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Reassessing Leading Research on China-Africa Engagement in Light of a Weakening Economy

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Honors Thesis

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Introduction:

Over the past couple of decades, literature that seeks to understand the growing implications of the rise of China has multiplied immensely. Alongside many discussions of the burgeoning economic relationship, military capabilities, and political systems, the body of literature that has garnered the most attention has been the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and what it means for the globe. Since many nations within Sub-Saharan Africa have chosen to align with China and join the BRI for many different purposes, many scholars view the BRI as a catalyst that could bring about change to the global geoeconomic status quo.

This paper intends to provide a comprehensive analysis of the literature surrounding China's economic presence in Africa, with a specific focus on the impact from loans provided to African countries as part of the BRI framework. By examining both the positive and negative impacts discussed in the wider literature, this paper seeks to offer insights into the multifaceted dynamics of China-Africa economic relations and their implications for development outcomes on the continent.

However, considering the lack of analysis regarding the impacts of the BRI in Sub-Saharan Africa within the changing socioeconomic context of China's economy, as many unforeseen circumstances have taken place in the late 2010s that severely impacted China's global geopolitical priorities, the latter part of the paper will shift its focus to China's recent economic downturn and what it means for the existing understandings of the impact of BRI loans. As data presented later in the paper will illustrate how Chinese loans granted to Africa under the BRI have decreased considerably, this presents the importance of a reassessment of China's engagement with Africa. Moreover, given that much of the existing literature and understanding of the implications made in regard to the BRI were published prior to 2016 or rely on datasets that are also outdated, this research paper intends to illustrate the importance of a reevaluation of the BRI under an updated perspective and how many key implications will likely change since the peak of the BRI. Overall, this research paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on China's economic presence in Africa by providing a comprehensive reassessment of the positive and negative impacts of the loans provided through the BRI amidst China’s economic downturn.

Developing Status of Africa:

Africa is Underdeveloped:

The African continent is currently one of the most underdeveloped regions of the world. Whether the discussion revolves around the economy, governance, or health, the issue of the continent’s chronic underdevelopment and backwardness never seems to fade from scholarly understanding even across various academic spheres (Ojo 2016). In fact, the Foreign Policy and Fund for Peace has gone on to categorize most African states as fragile states due to their inability to provide core functions to the majority of their local population (2023).

Moreover, Africa’s hindered development status can be attributed to the lack of proper infrastructure including adequate transportation networks, energy systems, and healthcare facilities (Haar 2023). It is important to recognize that the lack of efficient transportation networks constrains economic growth by impeding the movement of goods, services, and people. In particular, inadequate roads, ports, and railways increase transportation costs, hinder trade, and limit access to markets, thus stifling economic opportunities and perpetuating poverty cycles. Furthermore, as the lack of proper energy systems and healthcare facilities are also responsible for essential deficits related to socio-economic development, these foundational issues need to be addressed as the absence of these factors could lead to unnecessary suffering.

Additionally, the absence of adequate infrastructure causes urbanization efforts in Africa to ultimately fail. The issues of congestion, pollution, social inequalities, and poor quality of life for the local population can only really be addressed through essential infrastructure development (Guttman and Madden 2020). Therefore, to address these issues, it is a primary goal for many African nations to mobilize available resources in order to finance infrastructure development and bridge the infrastructure gap. However, many African countries do not have access to the necessary amount of funds and infrastructure development resources to beat the perpetuating cycle of underdevelopment. Consequently, most African governments are still limited in providing even necessities, exacerbating the growing gap between itself and other developed nations.

Aid as a Necessary Input:

As a result of these unfortunate circumstances, much of the globe has brought to attention the importance of foreign aid and the sharing of policy recommendations for the socioeconomic growth of the continent. Given that Africa currently struggles to supply their local population with all the necessary means of basic necessities in seasons of normality let alone in the face of an environmental or political crisis, foreign aid has acted as one of the crucial pillars of support for providing lifesaving assistance and long term development. In fact, many Sub-Saharan African nations have consistently been shown to have troubling indicators of extreme poverty across the years. To put this into detail, Africa is currently the continent with the highest rate of malnutrition and infant mortality across the globe (SOS Children's Village 2024). Additionally, given that the Human Development Index (HDI)—which is a statistical measurement that is comprised of average life expectancy, school attendance period, expected school attendance period as well, and per capita income—has repeatedly placed Sub-Saharan African countries including “Malawi, Liberia, Burundi, Eritrea, Chad, Sierra Leone and Niger at last place,” this goes to show the importance and need for development assistance within this continent. Overall, foreign aid serves as a vital catalyst for promoting resilience, progress, and prosperity in Africa. With this, it is estimated that Africa has received hundreds of billions of US dollars each year, with some estimations of the total received foreign aid totaling over a trillion dollars (Moyo 2009; Wescott 2022).

Although there is a widespread agreement that Africa needs development, vigorous debates have emerged questioning whether aid indeed fosters economic growth. While it might seem intuitive to assume that financial assistance alone suffices for economic development, the diverse findings from empirical studies examining the impact of foreign aid on economic growth suggest otherwise (Alemu and Lee 2015). The consensus now acknowledges that the ramifications of foreign aid are far from straightforward. In fact, foreign aid can exacerbate economic inequalities, fuel corruption, instigate political instability, and is not inherently beneficial to local communities. Consequently, various nations have expressed keen interest in discerning the most effective and consistent approaches in stimulating economic growth in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, numerous global entities have sought insights into which qualitative factors accompanying aid are best suited to bolstering the development of the underdeveloped continent.

Traditional Western Aid:

Historically, Western countries, particularly those in Europe and North America, have been major contributors to foreign aid and are often driven by a sense of moral obligation to alleviate poverty and suffering in less developed regions of the world. As a result, humanitarian aid has been a central component of Western foreign aid efforts.

U.S. Assistance for Africa, Select State Department and USAID Accounts

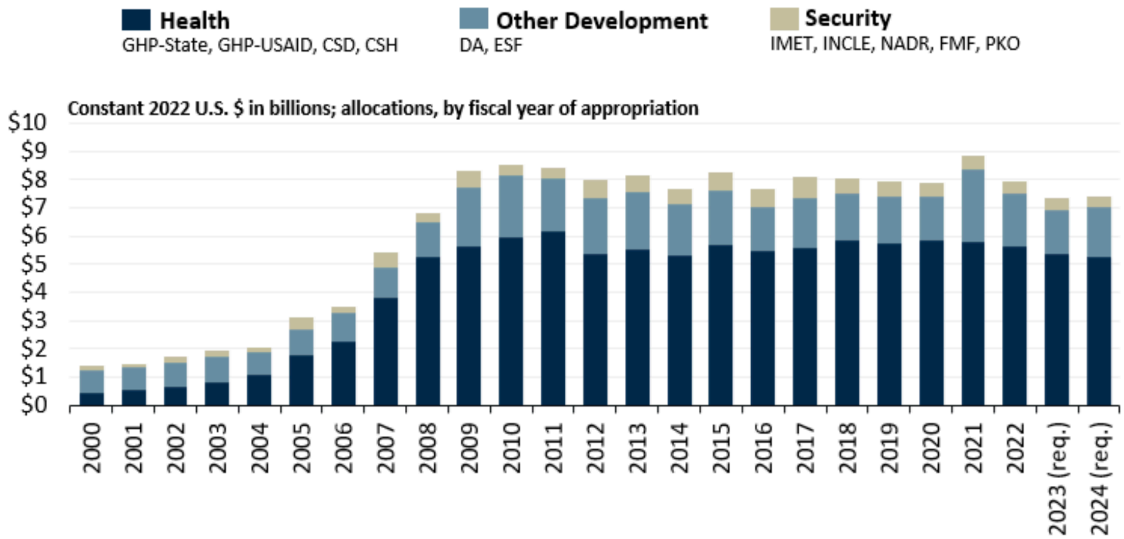

Figure 1. Arief, Alexis, Lauren Ploch Blanchard, Nicolas Cook, and Tomás F. Husted. 2023. "U.S. Assistance for Sub-Saharan Africa: An Overview." *Congressional Research Service*. https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R46368

As illustrated in figure 1, the US alone has invested billions of dollars into Africa within the past two decades, with a large majority of the aid being used to assist in the lack health programs. However, when it comes to addressing the root issues of underdevelopment, Western institutions have come to argue that democratic governments and accountable governance policies are a necessary step for the growth and prosperity of the continent. In fact, Western research has emphasized the importance of "good governance" of recipient nations—which is measured by the presence of low corruption, healthy rule of law, transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making—as a key factor in the effectiveness of foreign aid (Ika et al. 2012; Burnside and Dollar 2004; Dollar and Levin 2005). Additionally, as there exists supplemental research that also indicates the importance of democracy and specific macroeconomic policies for healthy aid effectiveness within aid-recipient nations, it is clear to see that "selectivity" has become an important component for Western aid (Isham et al. 1997; Isham and Kaufmann 1999).

Nonetheless, as the World Bank was successful in inserting itself into the development history of Africa, many nations that have reached economic development often join the multilateral institution in offering support for developing countries (World Bank 2023). However, China has sought to utilize its own distinct approach in engaging with the developing world, with many characteristics of its approach differing from the standard that the World Bank has set. Overall, China's entrance into offering development assistance has become a major focus for recent literature as scholars offer differing understandings regarding the impacts of China's approach.

China's Entrance in Africa:

The beginning of China's modernized pursuit of abundantly allocating domestic resources toward foreign investments can be traced back to the creation of the Forum for China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 and Chinese President Xi Jinping's public statements made in Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013 (Yu 2022; Berman, McBride, and Chatzky 2023). Through the FOCAC, China was able to establish strong bilateral relationships with many different African nations and establish its position as a donor nation to the continent (Institute of Developing Economies 2009). But, after the speeches in 2013, Xi Jinping introduced a new major step in China's efforts to take a leadership position in further globalization efforts, under the name of the One Belt, One Road initiative—which eventually became the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). From its inception, China declared that it intended to create a mutually beneficial collection of development and investment initiatives to not only promote China's economic transition but also boost economic development in countries that required assistance (Berman, McBride, and Chatzky 2023). In particular, China viewed the BRI as a way for new trade linkages to develop, export markets to cultivate, Chinese incomes to boost, and China's excess productive capacity to be exported—which were all necessary steps for China to transition out of the “middle-income status”.

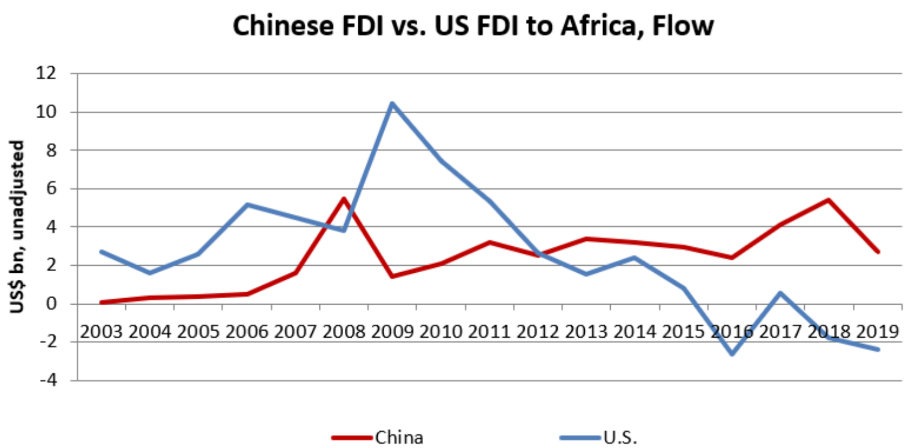

Figure 2. China Africa Research Initiative. 2024. “Chinese Investment in Africa.” *Johns Hopkins University*. https://www.sais-cari.org/chinese-investment-in-africa

While the extent of this initiative would not be made clear until years down the line, it was clear that the CCP had no intention of treating the Belt and Road Initiative as a mere catchphrase, as it was even included in China’s 13th Five-Year Plan and a central leading small group was created just to manage this endeavor (Murphy 2019). To this date, the BRI managed to capture the cooperation of 151 other nations, with most of these nations coming from Sub-Saharan Africa—44 countries (Green Finance and Development Center 2023). Although this statistic can be skewed as the continent of Africa contains many different nations, China’s presence in Africa should not be understated as 45.7 percent of China’s cumulative foreign aid had been given to countries in Africa alone by the end of 2009 (Dews 2014). Additionally, since this time, China also managed to surpass the US by becoming Africa’s largest trading partner, cementing its presence in the developing continent. Moreover, as witnessed in the lines in figure 2, China also became the largest bilateral donor of foreign direct investment to Africa within a similar time period as well.

With Africa comprising over 50 countries characterized by relatively poor governance records and low standards of living, the selective nature of World Bank projects has, in essence, pushed numerous African nations to seek collaboration with a development institution that exhibits greater openness to working with recipient governments. While there continues to be some skepticism as to the health of the bilateral relationships formed through the BRI, the existence and growth of these relationships have become evident as trade between China and Africa has surged drastically from $1 billion in 1980 to $128 billion in 2016 (Venkateswaran 2023). Moreover, as China's cumulative loans to Africa have grown to be totaled at $143 billion, China has also become Africa's largest bilateral creditor as well.

China's Turn to Africa:

Rationale for this Shift:

Through this understanding of China and its goals for the development and prosperity of its nation, the growing relationship between China and Africa becomes much more comprehensible. In particular, China's ability to procure greater energy resources found on the African continent through the mutual relationship founded in the BRI is a crucial factor in the growing loans made to the developing continent. Given that limitations on energy can slow economic expansion and place a strain on the public image of the CCP, compiling greater sources of energy is even more important and necessary. This is best understood when taken in context as China is predicted to make up 40 percent of the world's oil consumption by 2030 and 30-40 percent of the world's metal consumption by 2025 (National Development and Reform Commission 2019). Comparatively, this is fifty percent more than the total American consumption of oil (U.S. Energy Information Administration 2023). Thus, the accumulation of reliable energy resource reserves has become a point of unmistakable importance. As a result, China’s turn to the continent of Africa was almost bound to occur as the region is home to land rich in oil and mineral deposits. In fact, the UN Environment Programme has gone on to state that Africa currently contains an estimated 30 percent of the world’s mineral reserves and 90 percent of the world’s chromium and platinum—which are essential components in the production of goods and advanced technology (2024).

Moreover, complementary motivations for China's rationale for pursuing a growing economic relationship with Africa also comes from its desire to expand its market presence in Africa and to gain opportunities for Chinese businesses to export goods/services. Given that Africa currently has the highest potential out of all continents to experience a growth in its middle-class population, this can also provide an opportunity for the growth of demand for Chinese electronics and consumer goods. A UN policy brief even shared that Africa’s middle-class population could increase to more than 40 percent of the continent’s total population on the continent by 2060 (Duarte 2023). As Africa stands as one of the few regions with the potential for an industrial revolution, it naturally attracts global economic interest. Therefore, with China holding the greatest capacity to export businesses in the industrial sector and desire to transition towards a high-end manufacturing-based economy, its decision to export its productive capabilities to Africa holds significant economic importance for both regions, given the high potential for economic growth.

On the other hand, China’s involvement in the continent of Africa also acts as one of China’s most important political decisions as China’s role as a global lender of financial opportunities, subsequently places China as a global leader in politics as well. Given that China has had a first-hand experience with the negative consequences that come from over-dependence on the Western-led global economy in the 2008 financial crisis, China’s desire to become its own economic leader follows rational thought. This is strongly supported by research that has estimated that China experienced a thirty percent drop in its gross domestic product and annual growth rate as a consequence of the 2008 financial crisis (Yueh 2010). As a result, it is clearly understood that China has a wide array of motivations for its turn to Africa, spanning from the topic of energy resources, expansion of markets, and shift towards political hegemony.

Although the West's emphasis on investing in capacity-building projects began as a method for better aid effectiveness and remained as one of the most important factors of growth for the continent of Africa, the transformation of China into a donor nation has since changed the face of development for Sub-Saharan Africa. Rather than following the Western model or supporting Western institutions, China has had a strong desire to use development projects as a mutually beneficial method of bilateral engagement. As a result, research has shown that the Western investment form of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is heavily contrasted by China's heavy investments in the loan category of Other Official Flows (OOF). According to the definitions provided by the OECD-DAC, "grants and low-interest loans that governments or intergovernmental organizations provide to developing countries for the purpose of improving socioeconomic conditions qualify as ODA" (2022). On the other hand, "loans and export credits that governments or intergovernmental organizations issue and price at or near market rates qualify as OOF." Even though institutions such as the World Bank have invested in the continent of Africa for a much longer period of time, the rise of China as seen in the BRI is extraordinarily difficult to ignore as its distinct approach in favor of large-scale development aid has caught the attention of many different African countries.

At the same time, based on the sheer number of African nations who have already signed on to the BRI program since its commencement, it is also apparent that many African nations have come to view China as a mutually beneficial geoeconomic partner, rather than a rogue institution as stated by arguments made by some critics (Roopanarine 2013). As much of Sub-Saharan Africa is currently lagging behind the rest of the world, the availability of loans specialized in boosting the industrial capacity in the continent is looked upon very favorably. In fact, given that Sub-Saharan Africa has ultimately reached a point in their status as a developing region in which their income gap with the rest of the world has sadly grown, the presence of external methods for economic growth has become more important (Selassie and Hakobyan 2021). For example, given that much of the modernized world has arguably become fully digitalized while some nations in Africa continue to struggle to provide electricity to even 20 percent of their household population, there is an extremely important need for development investment as the continent may perpetually stay behind the times (Hairsine 2023).

While the economic engagement between the World Bank and Africa is perceived as the safest and healthiest due to its focus on aid and financial grants, it has not garnered a significantly more favorable acceptance than China's involvement. This is because World Bank aid packages and grants come with stringent implementation policies, requirements related to regime type, and expectations of good governance. In contrast, China primarily engages in bilateral trade, loan agreements, and market investments, making its presence significantly felt in Africa. Despite the greater economic risk associated with Chinese loans compared to World Bank grants, African nations are drawn to the potential for high stimulus that China offers to further economic productivity. As a result, Africa's increasing reliance on Chinese loans has arguably become more crucial for Sub-Saharan Africa than it is for China.

Evidence of Shift:

The ramping up of loans from China to Africa has been a significant trend that defined much of the existing literature regarding the implications of the BRI. Because connected relationships formed through foreign aid and investments are reflections of economic and geopolitical interests, China's engagement with Africa is also a demonstration of a globally changing geopolitical landscape. As seen within figure 3, which illustrates the aggregate yearly average of Chinese loans to Africa, China's investments in Africa have skyrocketed within the past number of years. In fact, given that the early periods of Chinese loan investments to Africa hovered just around 1 billion dollars and has since reached levels close to a yearly average of 18 billion dollars through relatively consistent levels of growth, this also goes to signify China's determination in maintaining commitments to the development sector of Africa.

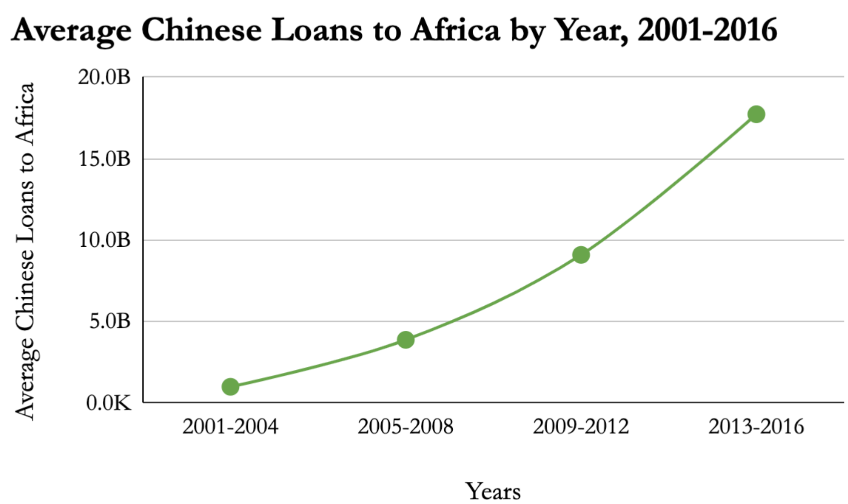

Figure 3. Global Development Policy Center. 2022. "Chinese Loans to Africa Database." *Boston University*. https://www.bu.edu/gdp/chinese-loans-to-africa-database/

With the growth of China's involvement in Africa, recent literature has sought to explore and understand the implications that come with the geopolitical and economic transformations that have developed within the past few decades. However, given the complexity of China's role, this has led to a broad array of perspectives on its impact. In the discussion that follows, this paper will separate out those that are positive and negative.

Positive Impacts of Chinese Loans to Africa:

In this section, the positive impacts of China's loans to Africa will be explored across six categories. First, the initial subsection will examine the transformative effects of Chinese investment in the development of transportation infrastructure, explaining how improved connectivity has led to economic growth and regional integration. Second, China's role in the creation of local jobs will be explored, highlighting how its investments have stimulated employment opportunities within African economies. Following this, China's positive reputation for its bureaucratic efficiency in executing development projects and how it has been received upon favorably will be analyzed. Subsequently, China's influence in Africa's overarching sector development will also be analyzed, citing evidence from the holistic positive effects of the presence of Chinese loan-based projects. Additionally, the next subsection will analyze China's role as a supplement to Western aid organizations, particularly focusing on its ability to complement ongoing initiatives to address Africa's development challenges. Finally, the last subsection will delve into the positive impacts of China's technological transfer processes with Africa, and the subsequent economic gains that come as a result. Through this enumerated examination, this section will provide a nuanced understanding of the positive ramifications of China's engagement in Africa and its implications for the continent's development trajectory.

Transportation Infrastructure Development:

In line with public statements regarding intent, China's most cited positive impact through the BRI has been the development of much-needed transportation infrastructure in developing nations. For example, through the loans offered by the China Eximbank to the government of Kenya, a 50.4-kilometer highway from Nairobi City Center to the town of Thika in Kiambu County was successfully constructed (Dreher et al. 2022). The development of this highway serves as a key example of the positive impact that can come from BRI loans, as Kenya was facing a traffic demand that was almost twice as large as the existing capacity. Given that many Kenyans resided in cities outside of the capital, as it was cheaper for the native population, the development of the highway allowed for a better means of navigation across the country, and the results were almost immediately visible. Following the completion of the project, data retrieved from completion reports have stated that traffic flows increased from 85,000 vehicles per day to 123,000 vehicles per day and journey speeds rose from 8 kilometers per hour to at least 45 kilometers per hour in sections with the highest levels of traffic (African Development Bank Group 2017). By reducing traffic times and opening the region to a greater number of communities, the implementation of the development project has since opened up opportunities for further economic growth for the Kenyan economy.

In addition, previous literature has often criticized World Bank projects for doing a poor job of following their rhetoric with proper implementation. Research has shown that there has been a disproportionate absence of World Bank projects in disadvantaged jurisdictions within developing countries (Mu and Van de Walle 2009; Chen, Mu, and Ravallion 2008). Furthermore, supporting research has even indicated that World Bank projects have tended to be located within wealthier jurisdictions (Öhler et al. 2019). While some of these trends have shown to be consistent with BRI projects as well, there is a strong potential for the BRI to act as a special case with a net positive impact due to the qualities of BRI focusing on "connective infrastructure" (Dreher et al. 2022). The primary infrastructure development that is funded by OECD-DAC aid agencies has been in the form of overland (interior-to-interior) transportation networks between countries (Bonfatti and Poelhekke 2017). In contrast, China has chosen to focus on interior-to-coast transportation networks. While both approaches are good, given that interior-to-coast transportation networks are more specialized in reducing excessive concentration within small cities and creating pathways for better domestic spatial equality, there is strong evidence to explain how the impacts from the quality of infrastructure development from China surpasses that of the West. Notably, China appears to be adopting similar spatial inclusion policies seen in their own "Develop the West Campaign" as a blueprint for developing local markets in Africa (Dreher et al. 2022). This approach aims to stabilize prices, encourage technology sharing, and make it easier for people to get to work by reducing travel times. Although World Bank projects are nonetheless significant, the direct economic impact of China's BRI has led to a more even distribution of economic activity across different regions.

This distinction in the quality of the transportation-based BRI projects being focused on interior-to-coast infrastructure is better understood by analyzing the unfortunate trends of landlocked nations. In his book *The Bottom Billion*, Collier argues that being landlocked is inherently a serious disadvantage to the economic performance of a nation (2007). Given that economic costs are significantly higher for land-based transport/trade in comparison to naval-based transport/trade, it is no surprise to see that most of the world's cities with the highest volume of economic movement are found in coastal cities. The detriments of being landlocked are further understood as only 20 percent of Africa's population lives by the sea or sea-navigable river while over 80 percent of Western Europe's population lives with available means for naval transportation (Ali 2022; Collet and Engelbert 2013; Gallup, Sachs, and Mellinger 1999). Therefore, considering that the economies of many landlocked nations are under more geographic constraints that can directly harm the economic health of a nation, a growing presence of transportation to naval ports can act as a quintessential method for circumventing existing limitations. As a result, creating better means and ready access to the coast for landlocked nations through the BRI is a meaningful contribution that can alter the economic stagnation that many underdeveloped countries struggle to overcome.

As China has sought to pursue a large-scale project-based approach in its financial support for African nations, it is imperative to understand that these projects are by no means a method of Chinese financial self-glorification, but rather, a tragic depiction of Africa's underdevelopment. To put the level of Africa's transportation infrastructure into perspective, data has revealed that only 43 percent of Africa's rural population has access to an all-season road, and just 53 percent of roads on the continent are paved (Gavas and Pleeck 2023). Additionally, Africa's average transportation network density remains at 2.5 kilometers per 1000 square kilometers. In contrast, the global average transportation network density is almost nine to ten times that of Africa's, at 23 kilometers per 1000 square kilometers. Furthermore, considering how transportation network density also revolves around automobile usage, it can also be understood that Africa currently suffers from an under-present necessary method of transportation as well (Herriges 2019). Therefore, this illustrates the immediate need for infrastructure development opportunities for Sub-Saharan Africa as the transportation of passengers and goods remains as one of the most important factors for economic development. Additionally, as seen with the exponential economic development found in the economic history of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, the investment in transportation infrastructure within these countries not only acts as a symbol of financial capability but also as a representation of a comfortable and reliable quality of life (Leather 2022). While Africa lacks the necessary population density to land ratio as many East Asian nations to have an equally efficient mode of transportation access, this does not deny the argument that the transportation infrastructure development options found within the BRI are extremely important opportunities for economic and social growth.

Job Creation:

Following in line with China's essential involvement in providing additional means for the development of transportation infrastructure, the presence of Chinese BRI projects also comes with the added positive implication of creating more jobs for the African population. Given that many of China's initiatives require a diverse range of skills, from engineering and construction to project management and administration, it is evident that the local labor forces often directly benefit from these projects. Overall, the provision of employment in various capacities can act as a means for significant poverty alleviation and economic empowerment. In fact, it is estimated that China's involvement in Africa between 2010 and 2019 has led to the annual creation of 18.6 thousand new jobs (Galal 2024). In addition, given that the US has only led to an annual creation of 12.1 thousand new jobs, this places China as the leading investor in the continent in terms of job creation.

Moreover, considering that the BRI's impact on job creation is expected to extend to Africa's ancillary sectors and the broader economy, this will consequently lead to the spurring of demand for other essential services such as warehousing, transportation, and customs clearance (Agility 2023). Additionally, improved connectivity attracts foreign investment and stimulates private sector activity, leading to the emergence of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across diverse industries (Dugbazah et al. 2022). As a result, these enterprises will likely further contribute to job creation by tapping into newfound opportunities for trade and business development enabled by enhanced infrastructure connectivity. Therefore, because the BRI can lead to direct and indirect employment for African laborers, scholars should appreciate the positive impact that the presence of Chinese infrastructure projects brings to the job market sector in Africa.

Bureaucratic Efficiency:

Additionally, another positive impact of BRI projects has been the efficient and fast timing of the Chinese government-financed infrastructure projects in comparison to those from Western sources. The Senegalese president even went so far as to directly compare and criticize Western institutions like the World Bank by saying "When bureaucracy and senseless red tape impede our ability to act – and when poverty persists while international functionaries drag their feet – African leaders have an obligation to opt for swifter solutions" (Condon 2012). By understanding that this sentiment has not been an isolated experience, it is not surprising to realize that the infrastructure capability ranking of China surpassed the US influence for the first time in 2017 (Custer et al. 2018). This difference in the implementation timing of projects is also understood to be in part because the loans provided through the BRI are on a bilateral basis whereas Western institutions are multilateral (Kini, Moses, and Zhu 2022). As a result, the fewer political constraints and standards that are in place, point to China as an increasingly popular global partner for developing countries.

Overarching Sector Assistance:

As the BRI is not only comprised of projects focused on the development of railways, but also roads, ports, and power plants, Chinese development finance could easily be a source of sustained economic growth for many developing nations. Studies have revealed that one additional BRI project increases GDP per capita growth by almost a full percentage point (Dreher et al. 2022). To put this into perspective, given that the average level of per capita GDP growth among the BRI recipient countries was revealed to be 2.85 percent from the period between 2002 and 2016, there is a noticeable positive economic impact associated with the BRI. While there are multiple explanations for this, such as the argument that the bilateral project management in the construction of BRI projects allows for better satisfaction of recipient government needs, there is now a recognition that the multiple qualitative differences between BRI projects compared to Western-institution projects may point to the BRI as being a more efficient means for global development.

Supplement to Western Aid Organizations:

Although a primary concern of Western institutions has been the idea that China may be pursuing a policy of “Racing to the Bottom”, where investment/aid agencies are intentionally sacrificing quality standards and defying regulations to increase competitiveness, data has illustrated otherwise (Dreher et al. 2022). While there are some states that have chosen to primarily rely on Chinese development, the presence of Chinese development finance in Africa should not be defined as an overthrow of the status quo as many African countries are relying on both Chinese and World Bank finance. In particular, data has revealed that developing countries have not viewed the BRI as a complete substitution for the World Bank, but rather, as a complementary source of development financing (Gallagher et al. 2023). In fact, out of 100 countries that have borrowed loans from either the World Bank or China, 72 nations have borrowed more from the World Bank or about the same for each, and only six nations have chosen to borrow exclusively from China. Additionally, many of China’s top borrowers—including Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, and Pakistan—have borrowed at equal rates from both the World Bank and China (Gallagher et al. 2023). As a result, China has had a tangibly positive effect on the African continent, as the introduction of the BRI to the continent also brought about a diversification of partnerships for many African countries. This is significant, as the diversification of partnerships lessens a country's reliance on any single external partner, reducing the risk of economic or political pressure. Additionally, China's presence as a supplemental provider of developmental finance allows African nations to have more choices when negotiating infrastructure projects, which also comes with added leverage in securing favorable terms for development projects.

Countries Borrowing from the World Bank and Chinese Development Finance Institutions, 2008-2021

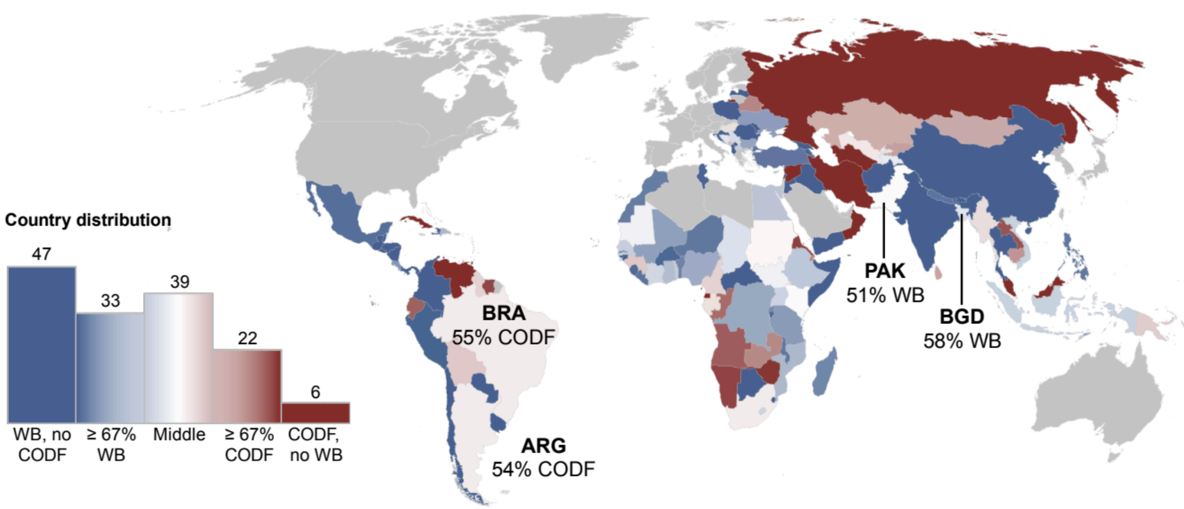

Figure 4 Global Development Policy Center. "'Small is Beautiful': A New Era in China's Overseas Development Finance?" *Boston University*. https://www.bu.edu/gdp/2023/01/19/small-is-beautiful-a-new-era-in-chinas-overseas-development-finance/

Notes: Gray countries did not borrow from either source.

Additionally, the BRI offers an array of financing mechanisms in contrast to the concessional loans and grants of the World Bank, ranging from direct investment to public-private partnerships (He 2019). This diversified funding approach addresses the complex needs of infrastructure development in countries along the BRI routes, providing them with options that suit their specific circumstances and development priorities.

While the Belt and Road Initiative operates independently of Western aid organizations, its multifaceted approach to development finance can often align with the objectives of traditional aid agencies, making it a valuable supplement to existing development efforts. By addressing infrastructure deficits, fostering and promoting regional integration the BRI enhances the effectiveness and impact of development initiatives in participating countries. Overall, collaborative partnerships between the BRI and Western aid organizations have the potential to unlock new opportunities for sustainable development in regions along the BRI routes.

Technological Transfer:

Lastly, the presence of Chinese agencies and projects within the continent of Africa has allowed for the transfer of technology which is integral to the development of the continent. In particular, research has confirmed that the presence of Chinese firms such as Huawei Technologies, ZTE, and China Telecom have laid the groundwork for much of the technological infrastructure found in Africa to this day (Agbebi 2022). Given that China offers competitive prices, essential equipment, and funding through policy banks, many African nations have found the services provided through the BRI to be very favorable. Moreover, Chinese technology companies have been able to provide services in nearly all aspects of telecommunications—such as undersea cables, satellites, and technological software (Hart and Link 2020).

Furthermore, the BRI has been argued to promote collaboration between Chinese and African companies in joint ventures, research and development initiatives, and technology transfer agreements between partners (Xinhua 2021). Notably, Chinese firms often bring to the table expertise in areas such as "construction, engineering, renewable energy, and digital technology", which can be transferred to local businesses and industries through training programs, technology demonstrations, and technology licensing arrangements. As a result, the transfer of technology not only enhances the capabilities of African enterprises but also creates opportunities for job creation, entrepreneurship, and economic diversification. With this in mind, it is evident that China has had a significant positive impact in Africa through its infrastructure development, fast implementation duration, supplement to World Bank projects, and technological transfers.

Negative Impacts of Chinese Loans to Africa:

Alongside all the positive impacts of Chinese involvement in Africa, there are also a great number of negative impacts. This section will explore the negative impacts of China's loans to Africa across six categories. Beginning with the exploration of ulterior political motivations for Chinese investments, this subsection will scrutinize the instances in which development assistance is contingent on strategic political interests rather than development objectives. Second, the next subsection will examine the instances outcomes in which Chinese development assistance has led to an increase in governance corruption. Subsequently, the absence of policy safeguards in Chinese investment projects will also be analyzed, highlighting how there is a lack of accountability within the project implementation process. Additionally, the next subsection will analyze China's role in being responsible for natural resource extraction and exploitation. Furthermore, the implications of China's labor and environmental standards will be analyzed highlighting the instances in which lax regulations have harmed the local population and geography. Finally, the last subsection will assess the growing debt burdens of African countries due to China's overemphasis on loans over direct financial assistance. Through these analyses, this section will stress the importance Africa's socio-economic well-being and how China's engagement in Africa can be understood to have resulted in various negative repercussions.

Ulterior Political Motivations:

Among the many different negative implications that have come from the presence of Chinese loans to Africa, a notable example pertains to the negative impact that can come from China's own personal geopolitical motivations. As China establishes its relationships built from the BRI on a bilateral basis, multiple trends have been proven to follow the presence of Chinese development projects. In particular, higher quantities of Chinese foreign aid have disproportionately been given to recipient governments that vote in line with Beijing in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the nations that do not establish diplomatic relations with the government in Taipei (Dreher et al. 2022).

Additionally, Chinese foreign aid projects have also been shown to be in closer proximity to the homes of political leaders, especially so, during the run-up to competitive executive elections (Dreher et al. 2022). Therefore, the existing trend illustrates how China may be prioritizing its domestic political desires rather than accountability in fighting against corruption within the developing continent. Even worse, it could be argued that China may be using the BRI as a method to impose its own political beliefs onto the developing nations of Africa who may not have had a strong stance previously. For example, Sao Tome and Principe, a central African island nation, altered its political stance from recognizing Taiwan to adopting the "one-China policy" in May 2017 (Venkateswaran 2023). Subsequently, following this decision, the nation swiftly garnered a series of project agreements funded by China, with expedited execution, along with direct support for its 2019 General Budget. This example underscores how the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is often accompanied by strategic political motivations that may potentially serve China's interests in international forums such as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in the future.

Although some characteristics point to the neutrality of Chinese foreign investment, such as the ordinary presence of BRI projects in African countries that have high supplies of natural resources, there are nonetheless valid concerns that China is not exempt from political bias when establishing progress toward becoming a global leader (Dreher et al. 2022). As a result, rather than solely looking at the positive economic impacts of BRI projects—which have also been shown to differ greatly from project to project—it is necessary for researchers to recognize that the BRI can result in several negative political and social consequences.

Governance Corruption:

A compelling illustration of the intricate consequences stemming from BRI projects is evident in the development of Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway (SGR). Former President Kenyatta of Kenya strategically centered his campaign around the necessity of economic growth, using the construction of various infrastructure projects as a method to obtain his electoral success (Ferree, Gibson, and Long 2014). Consequently, the implementation of the SGR was deemed indispensable and progressed at a remarkable pace, with the project completion taking place 18 months ahead of schedule. Initially praised as a success in numerous aspects and advertised as a flagship BRI project, the SGR encountered a dramatic downfall when it became surrounded in corruption allegations by Kenya’s Department of Public Prosecutions. In fact, media reports began to surface, detailing investigations into officials allegedly embezzling taxpayer funds through fraudulent compensation claims for land acquired for the railway (Malalo 2018). While Chinese entities were not implicated in the prosecution, the ripple effects leading to corruption cases in Kenya illustrate the broader negative impact of the BRI.

Even though corruption may not be directly associated with Chinese investment, this does not take away from the fact that an influx of large-scale Chinese investments into infrastructure projects may create an environment ripe for corruption, as lucrative contracts, extensive financing, and complex procurement processes can provide opportunities for briberies and embezzlements. Moreover, in the worst cases, the lack of transparency and accountability in project selection and implementation processes may enable corrupt practices to flourish, undermining the effectiveness and positive aspects of the BRI. Additionally, the BRI's focus on speed and scale in project delivery may lead to shortcuts in due diligence, environmental assessments, and regulatory compliance, further increasing the risk of corruption.

Unfortunately, given that it is often the countries with weak governance structures, limited rule of law, and pervasive corruption, that are also in the most need of infrastructure development, Chinese investments may unintentionally exacerbate existing governance challenges and reinforce negative systems that have been in place. As such, while the BRI holds great potential for economic development and infrastructure improvement, it equally comes with the great risk of furthering corruption.

Absence of Policy Safeguards:

As witnessed in the SGR case, the complexities that revolve around the BRI encompass much more than mere economic considerations. For example, there have been concerns that foreign aid and investment could undermine the accountability of government institutions (Jones and Tarp 2016). Governments are ultimately meant to be held accountable to the needs of the public as there are multiple ways in which public dissatisfaction can be exhibited: emigration, voting, and withholding tax payments. However, as critical discourse has pointed out, because projects financed by foreign institutions are completely independent of the domestic population in project-recipient nations, accountability for the quality and quantity of projects may be lost as there is no way for the domestic populations to manage foreign institutions if the financial expenditures are out of touch with public needs (Gong 2023). Additionally, it is also possible that governments may use international development finance to insulate themselves from the consequences of bad policies. For example, governments that have poor institutional quality and an underdeveloped tax base will most certainly feel the need to implement proper policy reforms, as a shrinking economy is beneficial to no one (Jones and Tarp 2016). However, if there are foreign sponsors who are willing to offer financial assistance to nations regardless of their policies and economic status, politicians may feel less obligated to initiate policy adjustments. Overall, these considerations point to the importance of having safeguards in place when foreign entities intend to offer financial assistance, however, it is evident that China's BRI lacks a considerable amount of policy safeguards as opposed to the World Bank (Beeson 2018.

Resource Extraction:

While the establishment of bilateral ties through the BRI is advertised as an important opportunity given to African nations by China, there is reason to believe that China may exploit the natural resources found within these nations. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Chinese entities have already gained ownership or stakes in nearly all the country's cobalt-producing mines, which is approximately 70 percent of the world's cobalt (Burrier and Sheehy 2023). Moreover, through China's billion-dollar investments in Africa for the purposes of developing lithium mines, it is estimated that China could secure one-third of the world's lithium mining capacity by 2025 (Hua and Wexler 2023).

While the involvement of foreign entities in resource extraction from other nations is not a new concept in international diplomacy, the circumstances surrounding the transfer of natural resources from Africa to China raises significant concerns as they appear to offer minimal benefits to the African continent. In fact, some argue that the contract terms associated with BRI-mineral agreements are often opaque and heavily favor Beijing. This disparity is notably exemplified in the case of President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), who traveled to Beijing to renegotiate an imbalanced $6 billion infrastructure-for-minerals deal with Chinese leader Xi Jinping (Rolley 2023). Despite the agreement being in place since 2008, it has resulted in billions of dollars' worth of minerals being exported to Beijing, while the DRC has seen minimal progress in infrastructure development since then.

Most concerning of all, there is a growing sentiment that aspects of the bilateral relationships formed through the BRI may be unable to establish a “sustainable” form of economic growth and development. While there has been growth in the trade volume between African countries and China in the wake of the BRI, scholars fear that Africa may not be developing fast enough to escape the resource curse syndrome found across many developing nations (Rwangoga 2022). To explain, the “resource curse” is understood as the tendency for resource-rich nations to fail at benefiting fully from their natural resource wealth. While this concept may seem counterintuitive at first, given that resource-rich countries have tended to have higher rates of conflict and authoritarianism, and lower rates of economic stability and economic growth, compared to their non-resource-rich neighbors, it is important that development agencies help these countries avoid the pitfall trap of overreliance on resources for economic development as it is unsustainable (Natural Resource Governance Institute 2015). Following in thought, given that the nature of Sino-Africa trade contributes to both sustainable and unsustainable economic growth, it is even more important to recognize that the economic impact of BRI projects needs to be understood with caution, rather than fervent acceptance.

Labor and Environmental Standards:

Although one of the cited positive impacts of the BRI has been the result of job creation, it has also become one of the primary criticisms as well. Existing literature has begun to criticize the labor practices of Chinese infrastructure development companies such as the hiring of Chinese workers rather than prioritizing local employment (Schwikowski 2018). This approach can lead to tensions with local communities and governments, as it deprives them of job opportunities that could stimulate their economies and improve livelihoods. This is further exacerbated by the evidence that "Chinese firms in Angola and Ethiopia found that nearly all low-skilled jobs were occupied by local workers, while many high-skill positions or management roles were reserved for Chinese workers" (Hillman and Tippett 2021). Additionally, there have been reports of poor working conditions and inadequate labor protections for both Chinese and local workers involved in BRI projects, raising questions about worker safety and fair compensation (Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons 2022). With this understanding, there has been a growing sentiment that has begun to add to the criticism against China's BRI, arguing that the safeguards placed by Western development agencies are meant to address these related issues, and as such are better means of promoting stable economic development.

Furthermore, another area of contention surrounding the BRI is its environmental impact. Because many BRI projects, such as the construction of dams, roads, and industrial facilities, often rely on the changing of the local landscape, BRI projects have raised concerns about their potential negative consequences for ecosystems and biodiversity. In particular, it is argued that the rapid pace of development facilitated by the BRI can lead to deforestation, habitat destruction, pollution, and the exacerbation of environmental degradation in vulnerable regions (Chiu 2022). Moreover, critics argue that China's lax environmental standards and regulations may be exported to BRI partner countries, undermining efforts to promote sustainable development and combat climate change on a global scale. Taken in conjunction with the opaque nature of BRI projects and the associated lack of transparency, the presence of Chinese foreign involvement in the labor and environmental sector of Africa has been argued to be a possible antithesis for many of the "good governance" focused policies undertaken by the World Bank and other Western aid agencies.

Growing Debt Burdens:

Finally, considering that the underlying nature of Chinese investment in Africa does not follow the Western emphasis on Official Development Assistance (ODA), one of the primary concerns regarding the BRI has been the argument that China's involvement has exacerbated debt burdens. Specifically, critics have argued that China has deliberately ignored the repayment capacity of developing nations, which ultimately results in the accumulation of unsustainable debt burdens for many countries (Hurley, Morris, and Portelance 2019). This is especially worrisome as political leaders may be more concerned with receiving large sized loans than paying them back. Therefore, many African countries, particularly those with limited fiscal capacity, have found themselves heavily indebted to China due to loans obtained for BRI projects. As the terms of these loans, are often characterized by high-interest rates and short repayment periods—qualities of Other Official Flows (OOF)—this can strain the financial resources of recipient countries, leading to a cycle of indebtedness that undermines their economic sovereignty and development prospects. In fact, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have reported that 22 African countries face financial distress because of their debt loads, with many of these countries owing the largest proportion to China (Africa Defense Forum 2023).

While there exist other sources of literature that have argued that Africa is not to be solely blamed for the increased debt loads, as it may have been in part due to unrelated economic fallouts, this does not take away from the negative implications that come from China's opaque lending policy regarding this matter (Butler, Jie, and Vines 2022). Most notably, critics have begun to argue that China's opaque lending practices and undisclosed terms make it difficult for African public and civil society organizations to assess the full extent of their own debt obligations and make informed decisions about voting for pro-China politicians. Given that debt refinancing often involves multiple development agencies, confidentiality clauses found within BRI project agreements make it exceedingly difficult for the public to know how much their local government owes and how other agencies could help address issues of debt.

In one specific case, the Kenyan President William Ruto was forced to reveal the terms of Chinese lending for Kenya's $4.7 billion Standard Gauge Railway, which had an overinflated revenue forecast (Africa Defense Forum 2023). Although this then allowed Kenya to receive policy recommendations and assistance for debt refinancing, the damage was already done. In fact, when confronted with the task of paying China without access to the necessary funds, the Kenyan government resorted to paying China at the expense of paying Kenyan government workers' salaries. In conclusion, while the negative impacts of the BRI can span a wide array of topics including political bribery, government corruption, lack of safeguards, resource extraction, poor implementation standards, and growing debt burdens, many of these negative impacts ultimately come as a direct consequence of the distinctive aspects of the BRI in relation to Western aid such as hasty implementation schedules and bilateral-based agreements.

China's Economic Slowdown:

As seen in the preceding section that has provided an in-depth examination of the positive and negative impacts of Chinese loans through the BRI, there currently exists drastically different sentiments and predictions of the impact of the BRI in Africa. However, it is important to note that the previously mentioned impacts are either largely premised on the assumption that the increasing surge in Chinese loans would continue, based on data during the peak of the BRI, or fail to predict how the implications may change overtime. This introduces a fundamental question: Do the assumptions and conclusions drawn from the earlier analysis remain the same considering China's economic downturn?

Following this section, this paper will critically reflect on the extent to which the prevailing narratives and understandings of China's economic relationship with Africa remains applicable in the context following the peak of the BRI. Ultimately, this turning point in the paper represents an addition to the ongoing discourse on China-Africa economic relations by offering a nuanced and updated perspective that reflects China's economic reality.

Factors for China's Economic Slowdown:

China's recent economic downturn can be understood through a combination of factors that have both domestic and international roots. Within China domestically, there have been several ongoing challenges related to how the economy was structured. For many years, China has relied heavily on investment and exports to drive growth (Prasad 2023). However, this approach has led to problems such as too much investment in certain industries and a buildup of debt. Although the Belt and Road Initiative was used as a method to alleviate the issue of overcapacity in Chinese infrastructure industries, it did not properly address debt accumulation within the nation. Over the years, China has heavily relied on debt-fueled investment to drive economic growth, leading to concerns about the sustainability of its debt levels (Pettis 2022). Therefore, excessive borrowing by both corporations and local governments has resulted in a buildup of debt, creating vulnerabilities within the financial system and opened the economic stability of the nation to major risks. Although many economic predictions were made, regarding the state of China's economy and the possibility of a growing debt bubble, China was ultimately not prepared for the economic bubble burst. As of 2023, China's debt-to-GDP ratio reached a record high of 288 percent (Nolt 2024). In conjunction with the fact that much of the borrowed debt will not result in any substantial income yield as the housing market also crashed, China currently has no choice but to scale back lending and raise their domestic interest rates. As a consequence, China's need to address these debt imbalances has contributed to a slowdown in overall economic activity, which may only further exacerbate China's economic downturn.

Additionally, another significant factor contributing to China's economic downturn is its strained relationship with the United States. As trade tensions between the two countries have escalated in recent years with the rise of Trumpian economics, China was essentially bound to experience an economic slowdown (Hass 2023). Given that this modern era of pro-tariff policies touch on billions of dollars' worth of goods traded between the two nations, these trade disputes have disrupted global supply chains and dampened investor sentiment, which also negatively impact China's export-oriented industries and overall economic growth (York 2023). With this, there has been a growing uncertainty surrounding US-China trade relations, contributing to further market volatility, reduced business confidence, and reducing China's economic recovery efforts.

Finally, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a severe blow to China's economy, severely influencing its economic downturn. Given that the pandemic resulted in widespread disruptions to production, supply chains, and consumer demand both domestically and globally, it was only natural that China was negatively impacted as well. But moreover, considering how China was also the epicenter of the outbreak initially, the implementation of strict lockdown measures to contain the virus, also led to a sharp contraction in economic activity (Li and Li 2023). While China has since managed to control the spread of the virus to a large extent, the lingering effects of the pandemic, including subdued consumer spending and weak global demand, continue to weigh on China's economic recovery prospects.

Reversal in Investment Output:

As China's economy faces challenges, there's a noticeable decrease in loans given out through the BRI. Figure 3 shows that predictions about the BRI's impact were accurate until 2016 but have since changed, as seen in figure 5. This shift reflects China's broader change in how it engages economically with other countries, especially in Africa. Overall, China is adjusting its priorities due to its own economic issues, leading to fewer investments abroad. As a result of the economic slowdown in China, this has led to a tightening of credit conditions and a more cautious approach to overseas investments, particularly in regions perceived as high-risk, which ultimately translates into a decline in the number and scale of Chinese-funded projects in Africa (Chatterjee and Navaratnam 2024).

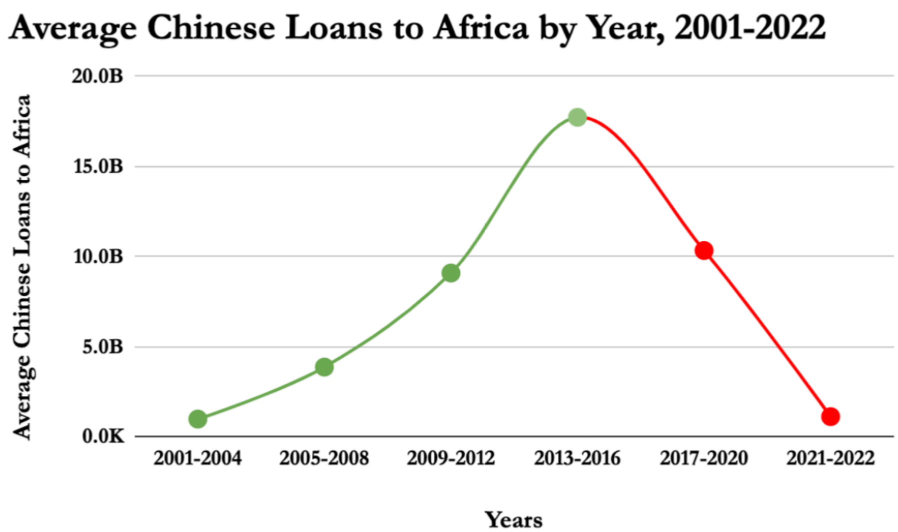

Figure 5. "Chinese Loans to Africa Database." Boston University. Global Development Policy Center. https://www.bu.edu/gdp/chinese-loans-to-africa-database/

Since this reorganization, some BRI projects have begun to experience delays, renegotiations, or outright cancellations (Chandran 2019). Additionally, heightened scrutiny over debt sustainability and financial risks has prompted Chinese lenders and investors to exercise greater due diligence and prudence in their dealings with African governments and businesses. Moreover, the evolving dynamics of global trade and geopolitics, including trade tensions between China and other major economies, have added another layer of uncertainty to the investment landscape, further dampening investor confidence (Authers 2024). Considering this, the landscape of future of loans in Africa through the BRI will take on new qualities that deviate from the standards of the BRI projects that were implemented before the economic downturn.

While China's rise was marked by unprecedented expansion and investment, its recent slowdown has underscored the challenges inherent in sustaining rapid growth over the long term. Structural vulnerabilities within the Chinese economy, including overreliance on debt-fueled investment, excess industrial capacity, and financial risks, have come to the forefront, challenging the narrative of China's invincibility (He 2023). Moreover, the economic downturn has extended beyond China's borders, affecting global commodity markets, supply chains, and investment flows. This raises questions about the sustainability and effectiveness of China's development finance strategies, particularly in recipient countries where Chinese investments have been instrumental in driving growth. Overall, the economic slowdown serves as a wake-up call, prompting a reassessment of China's role in global development and the dangers of over-dependency on the hegemon of the East.

Reassessing the Positive Impacts of Chinese Loans to Africa:

This section will include a comprehensive reassessment regarding the enumerated positive impacts of China's involvement in Africa as presented in the earlier section. With China's decreasing economic presence on the continent, understanding the change in the positive implications of its investments becomes very important. Through this reassessment of the logic and rationale behind the positive impacts that come from the presence of Chinese loans in Africa, this section seeks to understand how the logic changes as the rate of investment shifts.

Transportation Infrastructure Development:

While the recent weakening of China’s economy does not affect the transportation infrastructure development projects that have already been completed, it will significantly impact the signing of future BRI projects and raise concerns about the sustainability of these projects. As China continues to experience an economic slowdown and buildup of debt, this puts pressure on the country's domestic finances and limits its ability to finance ambitious infrastructure projects abroad. Following this premise, Chinese funding for transportation infrastructure projects in Africa will likely grow to be more selective, with the focus of these projects reorienting toward projects that offer higher returns and align closely with China's strategic interests. In fact, officials from China have addressed this issue by stating that China intends to transition towards smaller scale projects rather than focusing on big ticket projects to avoid financial risks (Chaudhury 2023). However, when taken in conjunction with data that has revealed a growing number of canceled and postponed projects from both African governments and China, this illustrates how investment in African infrastructure has become much less economically viable due to debt accumulation (Venkateswaran 2023; Berman, McBride, and Chatzky 2023).

Moreover, the economic downturn in China may prompt a reassessment of investment priorities, potentially impacting the quality and standards of Chinese-funded transportation infrastructure projects in Africa. Given that Chinese companies will face greater financial pressures, there may be an increased incentive to cut costs, reduce investments, or possibly prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability. As a result, this could raise concerns about the durability, safety, and environmental sustainability of transportation infrastructure built with Chinese financing, undermining the developmental impact of these projects. In addition, if China is unintentionally pressured to favor construction projects that include substandard construction practices, it is likely that the reputability of BRI projects will decrease and face further criticism by Western scholars. While there is the possibility that the economic pressure may motivate Chinese companies to make financially safer and smarter investments, China will likely have to favor the projects that are located in more developed nations than underdeveloped nations to maximize financial stability, which would ultimately contradict one of the primary distinctive characteristics of the BRI, in which it intended to avoid selectivity like the World Bank (Berman, McBride, and Chatzky 2023).

Furthermore, the economic downturn in China could also lead to changes in the terms and conditions of Chinese financing for transportation infrastructure projects in Africa. As China seeks to manage its own debt levels and financial risks, there may be adjustments in the terms of loans, such as higher interest rates or shorter repayment periods. This could increase the financial burden on African countries and limit their ability to invest in other priority areas. Additionally, Chinese financing may become more conditional, as China may grow to emphasize leveraging strategic assets as collateral for loans rather than offer diverse repayment options. Such conditions could have long-term implications for the sovereignty and economic independence of African countries, potentially worsening debt dependency and hindering efforts to achieve sustainable development. Overall, China's weakening economy has significant implications for transportation infrastructure development in Africa, highlighting the need for African countries to diversify funding sources and ensure that infrastructure investments align with their long-term development goals and priorities.

Job Creation:

In addition, due to the decreasing prospects of future infrastructure projects in Africa being funded by China, as illustrated in the previous section, the recent economic downturn is also expected to have significant implications for local job creation on the continent. As Chinese investments through the BRI have become a major source of many large-scale projects, these projects have also become an instrument for the creation of job opportunities (Galal 2024). However, given that China's ability to create jobs are not only tied but also limited to its capacity to primarily finance and create large-scale infrastructure projects, it is evident that the number of jobs that China can help provide to Africa will follow the trend of the decreasing number of Chinese loans to Africa.

Additionally, as the economic downturn will motivate China to be more cautious with its investments, this could mean a shift away from labor-intensive projects, such as infrastructure construction and a transition towards small scale sectors that require less manpower. As a result, African countries may experience a slowdown in job creation in sectors that have traditionally benefited from Chinese investment, potentially leading to unemployment or underemployment among local populations. Moreover, as Chinese companies face financial pressures, there may be a tendency to cut costs, which could also lead to rising concerns about the potential for inadequate construction practices, improper labor training, and the absence of long-term viability for BRI projects if they are not built to high-quality standards.

On another note, the economic downturn in China may also prompt a reassessment of China's development priorities and strategies in Africa, causing future BRI project agreements to be more favorable for the Chinese economy rather than the African economy. While this reassessment of strategies can take on various forms, a growing trend towards the hiring of Chinese laborers in place of African workers is one of the logical methods in which job creation for Africa is harmed. This logic comes from the fact that previous BRI projects have already led to the large presence of many Chinese laborers in Africa, therefore, there is reason to assume that this trend would persist given China's growing desire to restimulate their domestic economy (Hillman and Tippett 2021). While there is uncertainty whether this transition will only lead to delays or the erasure of job opportunities in Africa, there is strong reason to speculate that job creation will indeed be heavily impacted in one form or another by the lowering of Chinese investments in Africa.

Bureaucratic Efficiency:

In line with the previous speculations, China's recognition as a bureaucratically efficient donor nation will also undergo changes conidering its weakening economy and reduced investments in Africa. Traditionally, China has been praised for its ability to execute development projects swiftly and efficiently, often bypassing bureaucratic hurdles that hinder traditional Western donors (Condon 2012). Although there are most certainly existing benefits that come with policy safeguards, it can also act as a limiting factor for the implementation progress as well. Therefore, the advertised efficiency of China's BRI has been a key factor in China's appeal as a development partner for African countries, enabling the rapid implementation of infrastructure projects and the delivery of tangible benefits to local populations at a greater speed than that of Western donors.

However, the economic downturn in China and its impact on Chinese investment in Africa are likely to result in China scaling back its pace and scale of Chinese-funded development projects. This slowdown could be attributed to a variety of factors, including tighter budget constraints, heightened risk aversion, and a more cautious approach to investment. As a result, the rapid project implementation that China has been known for may become less prevalent, leading to delays and uncertainties in the delivery of development assistance to African countries.

While data regarding this subject matter is still developing, existing findings support this reasoning as China's reputation as a reliable donor nation has already been severely put into question. In fact, research has shown that "projects have been canceled or renegotiated across nearly 50 countries," with many of these cancellations coming from the side of the recipient nations rather than China (Parks et al. 2023; Dezenski and Birenbaum 2024). Moreover, given that these cancellations and renegotiations are coming in higher rates than that of pre-BRI years, this also points to the growing idea that China has already damaged its reputation as an effective donor nation to some extent.

Overall, China's status as a bureaucratically efficient and effective donor nation has and will continue to be put into question, as economic challenges persist in the context of its domestic economy. While China's reputation for swift project implementation has been a key factor in its appeal as a development partner for African countries, the implications of the economic downturn will ultimately limit China into pursuing a slower negotiation and implementation process as a means of avoiding any possible drastic BRI failures that further damages its domestic economy. While the responses to China's reputation as a donor nation have been growing more critical and louder, it remains to be seen how China will precisely navigate these challenges and adapt its development strategies to ensure that its investments in Africa contribute to development and mutual benefit for all parties involved. However, based on the existing challenges and logical economic pursuits of China, the continued advertisement and application of being a donor nation with "fewer strings attached" will likely diminish (China Power 2017).

Overarching Sector Assistance:

In a similar vein to the predictions made regarding China's changing stance towards the development of transportation infrastructure as its domestic economy weakens, there are a wide range of implications for its overarching development sector assistance as well. While China has primarily invested in crucial sectors of infrastructure like transportation, it has also been a significant provider of development assistance to Africa through investment in other various sectors such as energy, healthcare, education, and agriculture (Dreher et al. 2022). But given that the economic circumstance of China affects its ability to invest in Africa as a whole and not just its investments in transportation, its total capacity to finance development projects in Africa will likely be constrained.

Under one understanding of the circumstance, China's weakening positioning as a donor nation will do little to change the status of the completed development projects of the past. As a result, it should be reasonable to assume that China's involvement in Africa will continued to be looked upon favorably by African nations who have partnered with China in completing various projects previously. Additionally, given that the purpose of development projects is to help stimulate the aid-recipient national economy so that it may grow more self-sufficient, China's previous involvement in Africa will also be a positive factor in future African economic development as well.

On the other hand, it is safe to say that China's current struggle to manage its economic circumstance will ultimately act as a significant barrier to the implementation of future developmental sector projects. Given that many development projects rely heavily on training programs, funding for expansion, and the provision of new equipment, the recent transition will inevitably place China in a position where it will be difficult to maintain or expand existing development programs.

Consequently, a possible outcome that may come from this circumstance will be a decrease in the number of development projects that incorporate Chinese involvement, as Africa is forced to become more reliant in achieving sustainable development goals through other means. However, it is also possible that many African nations may also lack the personal funds to maintain and expand the presence of BRI development projects, causing setbacks in their development status if significant progress has yet to be made previously.

Supplement to Western Aid Organizations:

Among the many different implications that come from the visible reversal in the rate of Chinese investment output to Africa, one of the important predicted changes pertains to China's status as an external donor nation from Western aid institutions. As China has previously positioned itself as a distinct donor to traditional Western aid institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and various bilateral aid agencies, its role as a alternative to Western aid institutions will become less prominent as China's involvement becomes scaled back (Gallagher et al. 2023). Although China has been previously successful in inserting itself in providing support to the infrastructure gap that many Sub-Saharan African nations face, as Western aid institutions are more focused on providing development assistance in areas such as healthcare, education, and governance, African nations may increasingly turn to traditional international financial institutions for financing transportation infrastructure projects as China becomes more committed to addressing their own economic issues.

In fact, specific qualities of Western aid institutions may eventually grow to become more favorable in terms of long-term sustainability in comparison to Chinese financial institutions. Although these Western institutions are much less prone to invest in transportation infrastructure projects with the proportion of transportation focused projects only being eight percent of the total investment portfolio, which is less than half of the investment proportion included in China's portfolio, the inclusion of greater concessional loans, transparency, and technical assistance could result in some prospective transportation projects being better handled (World Bank 2023; Dreher et al. 2022). As the dynamics of development cooperation in Africa continue to change as China experiences greater internal pressure to refocus its economic priorities, it is appropriate to assume that Western aid institutions will grow to play a more prominent role in shaping the nature of development projects on the continent.

Moreover, China may begin to reevaluate its development assistance strategies in Africa, potentially leading to greater coordination and collaboration with Western aid institutions.

Although China previously illustrated itself as a bilateral donor nation that is more flexible, less conditional, and more aligned with African development priorities, its growing desire be more risk averse could be the catalyst for greater cooperation between China and the West in its role in Africa (Berman, Mcbride, and Chatzky 2023). However, this heavily relies on whether China intends to act with a supplementary role in the investment landscape rather than a substitutionary role. But because China has previously expressed its strong desire to differentiate itself from Western development institutions, it is fully possible that China may just accept its decreasing presence in Africa as a method of adhering to its prior geopolitical stance. Overall, as China navigates its responsibility and commitments to the development of Africa, it will be essential for it to consider its geopolitical relationship with Western institutions, as there is logical motivations for the pursuit of both common goals and geopolitical disagreements. Ultimately, further data on whether China becomes more transparent and open to the involvement of third-party development agencies will be necessary to accurately determine whether China's economic circumstance leads to further cooperation or divergence with other world powers.

Technological Transfer:

Finally, the implications that come from China's technological transfer to Africa in the development process will also undergo changes in response to the weakening economy. Historically, China has played a pivotal role in facilitating technology transfer to Africa through various initiatives, including infrastructure projects, joint ventures, and technology transfer agreements (Xinhua 2021). However, with China scaling back its investments in Africa due to economic pressures at home, this will certainly reduce the available opportunities for African countries to access and adopt cutting-edge technologies from China. In particular, the decreased funding available for technology-related projects, will likely result in the stagnation or slow decline of the presence of Chinese firms in Africa. But as the presence of Chinese companies are essential for the development of the technological foundations in areas such as energy, infrastructure, telecommunication, and digitalization, there is reason to believe that the technological advancement of Africa will be comparatively hindered from its previous growth rates.

Moreover, because the economic downturn in China may pressure Chinese firms present in Africa to rely on cheaper quality technology as a means of saving costs, this could affect the quality of the technology transfer as well. Just as economic constraints are predicted to negatively impact the quality of future large-scale infrastructure projects, the same principle can be applied to the technological sector of development assistance. Additionally, given that the process of technology transfer takes form of a long-term process as technological foundations must be built on top of one another, the pressure to receive short-term success from development projects may culminate in inadequate training, skills development, and insufficient support for technology adoption. For example, as Africa can only properly benefit from the adoption of cellular phones, after telecommunication bandwidths and electricity access within homes are first developed, local African populations will need more than just small interactions with the Chinese economy to confidently experience development in its technological sector.

Furthermore, as China may prioritize investments that offer higher domestic returns, there is a chance that technology transfer initiatives could be treated as a sacrificial expense for greater Chinese economic gain. To explain, rather than investing in job training, skills development, or technological advancement, Chinese firms may grow in attempting to employ more African laborers as a source for cheap and exploitable labor. With this, it should be understood that Africa will unfortunately be placed in a circumstance in which its pace for development will ultimately be hindered as China can no longer offer many of the same positive impacts as they were able to before.

Reassessing the Negative Impacts of Chinese Loans to Africa:

After having covered the reassessment of the positive impacts that have come from China's involvement in Africa, this section will now provide a similar thorough reassessment to the listed negative impacts of China's involvement in Africa as presented in the earlier section. Given that the data regarding the impact of Chinese Loans to Africa primarily pertains to the period before China's economic downturn, this reassessment will continue to provide theoretical understandings of the change in circumstance and empirical evidence when applicable.

Ulterior Political Motivations:

First, China's recent weakening economy and decreasing investment in Africa are expected to have significant implications on its practice of using personal geopolitical motivations to influence the distribution of Chinese development assistance. Given that China's engagement in Africa has been characterized by strategic geopolitical interests, such as giving preferential assistance to African nations who have a unsupportive stance towards Taiwan in the UNGA, this has been a core factor in which Chinese development assistance could position development loans to be more politically focused (Dreher et al. 2022; Venkateswaran 2023). As a consequence, this could seriously undermine the importance of distributing development assistance to nations that are in genuine need of assistance and better suited to receive loans.

However, because China's use of development assistance as a leverage for advancing geopolitical interests in Africa diminishes in relation to China's weakening economic strength, this could result in a diverging political alignment between China and African nations. As development assistance recipient nations are primarily concerned with the next source financial assistance, if the scale of Chinese loans and projects decrease then African nations may soon lose their motivation to vote in line with China within international organizations. Instead, African nations could look to other partners for assistance, possibly resulting in a transformation in the political landscape of Africa to become more pro-Western.

On the other hand, if China intends to stay committed to using development assistance as a method of influencing African nations within international organizations, the decreasing leverage may allow African countries to assert greater agency in negotiating their own terms of engagement. Given that African nations are now provided with an opportunity to either negotiate with China or turn towards working alongside traditional Western development agencies, this allows African nations to be less vulnerable to external geopolitical pressures and influences from external world powers. Overall, there is reason to speculate that African countries are likely to benefit the most under this changing implication, unless third party entities place further political leverage and influence through force or other bargaining tools.

Governance Corruption:

While there is room to debate whether having ulterior political motivations are an avoidable negative aspect of development assistance as nearly all donor nations are guilty of having it play a role in influencing financial decisions, the association between Chinese loan presence and corruption in governance is plainly a negative impact. Historically, Chinese loans in Africa have faced large amounts of criticism as their lack of transparency regarding bilateral finance agreements make it difficult for the public to notice the presence of corruption (Gong 2023). Yet nonetheless, given that there have been previous instances in which corruption cases came because of the construction process for Chinese transportation infrastructure projects, this all the more places a negative stigmatization between Chinese development finance acting as a possible source for local government corruption (Malalo 2018). Therefore, many Western critics of China's involvement in Africa often sight this evidence as a primary argument against the acceptance of Chinese development finance in the wider international community.

However, as many critics did not expect the presence of Chinese loans to diminish so considerably, this leads to the importance of a reassessment. As there are likely to be fewer projects and financial resources present in Africa within the coming future, this ultimately places fewer opportunities for corruption to occur by local officials. Additionally, as Chinese entities experience greater financial pressure, there is an increased likelihood that the project implementation process that is carried out will involve greater managerial scrutiny and oversight. Moreover, China's decreasing investment in Africa may pressure certain African countries who need development assistance to strengthen their governance mechanisms as a method of appealing to China's project development team. Overall, while challenges remain in addressing systemic governance weaknesses found in Africa, the presence of fewer projects may allow for a reduction in the number of governance corruption cases found on the continent.

Absence of Policy Safeguards:

Building on the negative impact of Chinese development assistance being associated with governance corruption, another negative characteristic that is associated has been the absence of policy safeguards. Criticisms against China's approach to development finance comes from the fact that China has chosen to adhere strictly to bilateral government agreements alone (Dreher et al. 2022). As a result, this prevents open transparency and opportunities for the wider public to keep the implementation process of infrastructure projects properly accountable.

With this, speculations regarding how China's subsequent decrease in foreign investment may affect their approach to policy safeguards can go many ways. First, given that the lack of policy safeguards is one of China's methods of characterizing itself as a bureaucratically efficient donor nation, there is reason to believe that this aspect of Chinese bilateral cooperation could remain consistent regardless of the changing economic conditions. Additionally, given that the decreasing scale and number of development projects do not place a direct motivation of urgency for China to place specific policy safeguards or shift towards multilateral agreements, it is possible that this aspect of Chinese development assistance undergoes little change.

However, as presented in the reassessment of the negative impacts of governance corruption, China may experience pressure to be more transparent and responsible in the characteristics of future development projects. As a result, the transformation of China into becoming a more open and collaborative donor nation due to its economic circumstance is also fully possible. Overall, there is no single concrete speculative outlook regarding how the impact of China's lack of policy safeguards may change due to the economic downturn, as China may choose to prioritize upholding its prior characteristics as a donor nation over transitioning into a different style of offering development finance options.

Resource Extraction:

An additional factor regarding the negative impacts that can come from China's engagement with Africa is the presence of resource extraction on the continent. As China has played a major role in resource extraction with its involvement in metal mining and oil consumption, a possible speculation of how China's economic challenge will affect this relationship is that there will be a slowdown in resource extraction activities in Africa. As some BRI project deals are signed based on "infrastructure for minerals", there is reason to believe that China's decreasing number of loans for infrastructure development in Africa will also culminate in a slowing down of access to African natural resources (Rolley 2023).

Consequently, this could create opportunities for other developing nations to be more involved in the extraction of natural resources found on Africa if China's role in resource extraction diminishes. Therefore, China may also be pressured to prioritize offering foreign development assistance to nations with large sources of raw materials over the nations that are resource scarce. This is especially possible given the fact that China is urgently attempting to build up their advanced technology markets to escape its "middle-income status" and would require rare metals such as cobalt and lithium to do so (Burrier and Sheehy 2023; Hua and Wexler 2023).

Additionally, the decreasing investment from China may provide an opportunity for African countries to renegotiate resource extraction contracts and agreements to terms that provide better benefits for the African nations. Considering how one of the examples cited earlier regarding the negative impact of resource extraction has already demonstrated a growing desire among African nations to want to renegotiate "infrastructure for material" deals, this present circumstance may be the added leverage that African governments needed to better negotiate favorable terms (Rolley 2023). However, China can also be expected to try to hold onto many of their current arrangements, as China's ownership and majority stake over some sources of raw materials will not be given up lightly. Overall, the weakening Chinese economy will ultimately result in possible growth in competitiveness among all parties involved to obtain greater control over natural resources.

Labor and Environmental Standards:

Another negative impact of China's investment in Africa that needs to be reassessed are the implications that come from subpar labor and environmental standards. Looking at the labor practices alone, a legitimate concern that has been raised discusses the preferential hiring of

Chinese laborers over African laborers (Schwikowski 2018). Given that this practice brings up the issue of equity within the workplace, as high skilled labor was sometimes reserved for Chinese laborers only, critics argue that China's labor practices in Africa may result in the exploitation of African laborers.

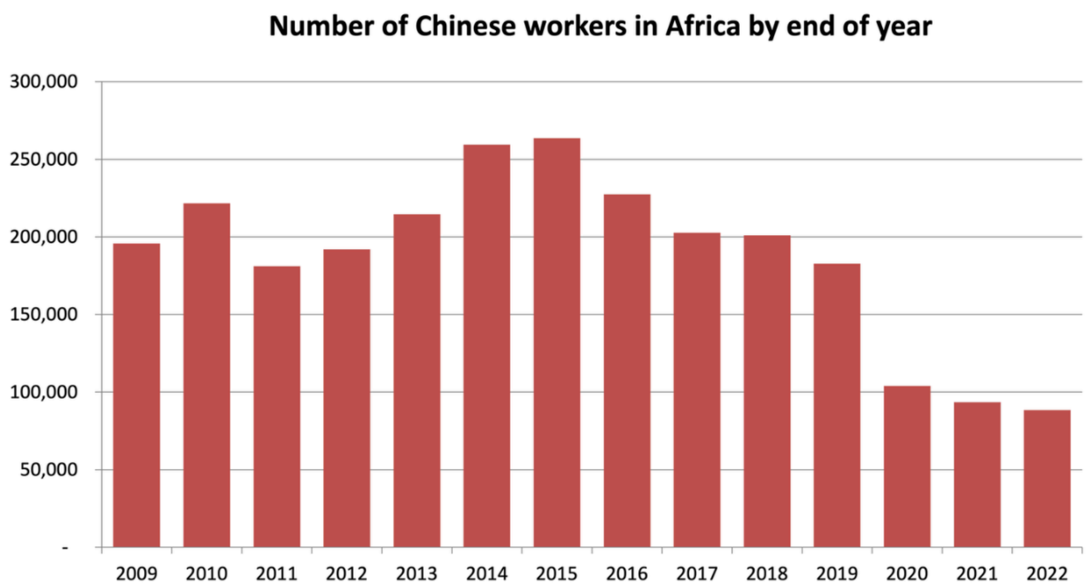

Figure 6. China Africa Research Initiative. "Chinese Workers in Africa." *Johns Hopkins University*. https://www.sais-cari.org/data-chinese-workers-in-africa

However, with China's economic slowdown leading to reduced loans and BRI projects, there will be a decrease in the number of Chinese workers employed in Africa. This speculation is further supported by data from the China Africa Research Initiative, in which the bar trend in illustrates a decline that is relatively similar to the one presented in figure 5. As a result of this decrease in the number of Chinese workers in Africa, this could cause a reduction in labor exploitation and unfair labor practices that have been associated with BRI projects. Despite that, researchers should not predict the opening of opportunities for African workers, because as stated previously, one of the speculated implications that will come from the decreasing number Chinese loans in Africa will be the voiding of job opportunities for African workers on BRI projects. Moreover, China may even hire a greater proportion of Chinese laborers over African laborers to better stimulate its own domestic economy.

While the reassessment of the labor practices and standards of China point to disadvantages for both China and Africa, the added pressure placed on Chinese companies for having lax environmental regulations could result in better adherence to international environmental standards for future African projects. In fact, Chinese officials have already begun to promote a new "Green Belt and Road Initiative" that promises to prioritize renewable energy infrastructure projects (Gallagher et al. 2023). If China properly sticks to this initiative, this could lead to improved environmental protection measures, a reduced ecological footprint, and a better management of natural resources, benefiting both local communities and the environment. Overall, the contrasting speculative predictions within this subsection point to both positive and negative impacts from China's decreasing involvement in Africa.

Growing Debt Burdens

Finally, a reassessment of the impact of Chinese loans on Africa's growing debt burdens will also need to be conducted. As China's presence in Africa has often been accompanied by large loans and financing packages through the BRI, this has contributed to the accumulation of debt in many African countries (Africa Defense Forum 2023). However, with China scaling back its loans abroad due to economic pressures, there may be a reduction in the availability of financing for future African projects. As a result, this could lead to decreased borrowing from China, potentially mitigating the risk of further debt accumulation in African countries.

However, another speculative outcome may be a shift in the borrowing strategies of African countries towards traditional Western multilateral aid institutions. With this, a possible outcome is a general shift among African governments in the adoption of stricter fiscal discipline, improvement of debt transparency, and strengthening of initiatives to payback debt. However, this is highly dependent on the presence of good governance within these nations. Alternatively, it is possible for the debt accumulation among African countries to continue to grow as China's economic downturn could have merely pressured African nations to only diversify their sources of financing.

On another note, for the nations that have struggled to pay back BRI loans to China in the event where project completion did not result in economic growth, China may allow African nations to renegotiate loan terms as China experiences decreasing economic leverage and cannot stay committed to previous loan agreements that are not paid back. Moreover, the absence of a significant presence of future BRI projects may also prevent debt accumulation to occur within the African continent in the first place. Overall, even though there is reason to believe that China's current economic downturn may decrease debt among loan-recipient nations, it is possible for debt accumulation within Africa to continue to occur if the focus turns to diversifying sources of development assistance rather than paying back debt.

Conclusion:

After reviewing how both the positive and negative impacts of China's engagement in Africa would change in response to the weakening Chinese economy, many insights regarding the multifaceted dynamics of this relationship have been revealed. While the implications of China's economic downturn at times both strengthened and weakened the enumerated positive and negative impacts, it should be generally accepted that both Africa and China will have to navigate new methods of bilateral engagement and reorganize around the changing impacts.

Moving forward, it is essential for researchers and policymakers to consider the implications of China's economic downturn on the engagement between Africa and China. While the reduction in Chinese loans may alleviate some concerns in regard to negative impacts, it also poses new emerging challenges for African countries that have come to rely on Chinese financing for positive impacts such as infrastructure projects and development initiatives. Therefore, there is a need for future research pertaining to China’s economic involvement in Africa to accept that the characteristics of China’s BRI loans have changed considerably, and therefore cannot be assumed to operate in the way in which it had done previously.

In conclusion, this research paper has provided insights into the complex dynamics of China's economic presence in Africa and the implications of the BRI for development outcomes on the continent. By critically assessing the positive and negative impacts of Chinese loans, as well as considering the implications of China's recent economic downturn, this paper has contributed to an understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing Africa in its engagement with China. Looking ahead, it is imperative that future research builds on the speculative reasoning that was presented in this paper as public data regarding the impacts of Chinese BRI loans through the early 2020s becomes more updated and accessible.

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