sustainability requires informed decision-making, transparent financial agreements, responsible borrowing, and efficient utilization of borrowed funds.

African governments bear the primary responsibility for managing their debt and ensuring that borrowed funds are allocated appropriately. China's lending practices in Africa are typically based on commercial terms, often with concessional interest rates and longer repayment periods compared to traditional Western lenders.

Moreover, African countries' debt to China represents a relatively small portion of their overall external debt, and not all African debt can be attributed to China. Also, many African countries have diverse sources of debt from various international lenders.

The classical case of Ghana-China debt.

You might have read boldly in various media reports that China is the cause of Ghana's debt crisis. How ironic. Let's look at the numbers to verify for ourselves. Ghana's total external debt stands at about \$30 billion.

Out of this, only \$1.9 billion is owed to China, which represents just 6% of the total external debt. How does it translate to the narrative that China is the sole responsible actor in the country's recent debt crisis? Who owns the remaining 94% of Ghana's total external debt? Definitely not China.

Hence, China is not the biggest driver of debt grief in Africa. Chinese foreign policy towards Africa seeks multi-polarity, not dominance or just conditional aid.

Myth 4: Chinese Projects Disregard Environmental Sustainability

Before making definitive statements about Chinese projects neglecting environmental sustainability, it would be prudent to conduct a thorough examination of initiatives carried out in Africa by both African entities and international organizations, assessing the environmental impact of these projects and considering the measures taken to address any environmental concerns. This will ensure a realistic evaluation of various projects before drawing conclusive judgments.

Increasingly, Chinese-funded projects incorporate environmentally friendly practices and technologies, reflecting a growing awareness of the importance of ecological preservation.

One key initiative demonstrating China's commitment to environmental protection in Africa is the Green Silk Road Environmental Protection Cooperation Plan. This framework emphasizes ecological considerations and green development, aiming to mitigate the environmental impact of Chinese projects on the continent. Through this plan, China seeks to align its activities with environmental best practices and ensure a more sustainable approach to development.

A notable aspect of China's efforts is the investment in renewable energy projects across Africa. The focus on solar and wind power signifies a strategic shift towards cleaner and more sustainable energy sources. By supporting the development of renewable energy infrastructure, China is contributing to both environmental protection and the long-term energy sustainability of African nations.

Myth 5: China is engaging in neocolonialism

Perhaps the most pervasive myth is the notion that China is engaging in a new form of colonizing Africa, suggesting that China is exerting political control and economic dominance over African countries. This claim is often made in reference to China's investment projects in infrastructure, natural resources, and trade deals on the continent.

However, it is essential to distinguish between neocolonialism and economic engagement. Unlike colonial powers, China does not hold direct political control over African countries. Economic interests and mutual benefits, as well as mutual agreements and cooperation, are the main driving forces behind its investments. Nonetheless, Africa is fundamentally different now from the colonial era of previous centuries, and China does not enjoy exclusive or monopolistic commercial rights in Africa.

This viewpoint overlooks the agency of African governments and their active role in negotiating the terms and conditions of their engagement with China. It is essential to recognize that China's engagement is primarily based on economic interests and building partnerships, not political or territorial control. Hence, it is incorrect to label China's engagement as neocolonialism without considering the complexities of African agency.

Conclusion

In conclusion, unraveling the truths of Africa-China relations demands a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies at play.

By shifting the discourse from sensationalism and stereotypes to a more balanced analysis, a clearer picture emerges.

Africa-China relations are characterized by both opportunities and challenges, and a better understanding is necessary for informed decision-making and constructive engagement. By examining concrete facts, we can dispel the myths that have obscured the transformative potential and complexities of this evolving partnership. With accurate information, policymakers and stakeholders can effectively navigate this evolving partnership and promote the best interests of Africa and its people.

About authors



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The Africa-China Centre for Policy and Advisory is a Sino-African research and policy think tank and advisory firm headquartered in Accra, Ghana.



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Who we are.



The Africa-China Centre for Policy and Advisory is a Sino-African research and policy think tank and advisory firm headquartered in Accra, Ghana.

The Centre is dedicated to providing unbiased policy and market research as well as distinct views on Africa-China relations.

We offer strategic guidance on key issues regarding China and Africa, covering multiple sectors and industries.

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