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Abstract

This paper explores the nature and dynamics of Sino-Gambia relations in the second republic. It survey the economic, political and social legacies of the Sino-Gambia relations under the second republic and the implications on The Gambia post democratic transition, 2017-2022. The paper seek to engage in critical evaluation of how China's diplomatic strategy in The Gambia is tied to its investment and aid to country. The diplomatic relations is anchored on principles of mutual understanding, non-interference, and respect for other states' sovereignty paired with common history of imperial domination and a shared future of development. In the context of the relationship, this article assess how historical legacy and current realities shaped the dynamics of Sino-Gambia relations in the context of democratic transition and liberal economic openness in The Gambia.

Keywords: *diplomacy, foreign policy, bilateral, aid, cooperation, ties, The Gambia, China,*

Introduction

China attached grand importance to cooperative diplomacy to strengthen its relations with The Gambia. This diplomatic tool has successfully amplify China-Gambia relation in diverse and prominent areas like economic, trade, infrastructure, social and culture. The current Sino-Gambia ties begin in 2016 when the two countries agreed on resumption of ties in.

There are numerous factors responsible for this. China is committed to initiate a new strategy of partnership for African countries as an alternative against the existing “coercive” relations. There are short term and long term goals attached to this strategy. China is believe to be on the right track on achieving this outstanding set of goals. However, critical and significant questions remains how China strategize its diplomatic tools to earn her the compliments of The Gambian government, factors associated to the success of these strategies, the goals and objectives of these diplomatic tools, how The Gambian government respond to this approach and the effects it has on The Gambia.

After the resumption of ties between the two countries in 2013, cooperation in various areas also escalated. This directly relates to the Chinese investment in The Gambia through Foreign direct investment, FD1, public private partnership, PPP and individual small scale businesses. Chinese enterprises are increasing investing in The Gambia. This is both a score and a setback in The Gambia economy.

Political Impacts

The relationship between The Gambia and China has both domestic and international political impacts.

Due to China's non-interference policy, the impacts on domestic politics are indirect and minimal. It is less emphatic than its economic interest. At the international level, China's most prominent political interest is the China Policy and the motive to furnish its international reputation. Recently, China has also adopted a new move to promote political stability in its African partners. A justifiable reference is China's peace mediation efforts in the Horn of Africa.

According to Thrall (2015), Beijing's political interest in Africa is four; bolstering its international image and influence, promoting the One China policy, countering unfavorable international norms and supporting the stability of international economic partners. As highlighted in the previous chapters, Beijing develops a strategic political and economic partnership with African states and treats them all, including The Gambia, evenly.

A general question may be imposed, by comparing The Gambia and China, on how the little Gambia of about 2 million population with a striving economy influences the hegemony of China's international influence. Referencing the realist point of view, all sovereign states have some extent of political capabilities susceptible to swaying decisions in the international system. The Gambia has a single vote in the UNGA like any other sovereign state. This is the most important organ of the UN bestowed with the right of overriding the decisions of the Security Council on special occasions.

*The UN "Uniting for Peace" resolution states that the General Assembly may take action if the Security Council, due to lack of unanimity among its permanent members, fails to act in matters that appears as a threat to international peace, breach of peace or act of aggression. The assembly can immediately consider the matter and make recommendation for members to maintain or restore international peace and security (Annan, 1998).

Considering the relatively bipolar international system, major decisions of the UN are mostly directly or indirectly influenced by the PRC or US. The PRC's glorious UNGA resolution 2758 was influenced by single members of African states with a majority voting for the restoration of the PRC's lawful rights in the UN. China recently demonstrated to be African Union's (AU) most strategic partner. The Gambia also has the same privileges as other African states in the AU and the ECOWAS. The AU is an international political strong base for Beijing. For Beijing, her clear intention is to gain the favor of the entire AU. The more allies and proxies attain in Africa by hegemony states, the more influence they impel in the international system.

Beijing is very vocal and emphatic on the One China policy in its relations with The Gambia. This is the main pillar of Sino-Gambian relations. Contradicting this policy means trivializing Beijing's international status. Perhaps, this concludes that Beijing-Banjul ties are cemented on political grounds.

Beijing expressed no interest in the domestic political affairs of The Gambia. Respecting states' sovereignty and non-interference in their domestic affairs is a key component of Beijing's foreign policy principle in the Gambia. Albeit, interactions between the two countries have indirect impacts on the Gambia's domestic political affairs. Beijing offers capacity-building training for Gambian government officials. Training sessions will somehow shape the political subscriptions of these officials through the unearthed new models, theories, and experiences gained.

Beijing through the CCP also has established relations with some political parties in the state including the ruling NPP and the UDP. Periodic training are offered to officials of these parties with at least some modules focusing on the socialist systems of the CCP.

Concluding Analysis

The rapid growth of cooperation between China and the Gambia will navigate a long effort in increasing China's global geopolitical strength, especially in the continent. The Sino-Gambia relations has less political leanings but are demonstrated to bind more importance than all the other interest. Its political interest in The Gambia has more international dimensions than it has in the domestic sphere.

At the domestic level, there are fewer impacts on internal political affairs at the moment but there is a high tendency of indirect influence (in the long term) in internal politics through ideological orientations. Motivations will be derived from the training and partnerships offered to the various political parties, technocrats, and civil servants by the CCP and the Chinese government.

Economic Impacts

The debut of China's open-up and reform policy flanges fundamental structural economic and political revival undertaken by the Chinese government. Amidst China's growing geopolitical strength, it witnesses a massive economic transformation from an agrarian economy to the world's fastest-growing economy with consistent growth. Maintenance of the enormous economic growth demands extending its economic goals abroad driven by the need for raw materials to feed her industries and market for her finished products.

For blossom economies, cooperation with Africa is fundamental for continuous and expanding sustainability. Developing Africa also needs the international market and the emulation of technologies from relatively developed countries to improve its lacking technical advancements and production growth (Yushi et. al). In relation to these, China and Africa's economic cooperation becomes an essential proceeding for both actors.

China has long-standing economic relations with African countries and unprecedented economic cooperation between the two sides is attained in the past two decades. Data from different research indicated that trade between China and Africa has increased at the fastest rate since 2000. China has economic cooperation with individual African countries before 2000. After 2000, China cooperates with individual African states in the spectrum of one African nation through FOCAC.

FOCAC was founded in 2000 as a platform for coordination and consultation in the relationship between China and Africa. Since the founding of FOCAC, the relationships between China and Africa have grown rapidly with strengthened partnerships in all fields. FOCAC, the adopted manual for the Sino-Africa ties, established a principle of win-win economic cooperation.

The economic activities between China and Africa have attracted both negative and positive impacts on the African economies. Some Western and African critics consider the relationship a neo-colonial one with China exploiting African resources in exchange for its devalued products. On the other hand, surveys have indicated that China's economic relations with most African countries have positive impacts especially on infrastructural development and the availability of affordable finished Chinese products (Jenkins, 2018, as cited in Lekorwe et al., 2016, Fig. 15).

China expresses little but international political interest in its relations with The Gambia. As a result, actors are mostly concerned with its economic interactions with The Gambia. There witnessed a growing controversy on the effects of the increasing economic activity between China and The Gambia. Whereas some are swayed by anti-China propaganda branding China's economic activities in the Gambia as a neo-colonial project, others subscribe to the fact that the relationship is a mutual base established by the autonomous consent of both actors. China demystifies an unequivocal approach in pursuing its economic interest with The Gambia. It remains under the purview of The Gambian leaders to critically and technically evaluate the nature, scope, and possible impacts of an agreement prior to approbation.

Since the resumption of ties, the pace of economic engagements between The Gambia and China has reached unprecedented growth. Chinese economic activities in The Gambia are modelled through infrastructural development, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), financing Chinese contracted projects, trade (import and export), and the provision of loans.

China has financed and implemented two major infrastructural projects in The Gambia from 2017 to 2022. This includes the construction of roads and bridges under the BRI and the renowned OIC D. K Jawara major conference center. According to the releases of The Gambian government, these two projects are grants from the Chinese government without publishing any economic conditions attached. These roads will in many ways boost the economy of the country through ease of mobility and the rapid flow of goods and services. However, about one year after the inauguration of these bridges, therein was a public outcry on surprise toll charges on the vehicles crossing the Chinese-built Samba Juma Bridge. Commercial vans are charged 150 Gambian Dalasi (about 3 USD) and taxis charge D50 (about 1 USD). The government clarifies these charges as a “default liability period” explaining China's control of the bridge for the first two years before final official handing over to The Gambia.

The Gambia also secures a loan of 25\$ million from the Chinese state own Exim bank. The loan bears development intends to build a The Gambia National Broadband Network (GNBN). The commitment of the loan is a 2% interest rate, 7 years grace period, and a 20-year maturity. The IMF calculated the grant element of the loan to 34% (aid data, a research lab at the William & Mary, retrieved 2023). The evaluation of this loan solely depends on the contract implementation, quality of work, and the accuracy of Gamtel's projections of a \$13 million increment of annual income bearing effect from the loan.

Trade dominates the relationship between the Gambia and China. The major activities of the relations are trade through investment, import, and export. It is virtually impossible to have a balance trading partnership between The Gambia and China considering the very geopolitical, economic and social discrepancies. The Gambia has a population of about 2.2 million people with a struggling economy of GDP \$1.83 billion in 2020. On the other hand, China has a population of more than 1 billion people, the fastest-growing economy, and the second-largest economy with a GDP of about \$14.7 trillion as of 2020 (OEC, 2022).

The Gambia is blessed with raw materials but has no production capacity compared to China, the world's largest manufacturing country with a global manufacturing capacity of more than 25% (safeguardglobal.com).

The trade relationship between such countries will certainly be based on the acquisition of raw materials and the provision of finished products.

China's foreign direct investment in The Gambia grows annually from 2016 to the end of 2020. By the end of 2020, China's foreign direct investment in the Gambia reached \$67.42 million. Most of China's investment in The Gambia is directed at the acquisition of raw materials to feed her industries. China's investment in The Gambia is mostly in the areas of natural and mineral resources exploration.

Trading exchanges between China and The Gambia also increase from the regeneration of ties. The Gambia import finished goods from China majorly, clothing and fabric, food (tea and rice), electronic and electric materials and devices, and building materials among others. China on the other hand import from the Gambia raw materials in the form of wood, titanium ore, raw tea, oily seeds, sand, and fish, most prominent among others. The two countries in 2018 signed an agreement of duty-free treatment of "goods" from the Gambia arriving in China. However, this is still to the advantage of China as these are unprocessed goods that will be processed in China with added value and sold at a maximum profit.

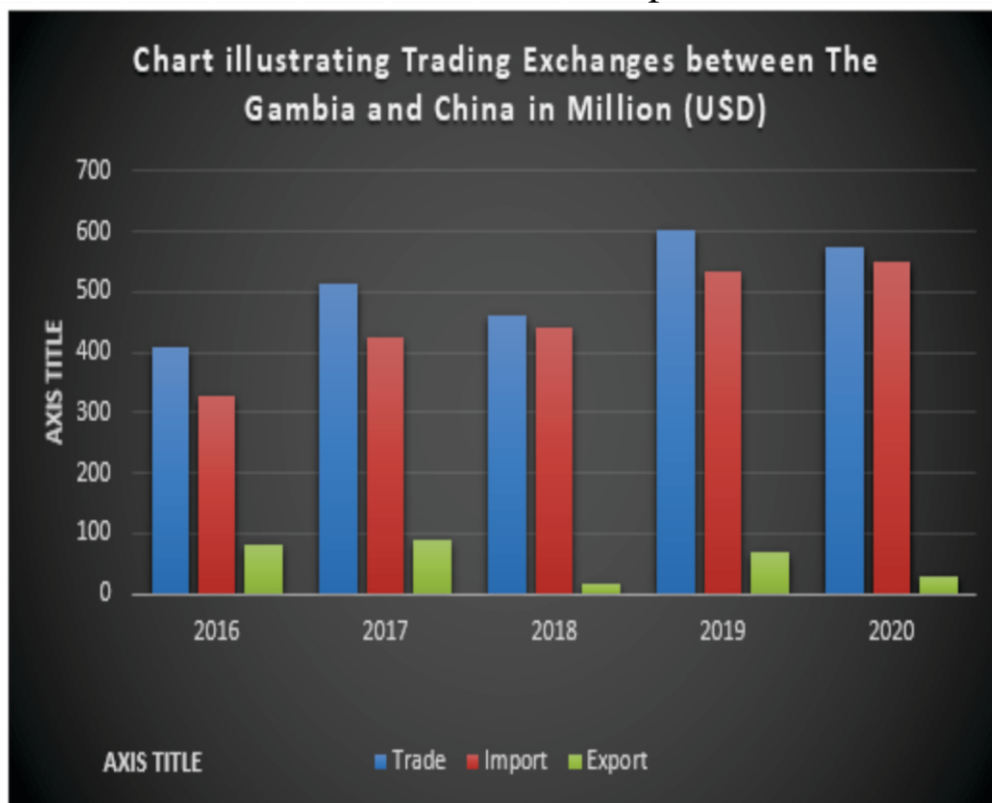


Figure 2, Source: Calculated data from OEC

The economic relations between The Gambia and China increase annually referencing the resumption of ties. According to the World Bank poverty measurement line, PPP 2011, 35.5% of Gambians live below the poverty line of USD 3.20 a day (ADB, 2022; African economic outlook 2022). Hence, the trade between the two countries will provide the common Gambian access to finished goods as goods from China are regarded most affordable in The Gambian market. Brautigam (2009), explains cited a major setback for China and Africa relations predicting the "crushing" rather than "catalyzing" Africa's industrial development process. The Gambia is so much relying on imports from China and reluctantly ignoring the need for local manufacturing of its raw materials. There is a significant trade deficit to the disadvantage of The Gambia.

The Gambia only import finished goods from China and most of the export to China are raw materials. China's FDI in the Gambia is enjoying constant growth. Generally, the trade relations are a win-win for both countries but on a high score points to China, through very polarized import and export deficit.

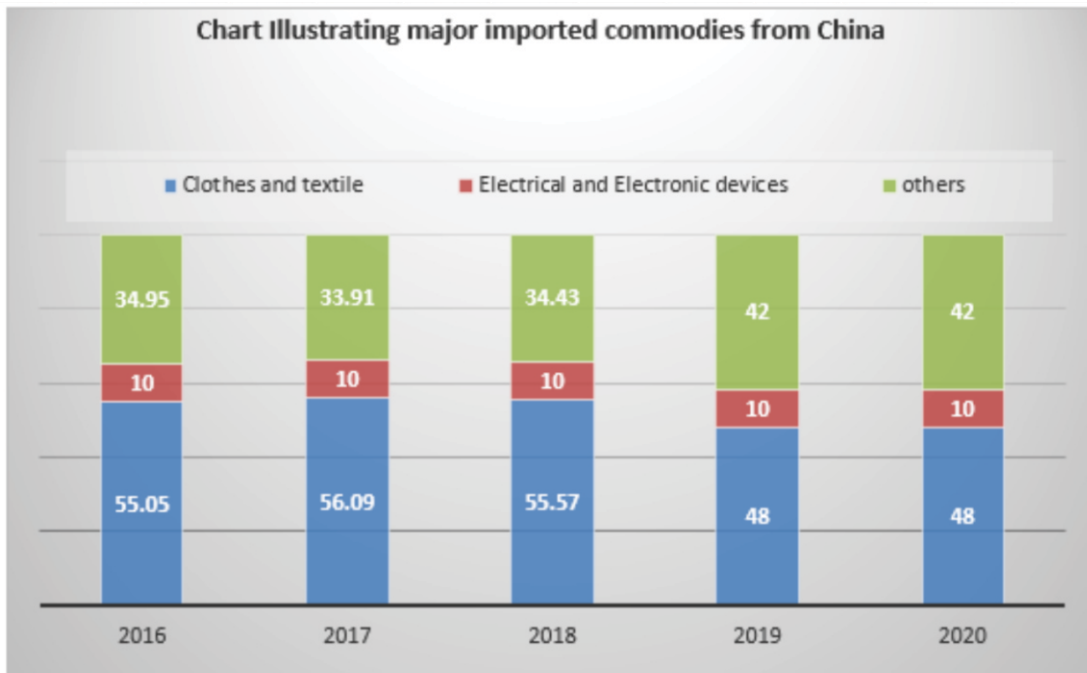


Figure 3, Source: calculated data from OEC

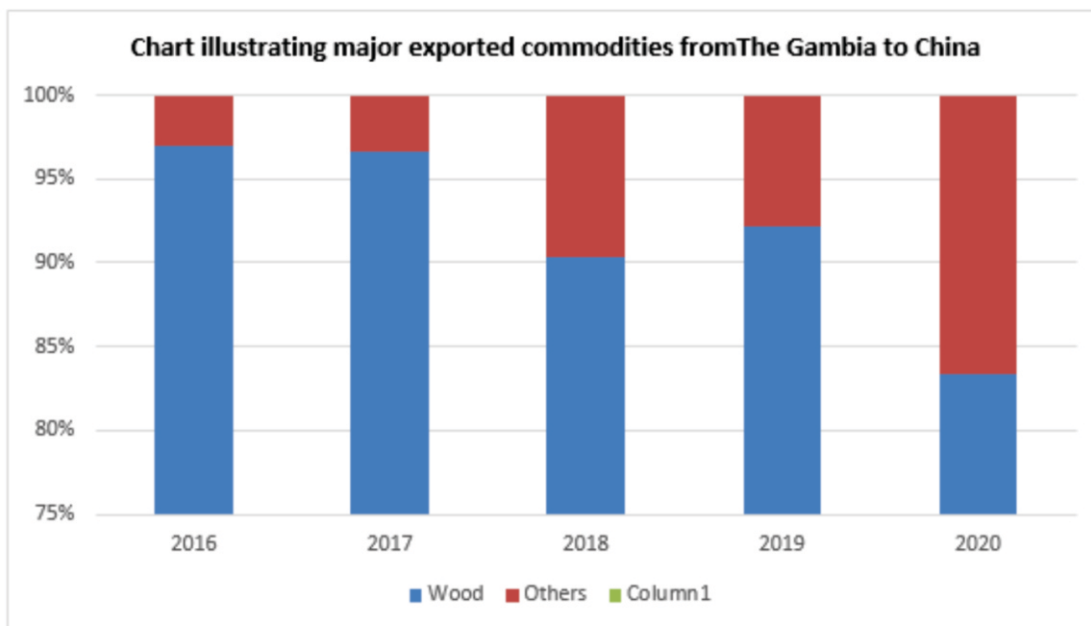


Figure 4, Source: Calculated data from OEC

Social Impacts

As highlighted in the previous analysis, the Sino-Gambia most recent relations have impacted the social lives of The Gambia people. More Chinese own private companies and individuals invest in the areas of sand mining, fishing, vegetable farming, merchandise trading, and other forms of business. This has both negative and positive attributes in the lives of the Gambians.

In the areas of sand mining, Gambian-owned private company Gach Mining and the China-focused Australian group are prominent for “black sand” mining and the production of titanium, rutile, ilmenite, and Zircon from Sanyang village (in the west coast region) exported to China (Malagen online, 2020).

Recently, the resumption of Sino-Gambian relations has attracted new breeds of Chinese private investors in The Gambian fishing industry. The private Chinese fish companies, Golden Lead, Nassim Fish Meal Plant, and JXYG fish factory are host in the extremely fish-rich west coast region villages of Gunjur, Sanyang, and Kartong respectively where they explore different varieties of fish to be exported to China. The activities of these companies have sparked controversial debates surrounding their effect on the lives of the people, the economy, and the environment. Unarguably, these fish companies generated positive and negative outcomes for the Gambian's socioeconomic life and environment.

Concluding Analysis

The sand mining activities attracted less fortune to the Gambia than it cost her. Sand mining is creating environmental destruction in mining areas of Sanyang and Banjul. Residents, environmentalists, and activists protested the destruction the sand mining in Sanyang will cost the environment. This is believed will affect water drainage systems and the green environment (Gainako Online, 2019). The sand which could have been processed in the Gambia to source revenue and employment is exploited by the government at the expense of The Gambians. The capitalist private mining companies are only drowned in profit-maximizing and attached less care to the welfare of Gambians.

According to the Gambian government, the Chinese fishmeal companies will add prevailing benefits to the Gambia economy. The fisheries ministry highlighted that these companies will create employment for youths and women and boost businesses in host local communities. In Sanyang, the transportation of fish to the Nassim fishmeal has increased business mobility in the area and is directly reflected in the business of local vendors, mostly women. Additionally, the fishmeal company has attracted people from neighboring Senegal, Sierra Leon, and Nigeria seeking work from the effects of the company. These newcomers generate income for the locals through rentals (Kurang, 2020). In the localities of these factories, food stands and commercial vehicles also benefit from the rapid business environment impact. Generally, the advantages of these fishing companies rotate around boosting the economy and business. However, the setbacks of the activities of these companies spread to broader areas.

The disadvantages touch a wider range of the socio-economic life of the people and the environment. Kurang 2020, revealed that the fishmeal companies render grave social and ecological changes to the lives of The Gambians. The companies initiate a competitive environment with the local people. Competition between local fishermen and fishmongers (with fewer resources, limited capital, and primitive tools) and the Chinese factories (with financial muscles and sophisticated fishing trawlers and equipment) is quite illogical and impossible. The factories buy more fish at higher prices which result in the scarcity of fish and price hike for the locals (Kurang, 2020, citing an interview with Gunjur fishmonger personnel in July 2020). The local fishmongers (mostly women) are frustrated with less supply of fish and the inability to compete with these factories.

Kurang referencing Hunt, 2020 further stated the presence of these sophisticated fishing trawlers pushes local artisanal fishermen (who are mostly breadwinners of their families) out of business (Kurang, 2020).

Moreover, the activities of these factories also impacted grave environmental disorder with triggered uprisings against these factories and the government by the local youths. This was witnessed in Gunjur in 2017 and the subsequent filing of a lawsuit against Golden Lead claiming damages for environmental destruction from irresponsible disposal and waste management (Gunjur Online, 2019). A complaint was also laid against the Nassim factory in Sanyang for irresponsible fishing and waste management. In Kartong, youths also rise for the closure of fish factories for massive fish dumps and disregarding of the environment (Standard newspaper, 2017).

The locals in Gunjur complain of air pollution from the operations of the factories which could cause some certain respiratory diseases. Residents of Gunjur complain to the fisheries ministry regarding the unpleasant smell derived from the operations of Golden Lead (Kurang, 2020). In Kartong village, the JXYG Company influences overfishing and juvenile fishing activities through the local fishmongers' eagerness to meet the demands of the factory. The fishmeal factories negatively affected the eco-tourism areas of these coastal villages. The once attracted beaches with friendly tourist environments are turned into disposals unfit to live. Tourism in these areas fall and many youths who survived on tourism were left unemployed (Kurang, 2020).

Furthermore, fish is the most common and cheapest protein in The Gambia. With the sudden operation of these companies, fish becomes scarce with significant price increment leaving depriving many Gambians away from their normal routine protein consumption (summers, 2019). The factories were also interested in special types of fish which leads to the wastage of fish and environmental depletion.

The river Gambia is one of the most important natural resources The Gambia is blessed with considering its history, size, geography and proximity to the mouth of the Atlantic Ocean. The Gambia's socio-economic, cultural and traditional life is closely linked to the river Gambia. Therefore, it is quite facile to entice mishaps or disruption in the daily lives of the Gambians through the river.

Conclusion

Over the past decades, Sino-Africa relations have witnessed unprecedented explosive growth across all sectors including economy, political, social, cultural, and security. China has established relations with about 53 African countries and secured the confidence of the majority of African governments. As the ties strengthen, the relations become more inclusive and attain esteemed prominence in the global arena.

China is more emphatic on its economic relations with Africa. China set the mark of Africa's largest trading partner with a record high of USD 139.1 billion in the first half of 2021 (Subban, 2021, referencing China's Ministry of Commerce). China volunteer as the continent's largest development partner complimenting Africa's effort to achieve her development aspirations. China presents as the best partner for Africa's development and works on providing Africa with economic alternatives through non-interest loans, grants, concessional loans and the introduction of reliable economic models. These political unconditional incentives have made China a favorable and reliable partner for Africa.

Added to that, the industrial paralyzed Africa with over 50% of the population living in poverty also needs China for the accumulation of affordable finished products. Thus, Africa enjoys an immense economic advantage for its partnership with China. China invested massively in Africa's infrastructural development. Unique among the main objectives of the current Sino-Africa relations is the craving for Africa's trade integration through effective communication (BRI) leading to the partnered construction of roads, bridges, railways, seaports, and airports across different regions and countries in the continent. China has also financed the construction of public institutions and government complexes in various African countries.

Embedded in China's foreign policy principle with Africa is the win-win cooperation. China unambiguously stressed a mutual gain cooperation in its partnership with Africa. Sino-Africa relations serve a platform for China to strengthen its global hegemony status. Africa remains a significant battleground for global powers. Ascribable to that, securing the spot as Africa's darling partner may secure China a strong voice in the geopolitical order. Economically, China will gain easy access to Africa's resources. Africa is one of the world's richest continents blessed with natural, mineral, and human resources with a highly consuming population. China assuming Africa's most darling partner will pace her route to unruffled and serene resource mineral and natural resource mobilization to feed her industries and a market for its finished goods. Culture is an effective tool of influence for all powers. China also has created significant cultural footnotes in the region through the establishment of Confucius Institutes in different African countries to serve as a cultural bridge between the host nations and China through the promotion of language education and cultural programs.

China and The Gambia have a history of inconsistent relations marked by suspension and resumption of ties. Shortly before the exile of the propagator of The Gambia's second republic, China resumed formalized ties with The Gambia for the second time. This is continued in the second government with a progressive remark. The most talked about relations registered successful traits for both state actors. China's engagement with The Gambia is positive for both sides to enjoy long-term economic and political benefits. However, the relations are hurdle by litanies of unfounded allegation describing it as a neo-colonial order. This claim is not only myopic but biased and influenced by propaganda. China does not show any sign of coercive action in The Gambia. All engagements are born of full and unrivaled consent of both parties. China, absolutely has an interest in The Gambia summed up in its overall interest in Africa, but that does not disparage the fact that The Gambia is not benefiting from the relations. The relationship is between two sovereign countries and whoever ploys her strategy well (considering the aspirations of her people) will emerge more positive with both parties enjoying a tangible extent of positive gains (win-win).

China presents itself as a partner to The Gambia. Partnership implies cooperation for a win-win. China has diverse and multifaceted relations with The Gambia encompassing major areas including economy, trade, politics, health, culture and infrastructure. Over the past five years, China has been the major bilateral trading partner for The Gambia with a record trading exchange of \$600 million by the end of 2019 (see page 61, Figure 1). Brautigam (2009) recognizes the potential of Africa to be a major beneficiary in her involvement with China from China's rapid development process.

China's involvement with The Gambia has positive impacts in the social and economic life of Gambians. A case is the construction of roads and bridges in URR which facilitated effective communication in the region and directly increase business and trading activities among Gambians in the areas. The construction of the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara conference center has serve the country a major structure to host important national and international events. Added to that, China has been active in promoting education among Gambians. China offers scholarship opportunities for Gambians to study in The Gambia and China. Many students from underprivileged backgrounds have benefitted from such and are in turn impacting the development of the Gambia and their individual families. China has been also instrumental in the development of the health sector and agriculture through the provision of expert services and equipment. China responds with humanitarian assistance when the need arises.

China also enjoys some form of benefits from its relations with The Gambia. Politically, The Gambia has a vote in the UNGA, and smooth ties with China could mean siding with China (as a global power) in the UN if needed. Added to that, strict compliance with the One China policy means a continuation of relations, and any form of disregard for this policy poses a question to China's diplomatic principles. Economically, China has been enjoying stable trade ties with The Gambia and emerged as its largest trading partner in 2020. The imports most of her goods from China and as well exports important raw materials to China. Foreign direct investment from China grows with an increasing number of Chinese private own companies operating in The Gambia, especially in the fisheries areas. However, a major argument arises that investment of private Chinese companies in the Gambia is to its disadvantage and creates a direct linkage between official aid and investment. Undoubtedly, aid is a form of public diplomacy creating fortunes for one's citizens outside its borders. But it is the sole responsibility of The Gambian government to set regulations for all foreign investors with the motive to safeguard the interest of her people. Added to that, the activities of some private Chinese investors should not be equated to that of the Chinese government and the general Chinese people.

This research exposes in summary the many layers of engagements between The Gambia China to lay and unbiased and empirical facts of the relations. The research concludes that the Sino-Gambia relations is fortified are a balance swing serving the interest of both states. However, considering the disparity in the geopolitical positions, economic situations and development phases of both state actors, I admittedly symbolizes the relation as that of a core and a periphery country. Thus, in a different orientation.

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