

*China's economic partnership with Africa: Is the relationship neocolonial? Can this relationship be beneficial to the development of West African countries?*

by

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Development and progress within the African continent has been in question for the past few decades, particularly after the global economic crisis or recession of the mid-1970s. Economic development has been slow in the continent compared to other regions of the world, contrasted sharply with Africa's strong growth between the start of decolonization until 1973, which was equal to and sometimes even better than most other global regions (Saia-i-Martin 2003; quoted from Hirsch and Lopes 36). The economic devastation that followed is often referred to as the "African Tragedy." Recently, China has invested a lot of money into Africa, building dazzling infrastructure projects like the Bui Dam and brokering deals in exchange for the resources that many African nations possess. The international community has been looking at this relationship skeptically from a distance.

This recent occurrence has led to the formation of this dissertation, which seeks to identify and confirm whether the relationship between China and West Africa is neocolonial or if said relationship will benefit West Africa in the future. These benefits include job growth, the addition of infrastructure and its longevity, reduction of relative poverty, rapid exchange of information, technology, and expertise and positive effects towards a countries' human security index. In this chapter, I will examine sociological and political theories that explain the position West Africa is in compared to other countries. This examination will lead the reader in identifying what makes a relationship neocolonial and what can help explain why West Africa has been exploited and continues to be exploited throughout history. It also seeks to answer, 'What kind of relationship would be beneficial to the acceleration of West Africa's economic progress in a capitalist-dominant world?' 'What will the economic progress mean to its citizens?' 'Will human security dwindle with the addition of Chinese support?' The graphic novel,

“Jigawa,” will illustrate to readers exactly what kind of relationship West Africa finds itself with China.

### **Creative Thesis**

The graphic novel portion of the thesis will be substantive and include accurate depictions of the relationship between China and Chinese migrants with West Africa, and its leaders and citizens. The most influential piece used is from Howard French and his book “China’s Second Continent,” in addition with other academic journals and articles that are concentrated in this field of study.

The graphic novel entitled “Jigawa” takes place in Nigeria, with periodic mentions of other West African countries like Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, and Mali in order to get an all-encompassing story about the growing Chinese presence in the region. Some information may come from outside of West Africa, but remain within the African continent, most notably from Central Africa. The story follows a young adult girl named Aicha Yakubu who studies international relations at a university in Lagos, Nigeria. She learns about Chinese investment within West Africa, but refocuses back to her hometown because her family from Jigawa state will need to give up their land due to projects that are heavily funded by Chinese investments. Moved by the ideas of protest and resistance, she organizes a strike against the Chinese project, especially finding out that this may solely benefit Chinese interests in the long-term. Aicha searches for solutions to help her family’s rapidly changing community filled with turmoil and mobilizes her community to question the abundance of Chinese enterprises in Nigeria and the Nigerian government’s eagerness to accept their money. Displacement, China’s level of non-interference or their extent into African politics, the transfer of ideas and expertise, and exportation of Chinese migrants among other aspects will be highlighted. It is important to

visualize this situation because it humanizes the predicament of developing in the Global South. Development is shocking for African nationals and seeing an outside influence like China readily change the world they are living in is a fascinating phenomenon to highlight in a visual format.

### **Neocolonialism**

Neocolonialism, or the use of political, economic, cultural or other means to control or have influence over other regions, especially former colonies, is what many Western countries (notably the United States) and Africans themselves believe China is practicing in West Africa. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana from 1960 to 1966, often spoke about neocolonialism and warned that it is a serious threat to world peace. In the introduction to his book, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, Nkrumah defines neocolonialism, stating “the essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings on international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.” (Nkrumah ix) He also noted how African countries are especially vulnerable to this form of imperialism, due to their legacy of colonialism. It is important to note that neocolonialism isn’t practiced solely by former colonial powers towards former colonies. “Where neo-colonialism exists the power exercising control is often the State which formerly ruled the territory in question, but this is not necessarily so. For example, in the case of South Vietnam the former imperial power was France, but neo-colonial control of the State has now gone to the United States. It is possible that neo-colonial control may be exercised by a consortium of financial interests which are not specifically identifiable with any particular State.” (Nkrumah x)

China insisted that they are not trying to pry into African political affairs like western countries have, as noted previously and in the case of Françafrique and the various foreign

political initiatives from the United States of America. The People's Republic has a firm policy of 'non-interference' and believes that the relationship they continue to foster with African countries will lead to a positive outcome for both parties. In 2012, President Hu re-affirmed China's adherence to non-interference in his final report to the 18th Party Congress, stating that 'China opposes hegemonism and power politics in all their forms, does not interfere in other countries' internal affairs and will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion'. (Duchatel et. al. 5) "China's Second Continent," by Howard W. French identified many of the positive aspirations that both Chinese and Africans have with the partnership. Liu Qi, an economics officer of the Chinese diplomatic mission to Mali answered the doubts about Chinese intentions by stating, "In China we want to establish win-win relations with African countries. We want to help them develop. We have no other ambitions. We do not seek to become colonizers. We respect their sovereignty and we do not interfere in their internal affairs." (French 146)

Some Africans indicated the intense need for foreign investment. In contrast, some Africans have touted an explosion of Chinese migrants, Chinese business, and Chinese cultural influence in their nations and refer to it negatively. "In many places, Africans complained that Chinese occupied construction, industrial management, even general maintenance of projects, and precious few of those skills were passed along to locals." (French 179) When visiting Côte d'Ivoire, my Ivorian parents often spoke about how many Chinese businesses have been popping up. Correspondingly, this left me concerned about China's economic partnership with Africa. Is the relationship neocolonial? Can this relationship be beneficial to the development of West African countries?

The aim of the next few sections will be to evaluate theories that explain the process of development within societies and how the system is set up to create developmental inequalities. I

will be applying the dependency theory to identify if a reliance net is being sown in Chinese/West African relations. Additionally, the world-systems theory will be employed to expound any noteworthy measures China can carry out to aid West African countries' economic development. Samuel P. Huntington fits into this analysis because strong political institutions are important for reaping the benefits of a growing economy. Africans recognize that many of their leaders haven't been effective, lack democratic propensity, and engage in dishonorable activities. Corrupt officials and lack of transparency may ruin the positive outcomes that come with having an international economic partnership. Modernization theory expresses that corruption and lack of democracy is Africa's number one problem, but maybe economic development or a turn to capitalism will help. Therefore it will be analyzed because of its suggestions and to highlight Africa's supposed "traditionalism".

**Theoretical Chapter: Dependency and world-systems theory working in conjunction to explain the relationship between China and West Africa**

In order to accurately pinpoint whether the relationship between China and West Africa is neo-colonial or not, a political theory can help explain or give further insight into the historical and current position of the periphery, 'Third World', or poor countries' on the economic stage. Theories can also provide steps into how these countries, or more specifically, West Africa, can get out of its supposed 'tragedy' and what it can do to develop. It also can reveal what core, 'First World,' or rich countries can do to aid poor countries in their transition. Modernization theory, dependency theory, and the world-systems theory would be adequate theories to analyze the thesis at hand. They are adequate theories because they offer competing explanations for development or the lack thereof, and are extremely diverse. These theories aren't only political

theories; they have started as economic theories, but sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists have added to these schools of thought.

Briefly, this section will only go into which mechanism would be beneficial to West African development from China's position. The comic itself will reveal how China actually operates within the region, and in some cases, in countries in Central and South Africa.

### *Modernization Theory*

Modernization theory, related to economic systems and development, is a viewpoint that sets inequality in conjunction with industrial and cultural differences between countries. It suggests that low-income nations were left out of important industrial processes in major historical developments, like the Industrial Revolution and more earlier, the Columbian Exchange. Generally, modernization theory is defined as “the process of social change whereby less developed societies acquire characteristics common to more developed societies” (Lerner, 386; quoted from Nhema and Zinyama 152) The theory emerged after WWII, in the 1960s by the United States' government because they needed an ideological basis to support the Alliance for Progress and the Marshall Plan, or the European Recovery Program. (Reyes 3; Frieire and Lima 2374) The key tenets of modernization theory are: breaking the chains of traditional society and moving towards modernity, using the modernization of the West as a model in doing so, and the need for assistance from First world countries which can promote development and modernization in poor countries. (Nhema and Zinyama 152)

Walt Whitman Rostow, an American economist, professor, and political theorist, provided possible solutions for the promotion of Third World modernization in his five stages of economic growth. His five stages of development are: traditional society, precondition for takeoff, the takeoff process, the drive to maturity and the high mass consumptions society. They

are the basis for modernization theory. (Reyes 3) This postulation is still taught today because of the development agenda set by the current dominant global forces. There is “a universal evolution in the direction of capitalism” “through economic modernization.” (Fukuyama 1992; quoted in Byekwaso 45). While completely lauded by major international financial institutions and other key national and international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) (Sylvester 18), this theory has many aspects that link to neo-colonial tendencies. The institutions that have utilized this theory in practice have not helped development in periphery countries. Arguably, those that have utilized the strategies put forth by this theory has hurt these nations’ development.

Firstly, modernization is an ethnocentric theory of development as it itself is a “europeanization or americanization process,” since much of its literature has “an attitude of complacency toward Western Europe and the United States.” (Reyes 1) The dependency theory, pushed by Latin American scholars (Raul Prebisch, Celso Furtado, and Anibal Pinto) with help from American marxists, directly counters modernization theory because it highlighted the unique process that other countries face that modernization theory did not; like colonization from the countries that they are supposed to follow in the footsteps of in this current world order. In addition, many African scholars have identified modernization theory as another means of continuing their control of low-income countries, especially former colonies. “The US developed the modernization theory as an ideology of dominating Third World countries in the name of helping them to come out of underdevelopment through the Western style of industrialization.” (Odei Ajei 2007; Ake 1981 quoted from Byekwaso 2005; 288)

As mentioned earlier, modernization theory suggests that the rise of modernity in society will be accompanied by the fading of traditional societies. Overall, it views traditional societies



as some sort of negative or unsophisticated system. But traditional societies are way too diverse to use as an analytical concept, as Samuel Huntington advocates. “Pygmy tribes, Tokugawa Japan, medieval Europe, and Hindu villages are all traditional. Aside from that label, however, it is difficult to see what else they have in common.” (Huntington 294) Furthermore, “the simpler theories of modernization implied a zero-sum relation between the two: the rise of modernity in society was accompanied by the fading of tradition. In many ways, however, modernity supplements but does not supplant tradition... In addition, one can go further and argue not only that coexistence is possible but that modernization itself may strengthen tradition.” (Huntington 295) One can see this clearly in places like Taiwan and South Korea, where its current development levels have been achieved by strong authoritarian regimes, (Reyes 3-4) and in Japan where Odei Ajei (2007) argues from the history of Japanese development that cultural values do not necessarily hold back development. (Byekwaso 293) Therefore, Europeanization or Americanization isn’t a necessary process towards development, and China’s ‘non-interference’ policy may be a step in the right direction for West African development because China won’t promote a style of development that won’t work for the history and circumstances present within the region.

In search of more characteristics of the modernization theory, I point to Dean C. Tipps, and his article “Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective.” Tipps posits:

Though studies of modernization have focused upon many different levels, ranging in scale from the individual through local communities to national and international units, it is the national territorial state which is of critical theoretical significance.... It is here at the national level that the various facets of the modernization process are seen to be aggregated. (Tipps 202)

He goes on in more detail to explain:

...modernization is a type of social change which is both transformational in its impact and progressive in its effects. It is also generally viewed as extensive in scope, as a 'multifaceted process;' which not only touches at one time or another virtually every institution of society but does so in a manner such that transformations of one institutional sphere tend to produce complementary transformation in others. (Tipps 202)

It is true that modernization is a multifaceted process that transforms all institutions within a society, however it does not induce a complementary transformation between each institution.

Modernization theory believes that economic development will breed democracies, the peak of modernity. This was advocated sharply by Seymour Martin Lipset, one of the primary scholars for modernization theory. It was also heavily advocated by the IMF and WB. This conclusion, however, is inaccurate as China itself had developed substantially and is still clearly an authoritarian and communist state. In addition, Przeworski and Limongi (1997) studied the trend between democracy and economic development, and surmised that after an average income of \$6,000 dollars, it is unlikely for authoritarian regimes to shift to democratic regimes; they will stay as authoritarian dictatorships. (pg. 159) Furthermore, "dictatorships survived for years in countries that were wealthy as they flourished in Singapore, East Germany, Taiwan, USSR, Spain, Bulgaria, Argentina, and Mexico for many years after countries enjoyed incomes above \$5,000, which Austria, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, and Norway did not have by 1950." (Przeworski and Limongi 160)

Moreover, Huntington highlights a key aspect that the modernization theory fails to address: that African and other non-Western cultures are fit for modernization, but rapid economic growth and industrialization breeds instability. This political instability is often what is referred to when discussing the "African tragedy," in conjunction with economic development.

...rapid industrialization and urbanization create discontinuities which give rise to mass society... In areas and industries with very rapid industrial growth the creation and

institutionalization of unions lag and mass movement are likely among the workers. As unions are organized they are highly vulnerable to outside influences... Rapid economic growth breeds political instability. Political mobilization, moreover, does not necessarily require the building of factories or even movement to the cities. It may result simply from increases in communications, which can stimulate major increases in aspirations that may be only partially, if at all, satisfied. The result is a “revolution of rising frustrations.” (Huntington 405-406)

Likewise, in Samuel P. Huntington’s essay, “Political Development and Political Decay,” he asserts that rapid modernization does not produce political development, but political decay (Huntington 386) Huntington compares the characteristics of political development with political modernization to make the poignant argument that “in a highly developed political system, political organizations have an integrity which they lack in less developed systems... They are insulated from the impact of non-political groups and procedures... In less developed political systems, they are highly vulnerable to outside influences.” (Huntington 401) The highly developed political systems, or highly institutionalized systems, are usually complicated. They become this way when an organization has stood the test of time and fostered successful transitions in leadership. It is important to note that Huntington distinguishes between development and modernization. However, this is precisely in opposition to modernization theory which assumes that they are the same process.

This is not the case for many West African countries, because many of its current institutions began in its colonial era, starting in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They have not exactly lasted the test of the short time it was established, and Africa is known for having authoritarian, despotic leaders that continuously remain in power until they die, undermining the peaceful transfer of leadership that is characteristic of democratic societies. Nonetheless, this makes said countries vulnerable to repeated influence by European powers and other foreign entities, like the International Monetary Fund, that can impede on its development. This is

important to note because lack of institutions and corrupt leaders affects economic development. It is a factor that influences how complex a country's economy is (i.e. how many sectors there are and how developed are these sectors) and where does the money coming into the country go to, like education, health, infrastructure development etc. But because African institutions were constructed due to outside intervention, they never had a chance to dictate what path is best for their path of development. Outside actors had set up institutions not only unfamiliar to the region, but arguably unhelpful for their unique culture and conditions. "According to African ethicists, the erosion of indigenous culture by the Western intrusion is held responsible for the existence of rampant poverty on the continent, and therefore they advocate the revitalization of African institutions and values." (Odei Ajei 2007; Matunhu 2011) This Western intrusion is not only referring to Western colonial powers but also international organizations and multinational corporations.

On the whole, Africa's economic development can not necessarily be tied to what the modernization theory posits. The theory suggests that when countries adopt more modern practices, those traditional societies will develop. And because the West was the first to reach the level of development many countries wish to attain, they are the model for development and modernization. However, through Africa's process of industrialization and their adoption of many Western practices, they still have been marred with difficulties along their development course. Therefore, it isn't a matter of their culture and how fast they can industrialize, or even economic development and democratization. This could be a matter, though, of not having strong institutions. And these institutions were directly affected by colonialism which incited further dependency on the First World after independence.

Huntington shows how traumatic and shocking the process of modernization can be. Political turmoil is natural in the process of modernization as advances of literacy and social mobilization accompany modernization. Fierce conflict can transform organizations into institutions, so current conflicts happening in the political sector is a part of Africa's modernization and not a part of their 'failure'. But modernization, again, does not produce a complementary relationship in other sectors. And changing traditional cultures in said countries doesn't expedite development, as it is just another mechanism for imposing powerful countries' culture on the poor, low-income, and weak ones. While modernization theory does have ethnocentric ties, the criticism of it allows us to understand West Africa's position on the global stage economically and politically. It also helps one to understand how China can have a positive effect on West African development, and not be another neocolonial relation. China's non-interference policy can serve to be a benefit for West African institutions, since they can further build and improve without outside interference; or at least more outsider influence. West Africa needs some level of self-determination. They are in the process of developing through the turmoil they encounter and the last thing the region needs are more political actors. But economic policies do have political ties, and it is a wonder how far China's non-interference policy goes, especially when it wants to protect its own interests.

While Rostow's model isn't accurate to development outside of the Western countries, it does point to something that was historically lacking within the African continent. "If the problem facing Third World countries resides in their lack of productive investments, then the solution lies in the provision of aid to these countries in the form of capital, technology and expertise." (Reyes 3) China is acting as the power that is seriously investing in the region. Western countries have been afraid to seriously invest in West Africa for some time now, (French

148) and the international organizations' loans weren't necessarily investments as they were loans that put 'Third World' countries in an even worse position. Consequently, the relationship can be beneficial due to China's non-interference policy, serious investments, and transfer of more than just money, like technology and desirable skills. However, if China is not transferring its technology and expertise, then the relationship may not be as beneficial to the overall development of West Africa. If China is similarly operating like the United States did when developing the modernization theory, we can confirm their relationship is neocolonial. Some level of self-determination must happen from West Africa, therefore I will point to the dependency theory because self-determination is its major solution.

### *Dependency Theory*

Dependency theory is an approach used to understand the economic underdevelopment of the Global South. Coined by Raul Prebisch and Hans Singer, the theory "refute[s] the idea propounded by bourgeois social science that the main obstacle to development is to be found in the inherent sociocultural qualities of the "traditional," backward sectors of underdeveloped countries, which supposedly lack the characteristics of the "modern" Western capitalist economies." (Angotti 126) Angotti suggests dependency theory's most progressive feature is that it directly attacked imperialism's role in national oppression and underdevelopment. (Angotti 126) The theory developed not only as a reaction to modernization theory, the 1950s formulations of the economic commission for Latin America (ECLA), and "developmentalism" ideology, but also in reaction to traditional Marxism. (Johnson 106) Overall, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Falleto defined a dependent system as one when "accumulation and expansion of capital cannot find its essential dynamic component inside the systems." (Cardoso and Faletto, p. xx)

The theoretical perspectives of the dependency theory shared by many dependentistas can be summarized into 4 main features. “(1) the critique of dualism, (2) the core/periphery theory, (3) unequal exchange, and (4) the dependent bourgeoisie.” (Angotti 126) Briefly, dependency theory posits that the gradual transition from an underdeveloped traditional society to a modern developed society isn’t necessarily the same for each country because of the role of imperialism. (Angotti 126; Nhema and Zinyama 154) Because of this, dependency theorists divide the world between core and periphery. The Global North or First World are core countries and are defined as industrialized capitalist nations in North America, western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. The Global South or Third World are periphery countries and they are less developed than the core countries. They constitute Africa, South America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Central and South Asia. While the Global South offered labor and raw materials, these resources were sold to the Global North, who had the means of production to transfer the material into a useful product. They would often sell these products for a higher price back to the underdeveloped nations. Therefore, the interaction between the Global North and Global South is one of unequal exchange and can be characterized as one of dependency. Dependentistas regard the bourgeoisie in periphery countries as being entirely dependent on external powers and cannot play an anti-imperialist role. (Angotti 127)

“Reconceptualizing Autonomy: The Difference Dependency Theory Makes,” by David L. Blaney understands and expresses the legacy of dependency thinking, its revelations and its shortcomings. Blaney asserts that the dependency critique exposes the tension that sovereignty contributes to hierarchy, marking states as independent political-economic units. In Blaney’s words, “dependency theory constitutes international society as an interweaving of two logics - the logic of capitalism (and its expression and embodiment in the global division of labor) and

the logic of sovereignty (and its attempted realization in the society of states).” (Blaney 461)

Blaney suggests that “dependency theorists focus on the way in which global capitalism as imperialism frustrates the aspirations of Third World states and peoples for self-determination and self-realization - aspirations constructed within international society.” (Blaney 461) The state is an important polity that realizes the self-determination of its people.

The legitimacy of the state has come to depend on its ability to make possible the pursuit and potential realization of its political community’s conception of the ‘good life’ (Jackson, 1990a). Thus, in principle and in the aspirations of peoples, the state functions in part as an enclosure, within which a community may seek to realize its own way of life free from unwanted external intrusions, and international society functions as a society of self-realizing political communities. (Blaney 463)

However, in the case of West African nations, their nationhood has never been self-realized. Their nationhood and operations of their state have been forcibly chosen for them during colonialism. Even after decolonization, they faced the hegemony and external sovereignty of European powers through multinational corporations and international programs. After implementing Western policies, African nations’ economic development or stance on the global stage was virtually unchanged; it rendered them further dependent on the means of production that Western states had. In supplying raw materials to Western states, they virtually fell into the trap of that continual cycle. They did not expand their market economies into other sectors. They failed to diversify their economy because their natural resources were the reason they were bringing a lot of money before 1975. (Hirsch and Lopes 37-38) This also unknowingly continued aiding Western development. A small, weak nation, though theoretically independent, will tend to adopt a foreign policy attuned to the interests of the superpower, within whose sphere of influence it lies. The relations of the small, weak nations are mainly with the superpower that dominates them and with the members of the same bloc, but their direct relations with countries in a similar position are minimal. (Tausch 84; Kaplan 105) So, not only



is dependency theory pointing to the fact that colonialism halted the periphery nations' self-realization and economic underdevelopment in comparison to core states, but also that continued Western domination also has done adverse damage to said nations.

Dependency theory assumes that the principal contradiction in the current epoch is between dominant and dependent forces, not a class struggle between imperialism and socialism. This "domination" is attributed alternatively to multinational corporations, financial institutions, or a "technostructure," operating on an international level; when attributed to imperialism, it is viewed principally as a foreign policy that can be reversed, and not as an organic system which requires the repression of independent nations in order to guarantee the export of capital. "Domination" is therefore a superstructural element whereby the powerful subdue the weak, the rich exploit the poor, and the "superpowers" devour the small nations. (Angotti 127)

Because of what dependency theory uncovered, they point out that the logical step peripheral countries would have to take next is to rely primarily on their own resources to overthrow the oppressive state structure that tied them to the world capitalist system. (Frank, 1974; Amin 1985 quoted in Nhema and Zinyama 154-155) Therefore, there must be an independent road to development for individual countries, without outside entities, in order to fully realize the status that Western countries have today. In addition, Reyes identifies that the theory combines elements from a neo-marxist perspective with Keynes' economic theory, or the liberal economic ideas which emerged in the United States and Europe as a response to the Great Depression. (6) This can serve as a way for West African nations to realize its own economic path. And having an influence like China, who have had a trajectory of growth similar to what the Keynes' economic approach posits, it may be a great influence on West Africa. However, it must be a friendly exchange of ideas and not a forceful imposition of a system.

From the Keynes' economic approach, the theory of dependency embodies four main points: a) to develop an important internal effective demand in terms of domestic markets b) to recognize that the industrial sector is crucial to achieving better levels of national development, especially due to the fact that this sector, in comparison with the agricultural sector, can contribute more value-added to products; c) to increase worker's income as a means of generating more aggregate demand in national market conditions;

d) to promote a more effective government role in order to reinforce national development conditions and to increase national standards of living. (Reyes 6)

Finally, because the world economic system is changing and other countries are becoming “the core”, it can be beneficial or further detrimental to African progress. “Frank, who was one of the “founding persons” of dependency theory with his widely received work in 1967, maintained in his 1998 account of global economic history that there are nowadays fundamental shifts of the global production structure in favour of China and the East, to the detriments of the old centres, which increasingly will become marginalised (Frank 1998 quoted from Tausch 86) Therefore, Western domination might be a thing of the past and Eastern domination will grow, which can signal China’s increasing position as being a neocolonial power towards Africa because of its own trajectory of moving from a peripheral country to a core power. But it can also push Africa into the semi-peripheral status, being both exploited and an exploiter, instead of staying as a periphery power, if we are going off world-systems theory.

All in all, the dependency theory is considerable in understanding that Africa’s development was not autonomous and plagued along the way with colonial nation-states and organizations that created a reliance net for them. In order to figure out if China’s investment is neo-colonial, we must analyze whether they are creating a reliance net that would make Africa dependent on them. Meaning, is West Africa allowing China to exercise significant control over their economic and political behavior? If this is the case, then the dependency theory stands to confirm that the relationship between these two entities is neocolonial.

In that same breath, while the dependency theory is quite extensive, some of its solutions may not be realistic today. Self-determination during our current global landscape looks quite autarkic. Being an autarkic state isn’t helpful in development because developed Western nations and East Asian nations have participated and do participate in international trade. Some East

Asian nations were also heavily influenced by Western powers and prevailed, like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. This is another critique of dependency theory as it cannot explain the success of industrialization and economic growth that newly industrializing countries experienced during the 1970s and 1980s. (Harris, 1987; Lipietz, 1988; Nhema and Zinyama 154) In these circumstances, exogenous links with core capitalism especially the United States of America did not produce standard peripheral underdevelopment as pronounced in Africa. (Nhema and Zinyama 155) On top of this, the only autarkic state that exists today is North Korea, which is infamously known for its underdevelopment. But it still relies on trade from China, therefore it is not completely autarkic either. In addition, China's economic relationship with Africa is clearly already happening, so autarky is not an option. However, other notions of 'national development' does not necessarily mean a move towards autarky.

Sunkel's notion of 'national development' does not entail autarky, but 'interdependence'. Each 'country' must garner the capacity (the wealth, the resources, the bargaining power) to chart its own course within a world of external influences, something impossible for the dependent peripheral country, but achieved more or less by the interdependent center. Sunkel's policy prescriptions center, then, on national policies and international reforms aimed at increasing the capacities of (now dependent) national units, and, concomitantly, of replacing relationships of domination and dependence with interdependence. This vision of national autonomy within interdependence is, for Sunkel, the retaliation of the promise of sovereignty. (Blaney 466)

This might be better explained, though, through the world-systems theory perspective. On the whole, while the solution propounded by dependency theory may be hard to fully realize, this theory does make up for the shortcomings that modernization theory has. Self-determination is important and should be explored by said country for development of its industries and overall human development, but also for the development of its institutions, or stable, recurring patterns of behavior. While it does make up for some shortcomings evident in modernization theory, the solution's modernization theory advances such as having a rich country invest in a poor country

and lending its technology and expertise to them is also important. Possibly, the world-systems theory can make up for some of the shortfalls of dependency theory as they are quite similar schools of thought and pair nicely with each other.

### *World-Systems Theory*

While explaining the dependency conundrum happening between periphery and core states, dependentistas begin explaining much of the world-systems theory. Both world-systems theorists and dependentistas believe there are a few nations that have access to the means of production and the power to shape the world economy. In addition, both schools are heavily influenced by Marxist theory. Daniel Chirot and Thomas D. Hall stated that the world-systems theory was merely a North American off-shoot of Latin America's dependency theory (90), which explains the numerous parallels they share. However, world-systems theory advances the great role capitalism has in shaping the world-economy and proposes another category to define particular nation-states in the entire world-system. Developed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), he puts forward that "the only kind of social system is a world-system, which we define quite simply as a unit with a single division of labor and multiple cultural systems." (Wallerstein 390) He identifies that there can be two varieties of such world-systems, world-empires and world-economies, respectively.

Empirically, world economies have historically been unstable structures "leading towards disintegration or conquest by one group," therefore transforming into world-empires, or great civilizations of pre-modern times like China, Egypt and Rome. (Wallerstein 391) World-empires were re-distributive in scope because trade was only a minor part of the total economy. During the sixteenth-century, Europe saw the full development and economic predominance of market

trade (Wallerstein 391) thus capitalism became the world-system especially since European powers dominated and influenced much of the world.

The division of labor is characterized by the relationship a country has to the production of the world economy. The three structural positions in a world-economy is the core, periphery, and semi-periphery and has been stabilized by about 164. (Wallerstein 391) To reiterate, the core focuses on capital-intensive production while the periphery focuses on labor-intensive production. The semi-periphery acts sort of as a buffer zone between core and periphery, “and has a mix of the kinds of activities that exist in them.” (Skocpol, 1977) “Semi Peripheries deflect the anger and revolutionary activity of peripheries, and they serve as good places for capitalist investment when well-organized labor forces in core economies cause wages to rise too fast.” (Chirot and Hall 85) They serve as both exploited and the exploiter (Wallerstein 405) and states generally regarded as semi-peripheries are South Korea, China, South Africa, Mexico, India, Brazil, and a few others. Without the existence of the semi-peripheries, the capitalist world-system would not function. Furthermore, “the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are world-wide classes that do not operate merely within state boundaries. The term semiperipheral, however, applies only to states.” (Chirot and Hall 86)

This theory postulates a power hierarchy in which the core societies dominate periphery societies for its labor, while the periphery sees no gains in return. In addition, the current economic world system is controlled by the core countries which structurally constrains peripheral countries and reinforces their subordinate position. There is an unequal exchange which leads to capital accumulation at a global scale, which tips in the favor of core states. “Peripheries produced certain key primary goods while their towns withered, labor became coerced in order to keep down the costs of production, technology stagnated, labor remained

unskilled or even became less skilled, and capital, rather than accumulating was withdrawn toward the core.” (Chirot and Hall 85) It is clear there are parallels between dependency theory and world-systems theory. Regardless, this begins to explain Africa’s subordinate position on the world stage.

In “The African Crisis: World Systemic and Regional Aspects,” Giovanni Arrighi uses the world-systems theory to describe the African Crisis of the 1970s. This paper can also be used to assess Africa’s overall disadvantageous treatment altogether. In this essay, Arrighi communicates that the reason for the downturn Africa went through in the late 20th century was directly correlated to the United States’ growing hegemony over the economic system at the time and the capital and resources it distributed to other areas. Alongside the highly developed state-formation and national-economic integration, much of East Asia’s boom was due to the preferential treatment the United States had to the region.

...this preferential treatment played a critical role in the ‘take-off’ of the region’s economic renaissance... Altogether, in the 20-year period 1950-70, US aid to Japan averaged \$500 million a year... In the period 1946-78, military and economic aid to South Korea amounted to \$13 billion (\$600 per capita) and to Taiwan \$5.6 billion (\$425 per capita). The true dimensions of this munificence are revealed by the fact that the nearly \$6 billion in US economic aid to South Korea in 1946-78 compares with a total of \$6.89 billion for all of Africa and of \$14.8 billion for all of Latin America in the same period. (Arrighi 31)

The United States gave the exports of its East Asian allies privileged access to the US domestic market, while tolerating their protectionism, state interventionism, and even exclusion of US multinationals to an extent that had no parallel in US practices anywhere else in the world... The political economies of Africa were given no such break. (Arrighi 31)

East Asia was exalted into the sphere of becoming capital-intensive, or becoming a semi-peripheral region, because they enjoyed preferential treatment from the United States, which dominates the world-economic system. If this did not happen, full-scale successful economic development may not have been achieved as early as it has been for East Asian

nations. This gives insight into how China can help exalt West Africa into becoming a capital-intensive region. China is currently the second biggest economy in the world and will surpass the United States and its hegemony over the world's economic system. Though it is still considered a semi-peripheral country, as it is both being exploited by the West due to its large population and many industries and exploiting South Asia and maybe even Africa for the many resources and labor power it possesses. However, if China invests a lot of money into West African countries, tolerates West African nations' protection over its domestic industries, and has low state intervention (as it claims), then it can be deduced that China's relationship with Africa will be very beneficial for each countries' development and could be a solution for its low placement in the global economy.

It is currently already doing better than the United States has done in terms of general aid. In 2018, President Xi Jinping announced that China will have provided \$60 billion in financial support to African countries, with \$5 billion of which going to Nigeria for major railway projects. This promise was made back in 2015. However, the investment plan has been criticized by political pundits that it could burden these countries with unsustainable levels of debt. (Brookings, 2018) There isn't much information yet that would show this, and one should be weary of what US officials have to say about this, as they have "trapped" other developing countries in debt and are in competition with China. However, this very well may be the case. Likewise, it is hard to ignore that through world-systems analysis, there will be a level of exploitation happening towards West Africa from China. If China is a semi-peripheral power and West Africa is a periphery region, the only relationship that could exist between them is one of domination and exploitation. China's relationship with West Africa cannot simply be to benefit West Africa, and it is not. But does that mean said relationship is neocolonial?

## Why the interest?

China has many reasons for wanting to invest and construct in Africa. Mthuli Ncube and Michael Fairbanks have identified that “the greatest challenges facing China are its aging populations, gender disparity, migration to cities, rural healthcare, and income equality.” (2) Even though it has the largest population of any country in the world, China’s ‘one-child’ policy, implemented in 1979, contributed to the now considerable aging problem they are facing. The gender disparity from favoring sons to daughters has led to significant decrease in pregnancies. Moreover, the rising standard of living due to rapid economic growth from factories, construction, and the lot has contributed to infertility. (Zeng and Hesketh) It’s demographic advantage is tied to its development, so its government is posed with the challenge of reaffirming its economic stance while dealing with this social issue. Therefore, it will continue to need a huge population to work on its many industries, with Africa being its current solution.

China knows that Africa’s population is the fastest growing continent in the world. This can be a good labor base. The United Nation states:

More than half of global population growth between now and 2050 is expected to occur in Africa. Africa has the highest rate of population growth among major areas. The population of sub-Saharan Africa is projected to double by 2050. A rapid population increase in Africa is anticipated even if there is a substantial reduction of fertility levels in the near future. Regardless of the uncertainty surrounding future trends in fertility in Africa, the large number of young people currently on the continent, who will reach adulthood in the coming years and have children of their own, ensures that the region will play a central role in shaping the size and distribution of the world’s population over the coming decades. (Population; UN)

In spite of their aging population, China still has the world’s largest population. With such a large population comes concerns for food security, an increase in consumption of natural resources, and a search for work. “China’s internal migrants can be divided into those with and without local residency rights. There will be an increase of almost 400 million migrants to the



major cities over the next 15 years.” (Ncube and Fairbanks 2) As China’s living standards rise, by 2025 its food needs will far surpass what is available in today’s open market. With about 20% of the world’s population in its border, China only has 9 percent of farmland. (French 146) It is heavily polluted due to high CO2 emissions from its many industrialization projects and factories, which has led to the erosion of its farmland continuously. Africa, in comparison, has 60 percent of the world’s uncultivated arable land. (French 146) China will most likely take advantage and exploit African land in order to remedy any food security problems in the future.

Finally, Africa is plentiful with natural resources, making it an economically beneficial place for China. In exchange for construction and building infrastructure, the Bui Dam being the most recent and monumental example, Africa is giving a lot of their natural resources to continue to power the economic powerhouse. Concerning unemployment in China, the Chinese people need more opportunities to work and make money for themselves. Many construction projects that have been conducted in Africa, with many hiring Chinese labor. (French 199) They have delved into the textile industry for quite a while due to their inexpensive labor and cheap prices, and have potentially compromised employment opportunities for Africans in the same work sector. (French 202) This will be explored further in the graphic novel section of this thesis.

While Chinese interests are becoming a lot more clearer and we can not ignore there may be some level of exploitation, we mustn’t ignore that economically, this relationship is helping Africa grow.

The value of China’s trade with Africa has grown astronomically from US\$ 1 billion in 2000 to \$55 billion in 2007, \$198.4 billion in 2012, and \$221.88 billion in 2014. In 2009, China surpassed the World Bank as Africa’s top lender and also became Africa’s leading trading partner. In this same past decade, several African countries have experienced a commodity boom and strong economic growth. (Akyeampong 2)

These numbers look good for Africa, as the continent's economy has been poor and slow growing for quite a while until recently. In addition, a reliance net hasn't been identified, but could definitely be in the works from the examples above, even though Africa is seeing some fruits from this relationship.

## **Conclusion**

China's involvement in West Africa is such an engrossing development that has recently intensified and taken a life of its own. It is not simply another international relationship because of the amount of money and time China is seriously investing in the region, and the continent as a whole. The expansion of infrastructure and construction projects, migrants moving to the region, and the overall attention China has given to West Africa can be both constructive and conducive to the growth of these countries but can very well be way in which China is creating a reliance net for its personal continual development, hence starting another neocolonial partnership that the region has seen time and time again.

Through analyzing multiple schools of thought concentrated around development, international relationships between nations, and the overall global economic system, namely modernization theory, dependency theory, and the world-systems theory, the status of West Africa on the global stage in relation to other countries has become clearer, some ways it can develop is more explicit, and the possible roles China can play in the region are unambiguous. China can either develop West Africa not only through investments, but also by transferring technology and insider expertise to the region's people while staying out from its political institutions and upholding their policy of 'non-interference'. Also, giving them economic breaks would be helpful. Or, China can only give investments and infrastructure projects to the region, which will leave a gap of need for Chinese professionals to further maintain the projects,

therefore creating a reliance net on these countries. They could also be interfering with its political institutions through the funds they bring to the area.

Modernization theory and Rostow's model identifies that foreign investment as well as transfer of technology and expertise is a good way to develop one's economy. Dependency theory recognizes that some level of self-determination is needed in order to not be heavily influenced by another country's interest, which is why having strong and stable institutions are really important. Samuel Huntington states the importance of strong institutions as well. Currently, corrupt officials and the lack of transparency prevalent in the region may ruin the possibility of prosperity and the And world-systems theory highlights that because of West Africa's position in our capitalist world-economy, there will be some level of exploitation from China, because it is a relationship between a periphery and a semi-periphery. However, in the future, the relationship could change to a semi-periphery and a core power, therefore indicating it was a somewhat beneficial relationship. Regardless, this exploitation is happening and the comic will illustrate to what extent is a reliance net being sown and if said relationship is truly neocolonial.