



Palace diplomacy: The means and the end to the Chinese control of African economy

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Abstract

Notably, China is a major global economy, thus increasing a debate parlance of foreign policy that sees China as a superpower. China's investment in Africa is visibly seen in African markets with substantial involvements of its multinationals in key commercial sectors such as infrastructure, telecoms, and agriculture. In the diplomatic arena, states that share a common perception of trade relations with preferred states are common topics. Not minding its positive economic impact in Africa, the debate around China-African relationship has continued to be filled with some sort of inconsistency and ambiguity. Using content analysis, this work intends to contribute to the general debate of Beijing's romance with African leaders underpinned by the question on whether the Chinese relationship with Africa could engender economic development on one hand and on the other hand seen as a threat to Africa's economic development. The paper argued that through the secret dealings of the Chinese companies with African leaders, couched as palace diplomacy, the Chinese have cornered African economy. Concluding that there is need for the reform of the approaches to curtailing socio-economic and political corruption in Africa in the form of applications of ideas molded and refined to transparency in dealing with the Chinese, while economic institutions in African is empowered to effectively fight corruption.

Keywords: Africans; Corruption; Diplomacy; Companies; Development

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1. Introduction

Within and outside, the Chinese image is that of a great power, and as China has become a major global economy, thus increasing a debate parlance of foreign policy that China has begun to emerge as a Superpower. Taylor (2007) however, founds that the difference between China's image of a great power and the leap to the status of a Superpower has been problematic for Beijing. Unexpectedly, China has been able to project itself to the international scene, particularly outside Asia.

To political leaders in Beijing, China is often referred to as the world's largest developing country and Africa as the continent with the most developing countries. Scholars like Shinn and Eisenman (2012) believes that China is hardly considered a classic developing country and Africa is by a whisker an organized political entity. They further comments that notwithstanding the position of China as a developing country, its influence on global affairs has continue to grow astronomically, while its actions to safeguard its interests have consistently been affecting the interests of the international community. Hence the assertion that outside its Asiatic neighbors, nowhere has China's political and economic relations with developing states received more attention than in Africa (Odgaard, 2022).

Esteban (2009) had comment that China is emerging in the 21st century as a global power and that Beijing has growing economic interests across the globe with an increasingly loud diplomatic voice among the committee of nations. With no exception, Africa is not left out in the Chinese global agenda. Hence in the last two decades China has double its presence in Africa, a region considered to be richly blessed in raw materials by the West. Arguably, this is one of the reasons why China has intensified its presence in the continent looking for energy and raw material suppliers, as well as markets for its construction companies, its cheap manufactures, apart from heighten its diplomatic ties with African states further punch up its prestige and international influence.

Shinn and Eisenman (2012) and Meservey (2018) had argued that Chinese' heavy presence in Africa has frequently attacked and undermine the presence of the U.S. in Africa as neo-colonialist and neo-imperialist, and in a practice that continues today, thus portraying China as a fellow developing country selflessly aiding the cause of African liberation. What Esteban (2009) referred to as Sino-American competition in Africa. Odgaard (2018) however argued that China's presence in Africa is not only based on protecting Chinese economic and security interests in Africa, but also focuses on providing development and stability that would benefit African local communities. On the contrary, Meservey (2020) believe that Beijing's giftings to Africa is deceptive and a face mask diplomacy propoganda, which is the newest permutation of a campaign aimed at promoting its own national economic and strategic interests.

China's investment in Africa is visibly seen in terms of its attractive and heavy presence in African markets with substantial involvements of Beijin's multinationals engaging in key commercial sectors such as infrastructure, mining, telecoms, and agriculture. The Centre for Chinese Studies (2007) believe that an essential pillar of China's overall engagement policy toward Africa is foreign aid motivated by political considerations accentuated by its socio-economic ideology, and pragmatic development assistance aligns to its growing commercial interests in Africa.

In maximizing its national interest, China has been very flexible in its diplomatic relations with African states and has been committed to the rules of the game which is preferred by its benefactor. This is the climax of Chinese principle of non-interference, and from this perspective, the domestic situation of the recipient country determines how Beijing's cooperation is conducted and its contribution to the development of such country.

Of course, there are a plethora of scholarly studies on China's relationship with different African countries. Using content analysis, this work intends to contribute to the general debate of Beijing's romance with African leaders in her bid to corner Africa's economy. Hence the question, whether this socioeconomic marriage of convenience between African states and China is a means and the end to the Chinese control of African economy.

2. Concept of palace diplomacy

Sally Mark (nd) defines diplomacy as the conventional method through which states influence the behavior and decisions of foreign governments as well as peoples which can be done at the levels of dialogue, negotiation, and other diplomatic means that would in any form lead to war or violence. It is an official channel of communication employed by the members of a system of states, a dispensation in which the members retain sovereignty but act with enthusiasm as if they are part of one body (Berridge et al., 2001).

Metaphorically, diplomacy is the prime currency of the international system, it occupies the bulk of activity between sovereign states. Rourke (2005) comments that it consists of formal and informal discussions aimed at resolving matters of mutual concern. Often, these talks, negotiations take place at bilateral or multilateral level. Usually, officially recognized diplomats trained in the intricacies of international protocol conduct such discussions. In the diplomatic arena, alliances with like-minded states, or at least states that share a common perception of threat, and trade relations with preferred states are common topics.

However, the rise of democracies, the media, and international institutions such as the United Nations, has brought about a shift towards a more public form of diplomacy. Thus, international summitry, when states' leaders come together to discuss high-profile foreign policy issues; have played an increasing role from the mid-twentieth century onwards as well. By nature, the target of diplomacy is to strengthen the state, or organization it serves in relation to others while advancing the socioeconomic and political interests in its charge. It therefore means that, diplomatic activity attempts to maximize a group's advantages without the risk of using force and if possible, without causing bitterness.

Within the framework of diplomacy, sovereign states engage themselves through diplomatic institutions such as embassies, consulates, and attachés with the views and mutual agreements. Within the diplomatic cycle, crises that arise between states are resolved peacefully through diplomacy. Abdurahmanli (2021) holds that the main purpose of diplomacy is to preserve peace by preventing conflicts, it is an effective method of communication and solution in international relations without racial, sectarian, or language discrimination in the world order. Abdurahmanli (2021) further sees diplomacy as the conduct of relations between states and

other entities involved in world politics through official policies and peaceful means. Henry Kissinger (former United States Secretary of State and National Security Advisor under President Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford) described diplomacy as a new world order and modern diplomacy as the balance of power between the forces of war and peace. It thus means that diplomacy is the means and the end to maintaining peaceful conduct of relations between states.

Abdurahmanli (2021) expresses the opinion that diplomacy covers many grounds because of globalization and has been distinguished in many fields such as mediation, multilateral, public diplomacy, shuttle diplomacy, nuclear diplomacy, coercive diplomacy, hard diplomacy, soft power diplomacy etc. However, one aspect of diplomacy that is uncommon or that has not been researched by scholars is palace diplomacy. Conceptually, palace diplomacy involves the use of gift (s) by developed sovereign states to induce the leaders of other sovereign states to gain access to the recipient leader's country. Meservey (2020) concur that central to palace diplomacy is lavishing states men with personal benefits, such as grand new workplaces that serve little or no purpose other than to elicit favor from the recipient governments.

Close to this type of diplomacy is ad hoc diplomacy. This type of diplomacy covers itinerant/travelling envoys, diplomatic conferences, and special missions sent to states for limited diplomatic purposes. This type of diplomacy was developed in Italy in the 15th century and implemented by the Italian ambassadors Abdurahmanli (2021). He argued that this type of diplomacy was described by the public as cheating, and cunning because it was conducted in a clandestine manner where only the heads of states [who benefits from the system] knows what is going on and to the detriment of the state.

Constantinou and Sharp (2016) conceives that in theory, diplomacy can be seen as a practice that produces, secures, and transforms the international systems and world orders, which is beyond statecraft pursuits. Thus, challenging the dominant accounts of scholars on what diplomacy is or ought to be. It is therefore, assumed that it is possible to identify and observe a peculiar diplomatic arrangement [such as palace diplomacy] which to everyone, or at least some thinkers, will agree is diplomacy [depending on the means by which the objective of the arrangement is achieved] and accept it and further study and scrutinize how it works, putting into consideration the generality of the people whose socio-economic interest might be significantly affected in the overall scheme of things.

Hence, palace diplomacy as an instrument of statecraft that practically raise the question about sincerity, representation, inclusiveness, and purpose. Observably, different diplomatic practices between developed and developing states of Africa, often marginalize and exclusively alienate some groups that may question the actions of their leaders but romance with, those in the palace of power consciously or unconsciously expose their counter/citizens to exploitation.

Adetiba (2022) had argued that diplomacy is an instrument of international engagement laden with an inestimable value capable of integrating the promotion of socio-economic, scientific, or cultural relations among sovereign states, while ensuring their commitment to the international agreements to defend the human rights of citizens as well as peaceful resolution of international disputes.

The argument that diplomacy often raises the question about representation, inclusiveness, and purpose shows that to a certain extent diplomatic moves may be secretive justifying the reason behind palace diplomacy. In a work titled *The Effectiveness of Secrecy in Diplomacy*, O'Gorman (2015) expresses the opinion that one of the integral features of diplomacy has been the use of diplomatic concealment or secrecy in its relations and negotiations, underpinned by the very essence of diplomacy of states. Hence the argument by Berridge et al. (2001) that secrecy is an essential component of diplomacy.

Berridge (2010) adds that secret diplomacy entails holding unto the secrecy of the very contents of a [bilateral or multi-lateral] negotiation between two or more states, keeping secret the knowledge and the content of an ongoing negotiations or agreement reached after diplomatic negotiations. If this is the case, it thus means that it becomes exceedingly difficult for leaders who is been influenced by other [powerful] state to open up on the terms of their engagements. The decades-long association of African leaders with Beijing to a certain extent has been hugely successful. However, China has been criticized that Beijing wants Africans to believe that it has their best interests at heart, and that Beijing is clandestinely milking African economy to advance its economic interest.

3. Chinese palace diplomacy vis-à-vis the African economy

Whether China is a superpower or a rising power with worldwide influence the Chinese interests are expanding astronomically, and on a global scale. To a certain extent China has established stable and lasting relations across the globe. Shinn and Eisenman (2012) had argued that except for Asia, no other major country can compete with the extent, the intensity, the speed, and the impact of China's relations in Africa.

China's Africa policy is based on its national economic and strategic interests, although with some sort of significant contributions to regional order. Odgaard (2022) believes that China's foreign policy [in whatever form] is not merely aimed at protecting Chinese economic and security interests but also focus on providing development and stability that benefit local communities. However, considering Beijing's foreign policy doctrines and the context in which Chinese policies are implemented overseas, one would begin to query the reasons behind the Chinese aggressive interest in Africa's economic development. For example, the Chinese' policy of non-interference in the political affairs of other states to a certain extent has allowed China to establish a global economic engagement notwithstanding the socio-political and economic differences with recipient countries Odgaard (2022).

Consequently, the contribution of China to economic and infrastructural development in Africa require some sort of policies without resulting to the use of force that is well-matched with the sense of facilitating socio-economic development while dealing with African states. However, the question is whether China partners with African states for the benefit of the Chinese' national interests or serves the purpose of mutual benefits. Odgaard (2022) believes that China have had to undertake economic development projects that link African economies together by infrastructure and communication without political conditionality in Africa,

thus, helping to put developing countries on a viable economic and social footing that engenders a sustainable political system, couched as economic diplomacy.

There are three ways of defining economic diplomacy. It connotes the management of international relations with emphasis on the economic dimension of a state's external relations, it can also be seen as a set of formulated strategies and tactics applied to fundamentally, achieve a restructuring of the existing international economic order, as well as promotes a nation's trade, commerce, and prosperity. What this portends to mean is that economic diplomacy is an integral part of world politics and in IR. Thus, countries whose foreign policy was hitherto dictated by their economic superiority and military supremacy are increasingly shifting their foreign policy priorities to the economic sphere through a thrust of economic diplomacy. Economic factors such as energy crisis, trade protection, instability in states' finance has always influence international relations vis-à-vis global demand and supply for resources (Tseng, 2008). Thus, it can be argued that China's relationship with African states using palace diplomacy is hidden under economic diplomacy dictated African economic woes.

According to Alden (2007), there is a similarity in the Chinese and African history and some sort of common colonial experiences vis-à-vis exploitation by the imperialists, victimization via externally funded civil wars and been subjected to ruinous socialist ideas. Ofosu and Sarpong (2022) added that about four decades ago, China and Africa were both labeled as poverty-stricken. They argued that they (China and Africa) were stuck in huge debt, with little or financial resources coupled with inadequate food for their ever-growing populations.

However, this has become part of Chinese history in that while states in Africa remain glued to their underdevelopment status and always at the mercy of their former colonial masters, the contemporary China has successfully achieved a remarkable transition from industrial shirker to industrial giant, this feat has become the pedestal upon which China has been able to penetrate the economy of Africans and some countries in South Asia. Cambodia is a perfect example. The relationship between Cambodia and China was officially sealed in July 1958 with practical cooperation in all fields of Cambodian economy as well as close communication and coordination in global and regional affairs (Phea, 2022). Debatably, the predicament of small states in a world of major powers that are often in conflict with each other has made smaller states to commit themselves to the protection of power states. Gilberg (2020) comments that the problem of relations between smaller states and larger powers is a crucial one for Cambodia, given the geopolitical facts confronting the leadership in Phnom Penh, while trying to navigate the difficult and unsettled relations between the various actors of varying size regionally and globally.

Hence, explaining this using shelter theory, which conceptualized policy options for small states that cannot ensure their own security and well-being giving its size and economy, thus seeking for shelter as provided by a benefactor or protector. The argument is that the power and the resources at the disposal of small states to diplomatically maneuver itself amongst powerful states is limited. Thus, their perception of diplomatic reality is different from that of larger and more powerful states meaning that they must seek shelter from these powerful states. To a certain extent, it becomes easier for smaller states to obtain needed assistance without becoming a client state of the protector.

Mearsheimer (2001) concur that small states attempt to reduce their risks and enhance their security by bandwagoning (this occurs when a weaker state decides that the cost of opposing a stronger power exceeds the benefits. The stronger power may offer incentives, such as the trade agreements, or protection, to induce the weaker state to join with it), and other diplomatic devices in which they either joins the bandwagon or coalition of a larger patron or attempts to get others to fight for it through passing the buck to somebody else and in return support their benefactor in safeguarding its legitimate rights and interests while responding to provocative actions from other powerful states like the United States [one of the two global superpowers].

In their diplomatic relations, according to Gilberg (2020), Cambodia and China have developed some sort of strong political relations. For example, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen visited China the coronavirus outbreak to showing that Cambodia stands with the Chinese people during at such a critical moment of its existence. In terms of political security relations China and Cambodia in 2019 signed Action Plan 2019-2023 on Building China-Cambodia Community of Shared Future. Economically, between 1994-2019, China remains Cambodia's largest FDI (21.81%), while pushing further a bilateral trade to 10 billion USD by 2023.

Although, there are important socio-political and economic differences between the Chinese and Cambodian societies, but a form of societal shelter is provided by mutual respect and acceptance of sovereignty in politics and economics, thus presumably, producing a win-win relationship argued Gilberg (2020). But who benefit most? China or Cambodia? It is possible to argue that both China and Cambodia get what they want and need out of the relationship. For example, Cambodia gets economic aid and assistance in terms of development, and China is rewarded through the expansion of its sphere of influence globally and within the Asiatic region.

The positive economic development of the Chinese, and the debate around China-African relationship has continued to be filled with inconsistency and ambiguity. It has been argued that although China's relationship with Africa could engender economic development on one hand but on the other hand, it may be seen as threat to Africa's economic development. Ofosu and Sarpong (2022) therefore believe that the effect of Chinese presence in Africa's economy no doubt will have negative effect on the economies of African states with reference to the transitional economies on the continent (transitional economies are those economies currently changing from a centrally planned economy to a market economy). Thus, questioning the Chinese romance with African leader instead of open economic schemes that could lead to employment generation in Africa while growing the African economy. Although, the Chinese loans, entwined with aid and trade, are to a certain degree cheap and easily accessible to African states with little or no string attached thus, representing a major shift compared to the strings-attached, and unfriendly economic policies of the West capable of making African states to remain impoverished and indebted to the West (Tan-Mullins et al., 2010).

It is true that Beijing's financial supports for African states has transformed the continent through a substantial resource-backed loans and grants to help finance the much-needed infrastructure projects on the continent, underpinned by the belief that the incessant conflict and economic instability on the continent can be minimized through economic development. Huang (2015) however argued that the loans taken by these states from Beijing are often tied to conditions where borrowers are made to purchase Chinese goods and services. Thus, helping Chinese companies to compete favorably for the share of the market with foreign enterprises. In a study conducted by Huang, it was discovered that close to 85 percent of Chinese companies

that execute developmental projects using foreign government loan projects between 1995 and 2010 ended up having a follow-up new project in the same countries.

The claim put forward by the Chinese to follow a policy of noninterference in the domestic cum political affairs of sovereign states according to (Kurlantzick, 2007) suggests that the decision on the allocation of financial aids to these countries decisions are made without considering the political institutions of these [recipient] countries. Western political pundits like Meservey (2018) consider this approach an opportune and rationale behind economic romance with corrupt and undemocratic governments, thus given credence to the application of palace diplomacy by the Chinese government. Collier (2007) concurs that the Chinese approach of not paying attention to political reforms in some of these states to a certain extent has helped to punch up dictatorial governments in Africa that are not sensitive to matters of good governance. Bräutigam (2009) however argued that Beijing's financial assistance to most developing [African states] does not necessarily equate to toxicity of these countries' infrastructural space and neither does the Chinese make governance of poorer quality in these countries.

Hence, Huang's (2015) argument that political stability of developing states where the Chinese have shown their interest forms the bedrock of Beijing' romance with these countries. If that is the case' what about countries like Somalia? From the WikiLeaks, the author noticed that, in Somalia for example, Beijing to a certain extent is not concerned with Somali politics, but economics, and thus position itself for commercial advantages in post-conflict Somalia. To this end China gave the Somali Mission to Kenya two vehicles for official and personal use.

Meservey (2018) comments that Chinese corruption in Africa takes more forms than paying bribes to win contracts. For example, it takes Namibian government close to two years to investigate 30 Chinese companies corrupt practices in the country over concerns that they were hiding illegal earnings. Meservey further reported that from the investigation, some Chinese business tycoons caught for running a \$300 million tax-fraud scheme. Environmental Investigation Agency (2014) reiterates that Chinese nationals are significantly, common players in the poaching syndicates causing chaos in Africa's wildlife, this is in addition to Chinese companies [and workers] who are notoriously flouting the environmental and labor standards of various African states. For example, Jacobs (2017) agreed with EIA that as many as two-thirds of Chinese boats fishing in West African waters are there illegally and are rapidly depleting West African fishing stocks.

Doumbouya et al. (2017) followed up that most Chinese ships are so large that they scoop up as many fish in one week as Senegalese boats catch in a year, thus costing West African economies \$2 billion a year. The actions of these Chinese firms cum fishing boats put a question on the issues of transparency, low governance and high corruption orchestrated and supported by some African leaders thus given room for back door policy dubbed as palace diplomacy that favors the Chinese at the expense of the sustainability of developing economies of Africa. By international standard, these Chinese fishing companies have inadvertently breached the international or national laws of these countries and effective prosecution of defaulters must be addressed.

Cited in Ofori and Sarpong (2022), Brautigam et al. (2018) comments that the Chinese economic activities metaphorically couched as geese can be grouped into four areas, those seeking strategic investment opportunities in Africa with each presenting different economic development prospects targeting structural

transformation in the industrial sector. These are large multinationals gunning for new locations to produce their products as part of global networks and value chains, the second group are those companies strategically positioning themselves to exploit the African local-market, the third are the raw material-seeking companies to feed the headquarters back at home, and the fourth group are those small companies that move together in flocks. These groups are found mostly in retail businesses across the continent. For example, in South Africa, they are the leading sector in retail businesses.

The deficit in Africa's infrastructural development and partly corruption [which has made way for several companies to thrive in Africa] arguably, is responsible for Africa's underdevelopment. Thus, giving the Chinese the opportunity to cash in on the continent's infrastructure finance gap.

Ofori and Sarpong (2022) supports this assertion that some Chinese loan deals with African governments lack the necessary transparency to fit with the often-hyped win-win Afro-Chinese relationship and that the terms and conditions of Afro-Chinese financial agreements have always been skewed and in favor of Chinese interests. Meservey (2018) had reported that corruption is often a key element of Chinese economic engagement overseas, particularly Africa. Sun et al. (2017) in a survey conducted in 2017 found that between 60% to 87% of Chinese firms polled in Africa admitted to paying a bribe to get a license to operate. What this translates to mean is that there is likely hood that every active Chinese aid projects in Africa are punched up because of the Chinese and its Africa's counterpart's love for and the willingness to effect on norms.

According to Dreher et al. (2018) countries that are more corrupt are likely to attract greater non concessional official Chinese cash flows than do less-corrupt countries; thus, explaining the romance of some African leaders with the Chinese companies that are comfortable and willing to play the corruption game. One aspect of the Chinese relationship with developing economies of Africa that call for investigation is the labor relationship between Africans and their Chinese employers. Because of the seemingly contribution of China to African economy and infrastructural development, its popularity as partner in progress has grown exponentially in the continent (Sun, 2017). However, the Chinese employers in Africa to a certain extent has for one reason or the other not enjoying the same acceptance/popularity as African and European employers.

It has been argued that Beijing's dealings with Africans are characterized by subtle, elusive, and clandestine relationship with African employees, with traces of the abuse of labor laws by the Chinese entrepreneurs which is against the fundamental human rights of Africans. Hence the reason behind using African leaders to get to Africans. For African entrepreneur, the speedy growth of Chinese-owned companies operating in the continent has always been a cause for concern. Chinese-owned companies have been accused of lack of transparency, non-adherence to the environmental and labor conditions of their hosts' countries, hence Beijing's opting for the practice of palace diplomacy in her dealings with African states. Carciotto and Chikohomero (2022) comments that research has shown that lack of safety characterizes the working conditions in Chinese-run copper mining companies in Zambia and abusive of labor practices among Chinese companies in several other African countries. Hence the concerns raised by researchers about labor rights violations and the unsafe employment conditions negatively impacting the relationships between African workers and Chinese their employers.

Carciotto and Chikohomero, (2022) further reiterates that wages, for low-skilled workers, remain low and in most cases below the minimum wage in such country. Sometimes Africans are dismissed unfairly without following the appropriate disciplinary and dismissal process. In most African countries, writes Carciotto, and Chikohomero, (2022), labor matters are often difficult to resolve because of the diplomatic connections between the Chinese companies and African political leaders. Where there are labor unions to fight for the right of the workers, the unions are either threatened or intimidated by the political class to the detriment of the workers' rights. It is unfortunate that African leaders/governments does not have a defined and solid policies that prioritize the common good of poor Africans that can guide China-Africa relations. By implication, African public officials are not serving the interest of Africans but are only interested in their financial gains through their deals with the Chinese.

Without doubt, states are the major actors in dealing with international relations, and two-way interaction, contradiction and competition are common among countries in the international community, which is why China, for the reason of its self-perceived position in the international system, has constructed a fairly consistent foreign policy aimed at preventing or limiting the development of hegemony, whilst at the same time trying to carve out space for itself as its economy continues to grow (Taylor, 2007). Hence, the reason behind China's making Africa as top priority in its overall economic strategy. Palace diplomacy therefore helps to explain the reason behind an increasingly obvious phenomenon in relation to the Chinese approach towards Africa.

4. What can Africans do?

Answering the above question entails identifying and defining the major problem confronting Africa. One major impediment to development in Africa is corruption. To a certain level corruption has cost Africa so much that its socio-economic and by extension its political development has been reduced to depending on aids from external [buoyant] donors thus restricting its upward infrastructural development. Thus, Kempe (2000) labelled it as the 'AIDS of democracy' which is destroying the future of many societies in the continent. If the level of corruption in Africa is as deed as described by Kempe, it means that Africa must do everything within its capacity to fight corruption.

There are indications that the level of corruption in Africa is deeply rooted in the patterns and expectations of political and social life of its leaders which has since tickle down to its citizens. Corruption is an enemy of economic development owing to its various vices. Therefore, any political entity that overlook and allow it to thrive is often plagued with socio-economic and political vices. Debatably, corruption robs a nation of its integrity while poverty is given the opportunity to enslave its citizens, precisely it is an enemy of economic development, hence it is a deliberate act undertaken with the intent of depriving the state of its socio-economic resources cum development by obtaining personal or private gains against the interests of the state.

Lawal (2007) expresses the opinion that in Africa, corruption has continued to permeate its existing political structures. It takes place when parties questioningly alter/manipulate the socio-political structure

and the behavior of its functionaries to produce dishonest, and unfaithful socio-economic situations (Otite, 2000). What Jain (2011) couched as political corruption which arises from a rogue dictator's control over a country's resource allocation and expenditure decisions.

Ngumbi (2020) explains that political corruption involves political leaders and takes place when state institutions are infiltrated by corrupt political elements who turns state's political instruments to an instrument of self-enrichment, characterized by violation of laws with impunity, clientelism, and patronage. By implication, these practices have given the Chinese the leverage to punch up their deals with any [African] country willing to go along with them. There is need to pay attention to this cancerous phenomenon because of its negative cost to Africa's socio-economic development. As a result of the level of involvement and position of actors involved, corruption has serious negative consequences on all aspects of governance and socio-economic spheres of life. Hence the inevitability of the need to constantly review and prioritize the fight against corruption in Africa as well strengthen the strategies deployed towards its elimination from governance structures.

Jain (2011) identifies three possible reasons why corruption thrive in Africa, the first is that there is rents associated with a government's regulatory powers, secondly, it requires that corrupt bureaucracies or government institutions to a certain degree be independent within the remaining administrative structure of the government, and thirdly that the public institutions controlling corruption be weak and ineffective. This explains why the Chinese have been able buy their way into the hearts of unsuspecting African leaders. Politically, this phenomenon can stimulate political instability and inefficiency of the public service Lawal (2007). At international level, corruption is considered an enemy of economic development as it projects a poor image of the continent as well as portray the interpersonal and business relationships with other country weakened.

This work believes that there are laws that govern the fight against corruption and both African leaders and the Chinese leader are signatory to these laws. For example, African states have established laws and institutions to govern the fight against corruption. The United Nations Convention Against Corruption (2004), UN Political Declaration and Action Plan Against Money Laundering (IMOLIN, 1998), and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (African Union, 2020). These are some of the international laws that attempt to oversee the fight against corruption. Ngumbi (2020) however remarked that there is no harmonized international structures and frameworks that can be applied in implementing these laws, apart from the fact that every African state retains their individual sovereignty thus choosing whether to ratify such laws or not. Hence the opportunity for the Chinese companies to engage individual political agents, state-owned or government linked firms to gain unfair advantage in Africa having discover the inability of African states to resist corruption.

From the foregoing, the fight against corruption in Africa vis-à-vis the Chinese activities in the continent requires the commitment and cooperation of those who benefit from it, which is not in their self-interest. Debatably, this effort should include requesting for, compiling, and publication of reports of Chinese companies corrupts engagement with African leaders. There should be a mutually supportive broader socio-economic and political policy reforms that gives credence to reduction in government involvement in the economy, thus

streamlining the functions government as well as limit the blanket approach to decision making authority of political leaders, with the aim of eliminating government monopolies and economic distortions that often facilitate corrupt practices.

On the 17th of October 2019, in Vienna (Austria), the Chinese government and the UN signed a memorandum of understanding on combating corruption, to strengthen cooperation on the implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in key areas such as prevention, criminal justice responses to corruption offences, law enforcement cooperation and stolen asset recovery (UNODC, 2019). It is therefore imperative for the Chinese government to abide by its commitments agreed to in the U.N. Convention Against Corruption on cooperation in combating corruption. This convention requires every country to establish laws that criminalize the bribing of foreign officials to gain business advantage. Giving the high level of Chinese shady businesses in Africa it is pertinent to say that China has yet to be committed to its commitment to fighting corruption in Africa.

5. Conclusion

Of course, there are a plethora of scholarly works on diplomacy, its meaning, types, and the dynamics of its usage to restructure/reorganize battered relationship with scanty efforts on the nexus between palace diplomacy and the economic interest of the Chinese in Africa. This work examines the Chinese romance with African leaders in her bid to corner Africa's economy, questioning the rationale behind the socio-economic marriage of convenience between African states and China.

Through the lens of palace diplomacy as an instrument of statecraft the study raise the question about the Chinese' sincerity, representation, and purpose in Africa. This study has discovered that although the Chinese claimed to love Africans and have its best interests at heart, but the frequent use of corruption by some of its state-owned or government linked firms to gain unfair advantage has proved otherwise, because some Chinese loan deals with African governments lack the necessary transparency to fit with the often-hyped win-win Afro-Chinese relationship and that the terms and conditions of Afro-Chinese financial agreements have always been skewed and in favor of Chinese interests. This work believes that various advocates of Chinese companies in Africa are motivated more by the economic benefits accruable to them than to Africans as a whole and therefore conclude that this fall short of the promised peaceful, free, and prosperous African countries.

This paper therefore suggests that there is need for the reform of the approaches to curtailing socio-economic and political corruption in Africa in the form of alternative applications and ideas molded and refined to transparency in dealing with the Chinese companies, while economic institutions in Africa is empowered to effectively fight corruption.

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