

Chinese aid in the library development of Africa: A brief survey

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Received 02 June 2022; accepted 17 July 2023

The recent relations between China and Africa are a much-debated topic in international socio-economic and geopolitics. There are many different opinions about the Chinese presence in the African continent. Some see it as a ray of hope for African sustainable development and others contested it as a form of ‘neo-colonism’. It is further argued that along with other forms of China-Africa relationship, countries in Africa can be benefitted from ‘Chinese Aid’ beyond trade or infrastructure development. In this context, this study tries to investigate the Chinese contribution to library development in many countries of Africa. Taking various secondary sources, particularly newspaper content analysis, this study has identified a few cases where China has invested in library development in Africa. It is observed that Chinese aid in African library development comes in three types. In the first type, the Chinese government is directly involved in the construction of libraries, in the second type Chinese multinational firms are donating books and e-learning materials to the schools and libraries. In the third type, Chinese non-governmental organizations donate books and other materials to the local schools and communities. Chinese aid in library development in Africa will perhaps enhance learning, capacity building, mutual trust, and friendly relationship. In the long run, this will be a win-win situation for both sides to further enhance the South-South cooperation and above all the development of the whole continent.

Keywords: China, Africa, Library, Library Development, South-South Cooperation

Introduction

The China Africa relationship has a long history. The bond between China and Africa dates to the 1950s. However, the relationship was not that pronounced until 1978 when China opened its economy to the outside world¹. Further, the Sino-African connection has grown substantially in the early 21st Century. Now China-Africa connections refer to the economic, political, and social interactions including the people-to-people contacts between China and the African nations. The relationship is further extended with the establishment of “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation” (FOCAC) in 2000. The FOCAC conferences are held every three years and is co-chaired by the President of China and the respective head of the state of host African country².

With the increasing trade, now China is investing heavily in Africa, particularly in the areas of infrastructure development, and resource extraction. China is also a major buyer of African raw materials, particularly oil and minerals, which has helped to boost African economies. Chinese multinational firms are involved in the construction of transportations networks, railways, sea ports, and other large-scale infrastructure projects in Africa. According to an

estimate, China has helped Africa to build more than 10,000 km of roads, over 6,000 km of railway lines. Beside this, China has also constructed many libraries, schools, hospitals, and other income generating facilities for the people throughout the continent³.

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed plans to build a “Silk Road Economic Belt” and a “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”. Later it was named as the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI)⁴. The BRI is the greatest international economic ambition of China in 21st century⁵. The project was initiated with an aim to stimulate better connectivity and subsequent economic development. It includes a vast region of the globe covering Asia, Africa, and Europe. It is estimated that, the BRI project might include about 64% of global population and cover 30% of world GDP. While infrastructure development is the major aim of BRI initiative, it also includes policy dialogue, trade, monetary support, and people-to-people contact⁶. It is further argued that the BRI is highly compatible with the ‘Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development’, and the ‘Agenda 2063 of African Union’ (AU). Further, BRI is aligned with the common development strategies of AU, forming a strong network and collaboration among the nations

for achieving common goals and promoting sustainable development in the continent.

Scholarly research on the China Africa relationship is mainly centred around the business, trade, infrastructure development etc. Along with the other activities, China has also established several school libraries, giving aids in the development of university libraries and so on. There is not much studies on China Africa relationship in terms of library development. In this background, this study aims at finding the Chinese investment in library development in various African countries.

Research Objective

The study is going to investigate the Chinese involvement in the African continent in terms of its investment in library development.

Sources of Data

Newspaper sources have been extensively used to find the Chinese contribution in library development in Africa. The news was extracted from the popular newspaper “China Daily.” It is an English-language daily newspaper published from the People's Republic of China. The newspaper was established in 1981. It is presently owned by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China. China Daily publishes news, analysis, opinions, and commentary on various issues of China. The newspaper has global coverage of various issues. The newspaper is widely read by English-speaking Audiences in China and all over the world. China Daily has a website and mobile App that provide latest news and multimedia content. It is one of the important sources of information for the analysis of contemporary issues of China and its role around the globe.

Search Strategy

Newspaper content analysis is a research method that involves analyzing the content of newspaper articles to identify patterns, themes, and trends. For this study newspaper content analysis method was used from the news of e-paper China Daily (website: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/index.html>). The news items were searched using the keywords “China,” “Africa,” “Library.” The retrieved records are further analyzed. Some other renowned databases viz Google Scholar were searched to find the relevant literature in the field. The data collection and analysis for this study has been done during February- March 2023.

Limitations

Newspaper content analysis can provide valuable insights into media coverage. However, it is important to note that it has its limitations. For example, it may not capture the full range of the story behind the reporting. Additionally, it may be the subject to biases in the selection of articles or the interpretation of data. Also, this paper is based on single newspaper content. Moreover, the China Daily is owned by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China. Hence there may be a possible bias towards more Chinese opinion or voice.

Data Analysis

The following section will discuss the Chinese contribution in the library development in several African countries. As previously discussed, the data has been collected from the popular English language ‘China Daily.’ The result is presented in Table 1, which shows the various examples of Chinese contribution in library development in Africa

Djibouti

Djibouti is a small country in the African continent located in the ‘Horn of Africa’. The country is an important gateway to Africa for the ‘Belt and Road Initiative.’ The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, built by Chinese multinational firms are first electric railway in Africa. A report said that China had given aid to the National Library and Archives of Djibouti for its reconstruction and development. It is further expected that with the Chinese assistance, National Library and Archives of Djibouti will play an important role in future. For example, the national library will play a critical role in learning, reading, and promoting national culture⁷.

Egypt

Egypt is a country located in North Africa, with a population of over 100 million. It is the third most populous country in Africa. The ‘Bibliotheca Alexandrina’ is a major library and cultural center located in Alexandria, Egypt. The library was one of the largest and the most important libraries of the ancient world. It was renovated and inaugurated in 2002. As a part of goodwill gesture, the China Cultural Center located in Cairo has donated books and audio-visual materials to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina⁸.

Table 1 — Examples of Chinese contributions in Library development of Africa

Sl No	Country	Region	Beneficiary	Funding agency	Types of library services provided
1.	Djibouti	Eastern Africa	National Library and Archives of Djibouti	Chinese Government	The National Library and Achieve is renovated with the financial help.
2.	Egypt	Northern Africa	Alexandria library, Egypt	China cultural center	China cultural center donated books and audio-visual materials to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.
3.	Kenya	Eastern Africa	National Museums of Kenya	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Tencent Holdings Ltd	UNESCO andTencent Holdings Ltd helped National Museums of Kenya to develop open digital library for indigenous game.
4.	Kenya	Eastern Africa	University of Nairobi	Chinese government	Chinese government has proposed to develop a China-themed library at the University of Nairobi.
5.	Kenya	Eastern Africa	Various School libraries	Project Hope for Africa, the initiative by China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF)	Project Hope for Africa provides textbooks and other learning materials to various schools.
	Tanzania	Eastern Africa		In 2010, the Chinese Business Association, the China Youth Development Foundation and the Tianjiu Happiness Holding Group initiated Project Hope into Africa, and jointly launched "China-Africa Project Hope".	Many Chinese entrepreneurs donated money to school libraries for various collection development in schools.
	Rwanda	Central Africa			
	Burundi	Southern Africa			
	Namibia	Southern Africa			
	Zambia	Eastern Africa			
6.	Ethiopia Lesotho	Southern Africa	National Library of Lesotho	Chinese government	China has helped to build Lesotho's National Conference Center, Paramount Hall, and National Library
7.	Madagascar	Eastern Africa	National Library of Madagascar	Chinese government	Donated Chinese books to the National Library of Madagascar
8.	Nigeria	Western Africa	National Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure	Huawei Technologies	Huawei Technologies deployed e-libraries, e-classes, and smart campus networks
9.	Republic of Congo	Central Africa	Ngouabi University	Chinese government	China has funded and constructed Ngouabi University library
10.	Rwanda	Eastern Africa	Rwandan Community	The Chinese community in Rwanda	The Chinese community started a library to promote learning, academic and cultural exchange between Chinese and the Rwandan people
11.	Republic of South Africa	Southern Africa	South African Community	Huawei Technologies	Huawei Technologies helped to build e-Libraries program to boost literacy in South Africa
12.	Tanzania	Eastern Africa	University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania	Chinese government	China helped Tanzania build a university library

Source: Own compilation from various news sources published in the online version of China Daily

Kenya

Kenya is an East Africa country, has a long-standing relationship with China. The relationship includes trade, investment, infrastructure

development, and cultural exchange. China is a major investor in Kenya's infrastructure, particularly in the areas of transportation. One of the most notable projects 'Nairobi -Mombasa Standard

Gauge Railway' is built with the Chinese help.

The National Museums of Kenya in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has launched an open digital library for indigenous games funded by the Chinese multinational company Tencent Holdings Ltd. It is assumed that these type of digitization projects will help to preserve the country's rich cultural heritage for future generations⁹. Further, Chinese government proposed to build a China-themed library at the University of Nairobi. The university has already a centre for 'Confucius Institute' to promote Chinese language and culture in Kenya¹⁰.

Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Namibia, Zambia, and Ethiopia

The 'Project Hope for Africa' is an initiative by the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF). The project aimed to supplement governmental initiatives to provide reading materials, textbooks, and educational equipment to various schools across Africa. The project was started in 1989 by the All-China Youth Federation. In Africa, the project started functioning in the year 2011 in Tanzania. According to the estimate, the Project Hope has raised \$1.4 billion, and helped over 4.9 million economically weaker village students. With the monetary help, the project helped to build 18,335 'Hope primary schools' and about 20,604 small libraries in the rural areas.

Further, about 19 Chinese entrepreneurs each donated 10,000 yuan (equivalent \$1,570) to 23 school libraries¹¹. The project is supporting the educational needs of hundreds of children in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Namibia, Zambia and Ethiopia¹².

Lesotho

Lesotho is a small, landlocked country located in southern Africa. The country has a population of approximately 2.2 million. It is surrounded by South Africa on all sides. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, since 1983, China has helped Lesotho to build various infrastructure. It includes industrial park, Lesotho's National Conference Center, Paramount Hall, National Library, radio, television, and other broadcasting facilities¹³.

Madagascar

Madagascar with a population of approximately 27 million people located in the Indian Ocean. It is the

fourth largest island in the world and the largest in Africa. China and Madagascar officially established diplomatic ties in 1972 and established a comprehensive partnership in 2017. The partnership is extended in health, education, culture, sports, and other areas. The association is further depended with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Belt and Road Initiative between these two nations. Cultural exchanges between these two nations are further extended with the donation of Chinese books and other materials at the National Library of Madagascar¹⁴.

Nigeria

Nigeria is a country located in West Africa. With a population of over 200 million people, it is the most populous country in Africa and the 7th most populous country in the world.

Chinese multinational Huawei Technologies, is helping Africa with the development of telecommunication infrastructure. China is involved in upgrading an undersea cable to Europe. This aims to increase faster connectivity all over Africa to address urban-rural digital divide issue. In Nigeria, Huawei has installed the National Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure. In addition, it has successfully deployed e-libraries, e-classes, and smart campus networks in various educational institutes in Nigeria¹⁵.

Republic of Congo

The Republic of Congo, also known as Congo-Brazzaville, is a country located in Central Africa. It shares its borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic.

China has funded the construction of Nguabi University library. The Nguabi University is the only public university in the Republic of Congo. The library has more than 10,000 books and CDs about China. These materials are helpful to learn more about China and Chinese culture¹⁶.

Rwanda

Rwanda is a small, landlocked country located in East Africa. It is bordered by Uganda to the north, Tanzania to the east, Burundi to the south, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west.

The Chinese community in Rwanda launched a library in the capital Kigali with more than 5,000 books in Chinese, Korean and English languages. The

library is established to encourage reading culture among the Rwandan people¹⁷.

South Africa

Huawei Technologies has several corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs in Africa. Among the many CSR Programs, one of the programs was launched in 2015 related to the e-Libraries program to boost literacy in South Africa¹⁸.

Tanzania

Tanzania is a country located in East Africa. It is bordered by Kenya and Uganda to the north, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west, and Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique to the south. One of the significant activities in the library development by China happens in Tanzania. China has helped the University of Dar es Salaam to build a university library at a cost of \$41.28 million. Now, this library is the largest university library in Africa¹⁹.

Discussion

With the increasing Chinese involvement in the African continent, China is also investing in the education and library development in several African countries. Chinese involvement in the library development can be categorised into three types. In the first type, Chinese government is the direct funder and involved in construction of libraries. The second type is the Chinese multinational firm's involvement through corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. The third type is the active involvement of various non-governmental agencies.

Among the direct involvement of Chinese government, the funding for the construction of the university library of the *University of Dar es Salaam* in Tanzania, National Library and Archives of Djibouti, China-themed library at the University of Nairobi are noteworthy.

Chinese firm Huawei Technologies is investing in developing telecommunication infrastructure in many African countries including Nigeria. The e-libraries program is implemented by Huawei to increase e-literacy among the masses in South Africa

The 'Project Hope for Africa' is donating books to the school libraries and helping under privileged students in schools across Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Namibia, Zambia, and Ethiopia.

The Chinese aid is coming in various forms, it includes the library infrastructure development,

construction of university library, book donation and community awareness of reading habits and so on. Moreover, in many cases the books are donated through the Chinese aid are the books on China, Chinese language, and its culture. It is also questionable how much benefit is incurred into the local community if the books are written in Chinese language. However, it requires further investigation in the ground and to be supplemented by the interview with various stakeholders.

As the countries in the continent are diverse, the benefit from the Chinese aid may vary. Perhaps, the countries with comparatively well-developed library structure (for example South Africa) might be benefitted from the Chinese assistance.

Conclusion

The relationship between China and Africa has not been without controversy. There are mainly two streams of discourse in China-Africa relationship. In one side, critics have accused China of engaging in 'neo-colonialism.' This stream of scholarly discourse accused China for the exploitation of African resources without incurring much benefits to the local communities. Along with this, there are also concerns about the environmental impact of recent China's activities in the continent. On the other side, it is argued that Chinese investment in Africa is supporting the development of African economies. China being the superior in terms of technological capability will help Africa to upgrade in various stage of global value chain through technological learning. African countries, in turn, are looking to China for more inward investment and trade opportunities to boost their economics. Perhaps Chinese experience will be helpful to Africa for technological learning and upgradation. However, keeping all these challenges, it is predicted that the relationship between China and Africa is expected to grow in future.

This is beyond doubt that the Chinese presence, along with their technological superiority will benefit the continent and the whole global south. However, to extract benefit from Chinese technological learning, Africa must develop its 'absorptive capacity'²⁰ through the technological learning. Here, a well-developed library system has a definite role to play. In this context an in-depth analysis of Chinese aid and the subsequent benefit in the education, particularly the library development is to be investigated in a different perspective beyond the popular discourse.

While studying Chinese activity in library development in the continent it is observed that China is investing in the development of various libraries and donating books to increase the reading habits among the local people. However, many of such activities are attached with 'Confucius Institute.' The institute is mainly propagating the Chinese language and culture. The actual benefit incurred by the local community beyond the teaching of 'Confucius Institute' is to be investigated further.

This study is mainly based on the newspaper report published on the online platform of the popular outlet China Daily. A further holistic picture of the Chinese influence on the library development in the continent need to be investigated through a field study by interviewing various stakeholders in the ground. This will supplement the findings further with the actual nature and breath of benefit incurred to the local community.

Acknowledgement

The preprint version of the article is available on the website: <https://www.qeios.com/read/LY49O4>.

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