

# Sino-Cameroon Relations: A Foreign Policy of Pragmatism

Julius A. Amin

**Abstract:** Based on primary sources, including documents obtained from Cameroon's Ministry of External Relations, oral interviews conducted in Cameroon, and local newspapers, and a variety of secondary sources, this article examines Cameroon's foreign policy and economic relations with China. It argues that Cameroon's engagement with China has resulted in short-term benefits for consumers but undermined long-term, sustainable economic development. The article concludes that unless China genuinely pursues its promised policies of "mutual respect" and "win-win gain," voices of protest will only grow louder in Cameroon and other African nations.

**Résumé:** Cet article qui examine la politique étrangère du Cameroun et ses relations économiques avec la Chine se base sur des sources primaires, y compris des documents provenant du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères du Cameroun, des entrevues orales menées au Cameroun, des journaux locaux, et une variété de sources secondaires. Il fait valoir que l'engagement du Cameroun avec la Chine a entraîné des avantages à court terme pour les consommateurs, mais a miné à long terme le développement économique durable. L'article conclut que à moins que la Chine ne poursuive véritablement ses politiques promises de "respect mutuel" et de "gain gagnant-gagnant," des voix de protestation ne feront que s'accroître au Cameroun et dans d'autres pays africains.

**Keywords:** China; Cameroon; Ahmadou Ahidjo; Paul Biya; Beijing Consensus; Washington Consensus

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**Julius A. Amin** is a professor of African history and coordinator of the Africana Studies Committee at the University of Dayton. His publications include *The Peace Corps in Cameroon* (Kent State University Press, 1992), *African Immersion: American College Students in Cameroon* (Roman & Littlefield, 2014), and numerous articles in journals, including the *Journal of Black Studies*, *Africa Today*, and *Cahiers d'études Africaines*. E-mail: [jamin1@udayton.edu](mailto:jamin1@udayton.edu)

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## Introduction: Contextualizing Sino-Cameroon Relations within the Literature of China in Africa

Within the last twenty years, contemporary observers and scholars alike have produced voluminous work on China's policy toward Africa with an emphasis on the continent's mineral- and oil-rich nations. The bulk of the literature falls into two categories: those produced by "optimists" and those produced by "pessimists" (Adem 2010; Shinn & Eisenman 2012). Optimists argue that China's friendly policy toward Africa has been a welcome change from Western incessant neocolonial pronouncements of corruption, backwardness, and inefficiency. China's economic engagement, they continue, has contributed to Africa's development.<sup>1</sup> Pessimists argue that China's economic policy in Africa is predicated on the extraction of oil, minerals, and other raw materials, and on securing markets for "cheap" manufactured goods, and that its policies have contributed to pollution, decimation of forest land, destruction of emerging industries, and unemployment.<sup>2</sup> Many agree with Western political leaders who accuse China of "authoritarian capitalism" and immoral acts in Africa (Cao 2013; Alessi & Hanson 2012).

Despite this recent scholarly output, few articles or monographs trace the story of China in Africa from the beginning to the present. In short, a historical perspective is missing. As Deborah Brautigam (1998, 2009), David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman (2012), Daniel Large (2008), and others argue, such a perspective is needed for a more informed understanding of the sources of China's motives and actions in Africa. Existing studies, they point out, lacked access to documents from China and African leaders, and rarely include voices of locals in African nations.<sup>3</sup> Others, including Seifudein Adem, question basic assumptions of China–Africa policy, suggesting that the notion of "China in Africa is inaccurate to an extent for China does not deal with Africa per se, but with individual African countries. And the sum total of China's relations with African countries is not the same as China's relations with Africa." (2010:352). Therefore, studies of China's policy toward individual African nations are essential.

This study of Cameroon's policy toward China, based on primary sources (including documents obtained from Cameroon's Ministry of External Relations, oral interviews in Cameroon, and local newspapers) and a variety of secondary sources, attempts to address some of these concerns.<sup>4</sup> It argues that Cameroon's engagement with China, shaped by the African nation's historical experiences and its leadership's goal to remain in power, has resulted in short-term benefits for consumers but has undermined long-term, sustainable economic development. Cameroon is ideal for a study of Africa–China relations. Its triple colonial heritage makes it unique, and the nation displays many of Africa's political, economic, social, and religious complexities. But unlike the mineral- and oil-rich nations of Angola, Nigeria, Sudan, and South Africa (on which much of work on Africa–China relations has focused), Cameroon is less well-endowed in terms of natural resources, and its relations with China have received little attention.

Within the last thirty years China has entered into a series of economic agreements with African nations. In the last five years alone, according to the website of the Forum of China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) (<http://www.focac.org>), which lists and updates information on this subject, hardly a week has passed without an agreement or exchange of official visits between China and an African nation. China’s trade with Africa has risen dramatically: from U.S.\$6.84 billion in 1989, to U.S.\$39.75 billion in 2005, and U.S.\$106 billion in 2008 (Brautigam & Xiaoyang 2011; Campbell 2008). While agreements have led to the construction of significant infrastructure for the African partners, they also guarantee a steady supply of oil, minerals, and raw materials to China and a market for Chinese-made products (Mohan & Lampert 2013; Sautman & Hairong 2008). In 2008 China exported to Africa over U.S.\$50 billion worth of equipment, a variety of consumer goods, and machinery (Brautigam 2009). From the 1990s onward, more and more Chinese have also traveled to Africa in search of fortunes, seeing the continent as “a dream destination” (Michel & Beuret 2009:118), rich in oil, gas, and gold, and also sparsely populated with much available land. In 2006 China’s direct aid to Cameroon totaled U.S.\$1.7 billion (Brautigam 2009). In a 2007 speech, President Paul Biya of Cameroon encouraged Chinese companies to “come in their numbers and invest in Cameroon” (quoted in Khan & Baye 2008:6).

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, ordinary Cameroonians could afford a variety of consumer goods such as DVD players, televisions, cell phones, clothing, and shoes because of the influx of cheap imports from China; the scale of clothing imports in particular has been referred to as a “textiles tsunami” (Konings 2011:187). In return, Cameroon’s exports to China consisted of cotton, timber, and oil. But the easy availability of these products, over time, has had a devastating impact on the local economy, destroying emerging local industries and forcing many out of business. As in other nations in the region, Chinese-made goods have either led to a significant drop in prices of locally made goods or in some cases forced local competitors out of business (Park 2013; Rupp 2008; Sautman & Hairong 2008). Cameroonian prostitutes even went on strike to protest the low rates charged by their Asian colleagues, whom they ridiculed as “yellow fever,” or “fake woman” (*fausse femme*) or “baba woman” (a negative term for “cheap and downgraded goods imported fraudulently from China”) (Ndjio 2014:376,384). Tens of thousands of motor bikes imported from China serve as taxis (*okada*, or *Bendskin*) and contribute to congestion in many of the nation’s urban centers.

In general, the policies toward China pursued by sub-Saharan African leaders are based on pragmatic evaluations of their own national interest. Like other nations, Cameroon considers China a counterforce against Western nations. Loans from China have reduced Africa’s dependence on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Waldron 2009; Khan & Baye 2008). Unlike Western nations, China does not attach conditions of human rights, good governance, and anticorruption policy to

aid. In this way the “Beijing Consensus” development model threatens the “Washington Consensus” of the World Bank and the IMF (Waldron 2009; Alden et al. 2008). Nevertheless, Chinese aid comes with other strings attached, such as the requirement that all projects employ Chinese technicians and workers and use Chinese-manufactured equipment.

### **Ahmadou Ahidjo: Architect of Sino-Cameroon Relations**

On the eve of independence in 1960 Cameroon entered a series of military and economic agreements that gave France overarching authority over the country’s domestic and foreign policy. As events later revealed, those agreements troubled Ahmadou Ahidjo, Cameroon’s first president, who looked for avenues to assert more autonomy for his nation. In 1962, during an official visit to Washington, he asked President John F. Kennedy for more U.S. involvement in Cameroon in the hope of neutralizing France’s influence. Though Kennedy made no promises, the U.S. sent Peace Corps volunteers and also approved technical and financial assistance to Cameroon through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).<sup>5</sup>

Unlike Cameroon’s relations with the U.S., its dealings with China started on a rocky path. Ahidjo resented China’s support of the opposition Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), which received arms and training in guerrilla warfare from China (Weigart 1996). In 1961 Ahidjo reported that captured dissidents had implicated China, and he accused China of destabilizing Cameroon (Sinou 1985; Weigart 1996). In 1964 he opposed China’s admission to the U.N. because of that country’s intervention in Cameroon’s internal affairs (Sinou 1985). Cameroon maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan, but when China’s position shifted in the late 1960s Ahidjo’s team moved to improve relations with mainland China.

Communist China’s formal involvement in Africa began at the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, popularly referred to as the Bandung Conference, of April 18–25, 1955. At that conference China’s premier, Zhou Enlai, presented his “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” calling for equality, respect, and friendship. Attending the conference were leading nationalists including Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India, President Gama Abdel Nasser of Egypt, and President Ahmed Sukarno of Indonesia. The Bandung Conference occurred during an intense period in the Cold War and at a particularly important moment for China. The U.S., continuing its pro-Taiwan policy and rejecting the one-China policy, placed an economic embargo on China and extended nonrecognition to the Communist regime. Communist China was diplomatically and economically isolated, and the U.S. containment policy, according to many, succeeded in creating a “devilish” image of China in developing nations (Eyene 2012:11; see also Men 2010). In 1956 China established diplomatic relations with Egypt, the first such agreement in the African continent. From that moment China continued to make overtures to other African nations.

The path remained rugged, however. Burundi, Central African Republic, Ghana, and Tunisia, for example, severed relations with China over perceptions that China supported subversive activities in these countries, and Cameroon refused to recognize Communist China. Faced with increasing isolation coupled with the Sino–Soviet split, China reversed course from supporting radical groups to one of pragmatism and economic development. Cameroon and other African nations reciprocated. On October 25, 1971, twenty-six African nations were among the seventy-six that voted in support of China’s admission into the U.N. (Hickey & Guo 2010; Harnet-Sievers, Marks, & Naidu 2010). The following year Cameroon withdrew its support from Taiwan and recognized Communist China, and on March 26, 1971, Cameroon and China established diplomatic relations. At this point relations between the countries entered a new, friendly phase of nonintervention, respect for each other’s sovereignty, and economic and technical cooperation. At a dinner in honor of Ahidjo’s 1977 visit to China, Vice-Premier Li Hsien-Nien and Ahidjo praised each other, restating their commitment to work as equal partners. They repeatedly characterized the relationship as one of “Afro–Asian Solidarity,” “self-centered development,” “respect for sovereignty and non-interference,” and “peace, equality, justice, and freedom.”<sup>6</sup>

### Implementation of Sino-Cameroon Relations

The Ahidjo team apparently took literally China’s rhetoric of “mutual gain” and “mutual benefit.” On September 27, 1972, Ahidjo signed Decree No. 72/500 approving an economic and technical agreement between China and Cameroon.<sup>7</sup> The decree reduced tariffs on imports and exports. It also listed the manufactured goods to be imported from China and the raw materials to be exported to that country. The agreement marked the beginning of a framework of Sino–Cameroon relations that has remained in place to the present.

Between 1972 and 1975 Cameroon and China signed at least eight agreements, many of them involving Chinese citizens working in Cameroon.<sup>8</sup> On May 7, 1975, both countries signed an agreement in which China provided assistance for the purchase of medical equipment. In another economic agreement signed in Peking on October 7, 1977, China extended to Cameroon a loan of roughly U.S.\$9.8 million to be used for the construction of public projects including the Yaoundé Conference Center (Palais de Congrès), the Lagdo Hydro-electric Dam, and Mbalmayo and Guider Hospitals.<sup>9</sup> To coordinate economic, social, and cultural relations with China, Ahidjo signed a presidential decree on July 24, 1974, creating the Bureau Charge des Relations Commerciales avec la République Populaire de Chine (BURECOM). This agency is charged with coordinating imports and exports, data collection, and assessment of the gains and losses of the trade with China.

In 1982 China began to provide concessional loans (i.e., preferential or low-interest loans) to its trading partners. Established in 1994, the

Export–Import Bank of China (China Exim Bank) doles out concessional loans to African nations on behalf of the Chinese government. Recipient nations agree to grant favorable terms to Chinese companies and citizens operating in those countries. In most cases there are little or no taxes on earnings and Chinese citizens are allowed to repatriate income to China.<sup>10</sup>

During Ahidjo’s era (i.e., until 1982), economic arrangements between both countries remained unchanged, although the trade relationship was unequal. In 1985 a memo from Cameroon’s Ministry of External Relations indicated the extent of the inequality during this period (in millions of F CFA—see below).<sup>11</sup>

Year	Imports	Exports	Balance
1976	3373	473	-2980
1977	2971	1330	-1641
1978	6757	450	-6307
1979	5539	400	-5139
1980			-689

Agreements with China did not include initiatives to promote manufacturing in Cameroon. China did not transfer any form of technology to Cameroon, and made little effort to genuinely partner with Cameroonian-owned companies. Major projects in Cameroon were completed with mostly Chinese labor, both skilled and unskilled. Chinese aid was largely in the form of huge building projects such as party halls, stadiums, and other public buildings. One of the most celebrated achievements, the Yaoundé Conference Center, was formally opened in 1985, although Chinese citizens remained in Cameroon to operate machines in the hall.<sup>12</sup>

By the mid-1990s, as China emerged as a major economic force in several African nations, dissatisfaction of local citizens increased. Certainly, Chinese ingenuity was appreciated at times. In 2004, for example, the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) contracted to construct a 13-kilometer road in Douala. The company accepted U.S.\$18 million for the project, whereas its closest rival requested U.S.\$30 million, and it completed the job a month ahead of schedule in 2006 (Konings 2011; Khan & Baye 2008, *China Daily* 2007). Many Cameroonians who were interviewed in July 2013 agreed that Chinese companies are more economically efficient and more productive than French companies.

Nevertheless, a great deal of suspicion exists. Chinese-sponsored building projects are seen as contributing little to improve the lives of ordinary people. In 2007, for example, Chinese construction companies earned U.S.\$12.6 billion and signed contracts worth U.S.\$29 billion in Africa (Brautigam 2009). According to one observer, however, “I have not seen a single Chinese investment project that is productive in any way; they are content with building infrastructure, especially stadiums and congress halls”

(Alden et al. 2008:132; see also Mazimhaka 2013). In 2012 China completed the construction of the African Union (A.U.) headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a towering twenty-story building with a conference hall that seats twenty-five hundred people. According to Chinese officials, the A.U.'s building is China's "Gift to Africa." To critics, the A.U. headquarters building is a "Hall of Shame," symbolic of China's colonization of Africa despite its frequent anticolonialism rhetoric (Conway-Smith 2012).

Increasingly, Africans question the values of Chinese investment and argue that Chinese aid and motives are no different from those of Western nations. Chinese companies in Africa have been charged with violating the law, bribing local officials, and treating local citizens with disdain. Studies show that Chinese-owned construction companies pay below the legal minimum wage in Angola, Namibia, and South Africa, engage in job discrimination in Botswana, and provide benefits for subsidized housing, paid annual leave, and paid sick leave only for Chinese employees (ALRN 2009). In Cameroon, they have created little segregated communities, discriminated against local residents, and do not hire African workers in their shops or businesses. Martin Abega, the executive secretary of the Cameroonian organization *Groupement du Interpatronal du Cameroun* (GICAM), says that Chinese "do not respect the rules of the game; they are the champions of contraband" (quoted in Alden et al. 2008:132). A survey of one hundred people conducted in 2009 in ten cities (Strauss & Saavedra 2009) revealed that a significant number (70%) believed the main beneficiary of Sino-Cameroon economic agreement is society's elites.

Many Chinese engage in small business activities such as shopkeeping, typically opening stores in poor neighborhoods such as the Douche Municipale in Douala where they easily force out local competitors with their lower-priced goods (interviews in Cameroon, July 2012). Chinese immigrants in Douala work as shoe repairers, petty traders, peddlers, and, as we will see below, as sex workers (Michel & Beuret 2009; Ndjio 2009). In Cameroon, Chinese involvement in small business activities has had a devastating effect on the local economy. As in urban centers in other African nations, Chinese store owners have moved in and taken control of existing businesses. Even as some Cameroonians express stereotypical notions of Chinese resourcefulness ("Chinese na [are] white people," said one interviewee in 2012), others regard them as Africa's new "conquistador" (quoted in Alden et al. 2008:134).

### **Change and Continuity: Paul Biya's Pragmatism Toward China**

Paul Biya, who succeeded Ahmadou Ahidjo to become the second president of the Republic of Cameroon in 1982, has continued and furthered the country's relationship with China. Biya made five official visits to China—in 1987, 1993, 2003, 2006, and 2011—and there have been countless exchanges at the ministerial and other levels.<sup>13</sup> During Biya's thirty-two-year presidency, the policy of "nonintervention" and "noninterference" with China

has been reciprocated by China's noninterference in Cameroonian political affairs. In the early 1990s, for example, Cameroon was rocked by protests, demonstrations, and calls for a constitutional conference, and Biya's regime almost collapsed. During those turbulent days, most major nations spoke up against Biya's actions, but China made no public statement. A more recent example was Biya's suppression of the demonstration of February 2008 in Cameroon. In Yaoundé, U.S. Ambassador Janet Garvey and representatives of the European Union asked the Biya regime not to remove presidential term limits from the nation's constitution and also to stop the attacks against youth, but China did and said nothing in public. Even when young people were brutalized a few kilometers away from the Chinese embassy in Yaoundé, China said nothing (Amin 2013).

Sino-Cameroon agreements during Biya's tenure include construction contracts for the Kribi Deep Seaport Project, the Ayato Water Project in Douala, and soccer stadiums, and for several infrastructural projects. In 2002 an accord signed by Bello Bouba Maigari, Cameroon's minister of state for industrial and commercial development, and Lu Fuyam, China's vice-minister of external commerce and economic cooperation, committed both nations to reducing duties on imports and exports. In another agreement signed in 2006, the Chinese company Shaanxi State Farms bought ten thousand hectares of land in the center and western regions of Cameroon to cultivate rice, process cassava, and rear ostrich. Critics charged that government sale of "ancestral lands" betrayed traditional norms. In interviews, Cameroonians commented that it was a "terrible blunder" to sell land to Chinese citizens since it encouraged "more of them" to immigrate into the country. Compared to China's population, "Cameroon is nothing," said one interviewee, and if they continued to immigrate into Cameroon, soon "Chinese will outnumber Cameroonians" (interviews in Cameroon, July 2012). As of 2009, rice cultivation by Chinese workers on Chinese-owned land was already taking place in the Nanga-Eboko region.<sup>14</sup>

In 2000 China canceled U.S.\$34 million of Cameroon's debts. Another agreement in the same year gave Hangzhov China-Africa Biotech Co. Ltd (HCABC), a Chinese pharmaceutical company, the right to conduct research in Cameroon. In 2007 China pledged U.S.\$100 million in new grants to Cameroon and canceled U.S.\$32 million of Cameroon's debts.<sup>15</sup> In 2009 Biya formally opened the Chinese-constructed Gynecology, Obstetrics, and Pediatrics Hospital and a multi-sport complex in Yaoundé. An agreement signed in Beijing in 2009 by Henri Eyebe Ayissi, Cameroon's minister of foreign relations, and Fu Ziyang, the Chinese vice-minister of commerce, involved the investment of U.S.\$8 million from the Chinese for the construction of the Gynecological-Obstetric and Pediatric Hospital in Douala.<sup>16</sup> In 2010 an agreement was signed by Louis Paul Motaze, the Minister of Economy, Planning, and Regional Development, and Fu Ziyang of China in which China provided another U.S.\$8 million loan to Cameroon for various projects. In the same year Cameroon's Ministry of Post and Telecommunication reached an agreement with Huawei Technologies Co.

Ltd, a Chinese-based multinational company, to improve the nation's telecommunication system.<sup>17</sup> In 2012 China agreed to provide Cameroon with medical personnel including radiologists and anesthesiologists, as well as medical equipment for the Gynecology, Obstetrics and Pediatrics Hospital in Yaoundé, Buea District Hospital, and a Chinese-constructed hospital in Mbalmayo.<sup>18</sup> In return Cameroon provided housing and utilities. To pay for the program China extended an aid package of U.S.\$870,000. China has also awarded scholarships to Cameroonians to study at Chinese institutions (40 in 2008 and 32 in 2009).

The growing presence and the significance of China in Cameroon are also evident in the various programs that have been developed to teach Chinese language and culture. In 1996 the Chinese Zhejiang Normal University established a Chinese language teaching program in Yaoundé. In collaboration with the International Relations Institute of Cameroon (IRIC), Zhejiang Normal University created a Mandarin language learning center in Yaoundé. In 2007 it was converted to the Confucius Institute where students learn Chinese language and culture. Another indication of Chinese influence in Cameroon is the growing presence of Chinese traditional medicine. In 1989 Cameroon and China reached an agreement stating that the two nations would cooperate to improve the use and study the techniques and effectiveness of traditional medicine, including research into the use of medicinal plants, and that Chinese traditional doctors were allowed to practice in Cameroon.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Cameroon is home to numerous practitioners and one sees billboards throughout the country advertising Chinese traditional medicine. Chinese drugs and ointments are sold on street corners and in shops as the cure for all types of ailments, and Cameroonians have drifted toward Chinese traditional medicine because it is much cheaper than Western-based medical care. Western-trained physicians, in turn, have protested and called on the Cameroon government to control "these quacks" (interviews in Cameroon, June 2013).

As well as exporting laborers and professionals, China has also attracted migration from Cameroon. Just as the economic recession of the 1980s led young Cameroonians to seek employment in Western nations, others headed to China where many taught English or found menial jobs. For many, however, optimism about the opportunities offered by China was short-lived. Shu-Mei Shih (2013), Barry Sautman (1994), Yinghong Cheng (2011), and others have written about the treatment of Africans in China and the changing depiction of black people in Chinese popular culture. Although much more work on this subject is needed, racial attacks against Africans in China are well-documented, along with the humiliation, brutalization, ridicule, and name-calling to which Africans are subjected (Bodomo & Ma 2010). They are referred to by epithets such as "monkey" (Robertson 2011) and are associated with violence, shiftlessness, and low-quality work. Chinese females dating Africans are ridiculed as bringing "shame to 'our country' and 'our ancestors' by sleeping with 'ugly and smelly' blacks," and

Africans are harassed, intimidated, and repeatedly told “Go home you African dogs” (Cheng 2011:567). In the 1980s several urban centers in China were sites of anti-black protests.

These views and actions, of course, raise fundamental questions about the legitimacy of China’s notions of “equal partnership,” and “mutual respect” in its dealing with African nations and people. For all the talk of equality, Beijing has done little to stem anti-black attitudes. In 1989 Cameroon’s Ministry of Higher Education threatened to pull out its citizens from China and protested the treatment of Cameroonians in the city of Nanjing in particular. In a memo dated January 20, 1989, and titled, “Situation étudiants Camerounaise en Chine” (The Living Conditions of Cameroonians in China), ministry officials called upon the Cameroon ambassador to investigate the problems of racism in the city and to act accordingly, especially in regard to “des rapports entre Etudiants Africaines et jeunes filles chinois” (the relationship between Africans and young Chinese females).<sup>20</sup>

The treatment of Cameroonians in China differs dramatically from the official reception Chinese workers have experienced in Cameroon. As of 2009, Chinese were the only foreigners allowed into the country on an eighteen-month residence visa without a labor contract. When the visa status was extended in February 2007, the Cameroon Embassy in Beijing received seven hundred thousand applications (Michel & Beuret 2009; Deutchoua 2007). One of the side-effects of such a liberal visa policy has been a great deal of social tension in regard to the role of Chinese women in the country. In the 1980s, when China’s overriding mission in Africa was to secure markets and guarantee a supply of raw materials, most of the employees connected to Chinese development projects in Africa were male and young Chinese females were encouraged to go to Africa mostly to provide company for Chinese male workers. Chinese company policies discouraged relationships between Chinese men and African females, and the emigration of Chinese women was promoted as a “civic duty.” From the early 1990s in Cameroon, however, and especially at the turn of the twenty-first century when immigration from China increased dramatically, the country experienced an influx of many more Chinese women than the economy could support. This problem was compounded by the fact that by then many Chinese men had rejected earlier restrictions and established relationships with African women. Especially in Douala, Cameroon’s economic (and expensive) capital city, many Chinese women turned to sex work for financial survival. As Basile Ndjio says, “These young prostitutes put their sex, and sensuality at their states’ disposal in the same way as Chinese migrant males did with their strength and energy” (2009:610–11).

As of 2006 they were more than three hundred Chinese prostitutes in Douala, where they are concentrated in neighborhoods such as the Quartier Village, at Carrefour Elf Aéroport, and in residential areas of Bonamoussadi, Makepe, Bonapriso, and Akwa (Ndjio 2009; Michel & Beuret 2009). In Yaoundé they loiter in major hotels including the Hotel Mont- Fébé. Just as

critics talk about a “textiles tsunami,” they liken Chinese female presence to a “sexual tsunami” (Ndjio 2009:616). During the day they hang out at nail salons, Chinese restaurants, and Chinese-owned shops, and at night they walk the streets. They are well-organized with pimps, and are vilified as “junk woman,” “thieves,” “predators,” “invaders,” and “bitch-witches” by the locals (Ndjio 2009:611–12; 2014:381,384). Others note, sarcastically, that like Chinese goods, Chinese prostitutes are equally low-priced; they “will turn tricks for as little as 2000 FCFA [U.S.\$4.25], whereas the locals, the famous *Wolowoss*, won’t get into bed for less than 5000 [\$10.75]” (Michel & Beuret 2009:115). According to Basile Ndjio, who conducted extensive interviews with prostitutes and their “Johns” in Douala, “so synonymous have Chinese restaurants become with brothels . . . that nowadays, when people say that they are going for a meal in a Chinese restaurant, they frequently also mean that they are going to solicit Shanghai beauty in a Chinese restaurant” (2009:611).

### FOCAC and the High Point of Biya’s Diplomacy toward China

A particularly significant event in China–Africa relations was the creation by Beijing of FOCAC. The overt purpose of the forum is to help develop better Sino–African relations, although critics (e.g., Chidaushe 2007) have commented that its real purpose is to promote the interests of China, which establishes the agenda and controls deliberations for all meetings. The first FOCAC Ministerial Conference, held in Beijing in October 2000, was attended by more than eighty ministers from China and representatives from forty-four African countries. The second Ministerial Conference took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in December 2003 (Hickey & Guo 2010). At the end of the meeting China signed 382 assistance agreements with African countries. The 2006 Summit in Beijing was a particularly important event. Attended by seventeen hundred representatives from forty-eight African nations, including forty-one presidents, it marked the fiftieth anniversary of China’s official involvement in Africa and showcased China’s leadership role among nonaligned and developing nations. The event was marked by much “pageantry” (Brautigam 2009:241); streets in Beijing were decorated with African flags and artifacts, and African cuisine was served throughout the city (Manji & Marks 2007). The promises made at the three-day event, according to Brautigam, basically “married aid to China’s global ambition” (2009:241).

In 2011 Sino-Cameroon relations reached another milestone, the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations. To commemorate the anniversary, the Cameroon embassy in Beijing produced a pamphlet documenting key moments in Sino–Cameroon relations. Biya was quoted as saying that China’s relations with Cameroon were “exemplaire[,] ... efficace[,] ... et généreuse.”<sup>21</sup> As part of the commemoration Biya also traveled to China, barely two months before a scheduled election in Cameroon, confirming

his confidence in his reelection prospects and also the political value of the Sino–Cameroon connection. In several editorials (July 12–13, 2011) the *Cameroon Tribune*, a progovernment newspaper, praised China’s contributions to Cameroon, and Biya was quoted in a number of articles praising China, “among our most reliable and most faithful external partners,” for its unprecedented economic growth and its policies of “peaceful conflict resolution, non-interference in the domestic affairs of states and respect for their territorial integrity” (*Cameroon Tribune* 2011b). In an address to African diplomats in Beijing, Biya challenged Africans to emulate China’s example of “hard work and determination” in order to eliminate poverty (*Cameroon Tribune* 2011c).

### The True Cost of Cameroon’s Economic Engagement with China

Despite all the praise, successes, and celebrations of the Sino–Cameroonian relationship, it also has had severe consequences. China’s aid, for example, is predicated on unconditional acceptance of the one-China policy. Partners who establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan jeopardize any aid prospects and face potential suspension of diplomatic relations with China. Even China’s widely professed policy of noninterference is not total. As China’s intervention in the internal affairs of Zambia and Sudan show, the policy is in operation only when China’s political and economic interests are not threatened (Ali 2007; Brautigam 2009).

It must also be understood that Chinese aid, whether in the form of technicians, equipment, military hardware, construction materials, or unskilled workers, consists mostly of loans, which Cameroon is under contractual obligation to repay. Given the nation’s trade deficit and current loan obligations—with repayment of some loans scheduled to begin in 2020—it is possible that Cameroon will be paying those debts for generations to come.<sup>22</sup>

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Cameroon and China, Cameroon’s economy has not improved; in fact, the country was worse off in 2009 than it was fifty years before. In the early 1960s Cameroon’s per capita income was U.S.\$518, six times that of China; in 2004 it was U.S.\$662, half that of China (Charlier & N’Cho-Oguie 2009). Because of a dramatic jump in imports, Cameroon’s trade deficit with China has risen, accounting for 82 percent of the total trade deficit in 2005 (Khan & Baye 2008). Though Cameroon produces rubber, there is no shoe industry or domestic production of soccer balls. The clothing industry, represented by Cameroon Industrial Cotton Processor (CICAM), is almost nonfunctional. The profession of tailoring is almost extinct. Cheap motor bike imports from China have almost crippled taxi business in many cities. Though Cameroon is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and also has major rivers, the fishing industry has collapsed and much of the fish consumed in the country is imported from China. Doughnuts, which many young Cameroonians grew up making and selling to augment family income, are now produced

in massive quantities by Chinese— called “beinge Chinois” in Bamenda and “puff-puff” in Douala—and sold at reduced prices. Local merchants in Cameroonian cities who make a living from the sale of roasted corn, plantains, and barbecued meat by the roadside face stiff competition from Chinese competitors (Mbori 2005; Chimton 2012). Chinese traditional medicine has overtaken Western-based medicine and in many cases has jeopardized the health of Cameroonians. And so it goes. Cameroonians are in disbelief that while youths look for ways to leave the country, young Chinese citizens immigrate for all types of odd jobs (interviews, June and July 2012). Whether in Dakar, Abidjan, Libreville, or Lagos, it is a familiar story.

## Conclusions

While the “Beijing Consensus” initially seemed preferable to the “Washington Consensus,” especially to Cameroonians who welcomed an alternative to French domination, each day has raised new questions and apprehensions about Chinese business practices. As one interviewee stated, “China is exactly like France and in some cases, worse” (interview, July 2012). In the overall scheme of things, China’s contribution to Cameroon’s economic development has been minimal. The conclusions of this study, therefore, complement those reached by analysts of China’s role in Africa who come down on the side of pessimism. What Moelesti Mbeki, deputy chairman of the South African Institute of International Affairs, said in Beijing in 2005 remains valid today: “Africa sells raw materials to China and China sells manufactured goods to Africa. This is a dangerous equation that reproduces Africa’s old relationship with colonial powers” (quoted in Manji & Marks 2007:5). He might have added that China also exports too many untrained people to Africa. While African nations are in need of engineers, scientists, physicians, and water-resource technicians, the continent already has plenty of unskilled workers of its own.

In many ways this is an unsustainable situation. Because of advances in information technology and the Internet, and the rapid movement of ideas, goods, and people across national and continental boundaries, anti-Chinese protest activities that already exist in Cameroon and in other African nations will continue. Biya and other African leaders may have to take much more seriously calls for an “African Consensus,” an alternative paradigm to both the “Washington Consensus,” and “Beijing Consensus” which takes into consideration the economic needs and realities of local people. The old political tactics of silencing, manipulating, and co-opting may no longer be sufficient. Africa’s “silent majority” may finally be pushed to a brink. China’s booming economy will continue to need raw materials, and therefore will need Africa for generations to come. Africa’s voices of protest will continue to grow louder against unfair business practices in the region. The rhetoric of “win-win” and “mutual benefit” is no longer adequate. China will be able to stem a rising tide of protest only by instituting a

number of reforms, such as working for a more equitable trade arrangement with Cameroon and transferring relevant technology and a percentage of Chinese-funded contracts to Cameroonian firms. China, in other words, must commit itself in earnest to the “win–win gain” that is expressed in FOCAC slogans.

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## Notes

1. See Campbell (2008:102–4); Mohan (2013:ix–xi); Brautigam (2009:310); Eyene (2012:18).
2. See Strauss (2013); Sautman and Hairong (2008); Tull (2006); Mohan and Lampert (2013); Alden et al. (2008).
3. See Brautigam (1998:4–5); Large (2008:48); Shinn and Eisenman (2008:8–9); Monson and Rupp (2013); Esteban (2010); Manji and Marks (2007); Rupp (2013); Park (2013:146).
4. Oral interviews were conducted in June and July of 2012 and 2013 in the Cameroonian cities of Yaoundé, Douala, Kumba, Bamenda, Limbe, Tiko, and Buea. One hundred people, including ten Chinese store owners and their relatives, were interviewed. While fewer Chinese were interviewed than initially planned, their opinions were informed and representative of a cross section of the population.
5. Memorandum to the President, March 13, 1962, "Cameroon–Ahidjo Visit," March 1962, Box 112a, President's Office Files, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts; "Head of Cameroon Says Reds Aid Foes," *New York Times*, March 15, 1962. Also see Amin (1992).
6. See *Peking Review* (1977a, 1977b, 1977c).
7. Le Président de la République, Decret No: 72/500 du 27 Sept 1972, "Portant ratification de l'Accord de Coopération Gouvernement de la République

- Populaire de Chine et le Gouvernement de la République Unie de Cameroun,” Cameroon Ministry of Foreign Relations, Yaoundé (MINER).
8. Memo, “Note sur l’état des relations,” 1985; Decret No. 75/387 du Juin 9, 1975, Le President De la République, “Protocole D’Accord Entre Le Gouvernement de La Republique Unie Du Cameroun et Le Gouvernement De La République Populaire De Chine Sur L’Envoi Par La Chine D’une Equipe Medicale Au Cameroun,” MINER.
  9. Le Presidence de la Republique, Decret No: 75/387 du 9 Juin 1975, “Portant publication du Protocole d’Accord entre le Gouvernement de la République Unie du Cameroun et le Gouvernement de la République Populaire de Chine, relatif à l’envoi par la Chine, d’une équipe médicale au Cameroun, Yaoundé,” June 9, 1975, MINER; Le President de la Republique, Decret No: 78/394 du 12 Septembre 1978, “Portant ratification de l’Accord de Coopération Economique et Technique entre le Government de la République Unie du Cameroun et le Gouvernement de la République Populaire de Chine, signe le 7 Octobre 1977 à Pekin, MINER. See also Eyene (2012:86); Sinou (1985:15–16).
  10. See Brautigam (2009:114); Hubbard (2008:218); Khan and Baye (2008:9,28); Konings (2011:199); Chidaushe (2007:109).
  11. Memo, “Note Sur L’état Des Relations Entre la République Populaire de Chine et la République du Cameroun,” February 27, 1985, Ministère des Etrangères, Direction Afrique Asie, MINER.
  12. Memo, Palais de Congress Direction Generale à Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères 23 mai 1985, MINER; Memo, February 27, 1985, MINER.
  13. Official visits to Cameroon included the following: Prime Minister Li Peng (May 1997); Prime Minister Zhu Rongji (August 2002); President Hu Jintao, China’s (January 2007); Vice-Premier Hui Lianyu (January 2011). During all visits economic agreements were either signed or revised. See “40eme Anniversaire des Relations Sino-Camerounaises, 1971–2011,” MINFA; *Cameroon Tribune* (2011a).
  14. “Accord de Coopération Commerciale, Economique et Technique Entre le Governement de la République du Cameroun et le Governement de la République Populaire de Chine,” Yaoundé, August 30, 2002, MINER; “Avenant No 1 au Protocole D’Accord du 13 Janvier 2006 entre le Government de la Peublique du Cameroun et la Societé Denomme integrate-Industry-Commerce Corporation of Shaanxi Land Reclamation & States Farms Relatif a la Realization des Investissements Agricoles au Cameroun, Yaoundé,” July 3, 2007, MINER. See also Konings (2011:193).
  15. See Shinn and Eisenman (2012:214, 306); Nzeugang (2010:27–28); Khan and Baye (2008:4); Konings (2011:4).
  16. “Relève des Conclusions de la Visite des Responsables de L’ Enteprise Chinoise ‘Hangzhou China–Africa Biotech Co Ltd’ (HCABC) au Cameroun du 10 au 22 Juin 2007, Yaoundé”; “Avenant No 1 au Protocole d’Accord du 13 Janvier 2006 entre le Government de la Peublique du Cameroun et la Societé Denomme integrate-Industry-Commerce Corporation of Shaanxi Land Reclamation,” MINER; Letter, M. Xue Jinwei, Ambassadeur de la République Populaire de Chine au Cameroun à S.E.M. André Mama Fouda, Ministre de la Santé Publique de la République du Cameroun, January 24, 2012, MINER.
  17. “Protocol d’Accord en matière de formation des nouvelles technologies dans le reseau postal Camerounais entre La République du Cameroun et Huawei Technologies Co., Limited,” Yaoundé, March 24, 2010, MINER.

18. "Accord de Cooperation Economie et Technique entre le Gouvernement de la République Populaire de Chine et le Gouvernement de la République du Cameroun," Yaoundé, March 24, 2012.
19. Letter, Minister of Public Health to Minister of External Affairs, "Programme d'exécution de l'accord culturel Sino-Camerounais," Ref. M/L no3734/DIPL/D1/B/EO, June 19, 1989, MINER. Also see Eyene (2012:87–88).
20. Memo, "Situation étudiants Camerounaise en Chine," Ref: V/MP No 014/CF/16-1 MESIRES/B00 du 04/01/89," January 20, 1989, MINFA.
21. "40eme Anniversaire des Relations Sino-Camerounaises, 1971–2011," MINER.
22. "Accorde de Cooperation Economique et Technique entre le Gouvenement de la Republique Populaire de Chine et le Gouvenement de la Republique du Cameroun," March 24, 2010, MINER.