

CCPS

An International Journal

Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal (CCPS) is an academic journal published by the Institute of China and Asia-Pacific Studies, National Sun Yat-sen University, Taiwan, focusing on the Chinese polity, economy, and society; and the interrelationship between sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors that influence political, economic, and social outcomes in contemporary Mainland China and Taiwan, as well as Hong Kong and Macau, and their politico-economic and strategic relations with other regions and countries.

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Negotiated Dependencies: A Critical Political Economy of China's Expanding Influence in the Global South

In a rapidly evolving global politics, the Global South remains a critical arena of geopolitical contestation and economic realignment.¹ China's assertive global presence, notably observed through development assistance,² maritime diplomacy,³ and large-scale infrastructure financing, has unsettled long-standing power asymmetries and invited both optimism and anxiety about the nature of South-South cooperation.^{4,5}

China's engagements in Africa and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) should be understood as dialectical processes. They reproduce global hierarchies while enabling new forms of contestation. Africa has become a laboratory for China's geo-economic and geopolitical ambitions. Through infrastructure investments and resource-backed loans, Chinese capital has positioned itself in key sectors with minimal terms and conditions, particularly in transport, energy, and telecommunications industries.⁶ This has enabled many African governments to bypass Western donor constraints and pursue ambitious development projects. However, following the critical political economy's (CPE) viewpoints, such engagements also deepen fiscal vulnerabilities and reproduce primary-export dependence (Brautigam, 2020). ASEAN states present more differentiated pathways of negotiated dependency, shaped by their diverse developmental states and regional integration mechanisms. Countries like Cambodia and Laos display elevated levels of dependency on Chinese capital, particularly in infrastructure and hydropower, which reinforces elite-centered development models while externalizing environmental and social costs. In contrast, Indonesia and Vietnam have embraced strategic hedging: selectively welcoming Chinese investment while using regional institutions, such as the ASEAN+3 and the East Asia Summit, to shape governance frameworks and mitigate overdependence.

Amid these transformations, a key question arises: how do states and regional institutions in the Global South navigate external influence while asserting agency in development and diplomacy? A CPE perspective situates these debates within the broader context of global capitalism, uneven development, and evolving geopolitical alignments. By focusing on Africa and ASEAN, the

current *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal* (CCPS) issue examines how China's influence is or can be mediated, creating differentiated and contested forms of dependency. CCPS engages with these questions through the lens of CPE, foregrounding the structural constraints, institutional dynamics, and strategic choices that shape engagements between China and the Global South. Rather than accepting simplistic binaries of dominance and subservience, the CPE approach used here centers the uneven but negotiated nature of these relationships. It examines how global forces – such as capital flows, geopolitical realignments, and institutional path dependencies – interact with local conditions to produce variegated outcomes.

The first paper, *“Sino-Botswana Development Cooperation: Assessing the Opportunities and Risks in Chinese Economic Assistance,”* applies this perspective to Botswana's development trajectory under Chinese economic assistance, analyzing how aid flows, infrastructure projects, and economic cooperation are embedded in political, social, and environmental contexts. The study interrogates not only the material gains but also the hidden costs of dependency including labor exploitation, ecological degradation, and weakened accountability mechanisms. Through a CPE lens, Chinese assistance is understood not merely as a transfer of resources, but as a political project that reshapes institutional arrangements and constrains policy autonomy. The authors argue that local actors are not powerless but must strategically navigate and contest the conditionalities embedded in seemingly unconditional aid.

The second paper, *“From Declarations to Negotiations: ASEAN's Role in Managing the South China Sea Dispute,”* explores ASEAN's role in managing the South China Sea dispute, revealing the tensions between regional norms of consensus-building and the structural pressures exerted by China's economic and military influence. ASEAN's evolving declarations and diplomatic postures are read not only as expressions of normative commitment but also as adaptive strategies within an asymmetrical regional order. From a CPE standpoint, ASEAN's diplomacy represents a form of “soft balancing” that seeks to preserve regional autonomy amid deepening economic interdependence. The paper thus highlights how regional institutions, though constrained, can function as sites of contestation against hegemonic encroachment.

The third paper, *“Beyond the Debt Trap Narrative: Structural Risks and Strategic Choices in Africa–China Infrastructure Partnerships,”* delves into the widely debated phenomenon of “debt-trap diplomacy” in the context of China's

Belt and Road Initiative in Africa. Rejecting deterministic accounts that portray African states as passive victims of Chinese manipulation, the study uses a comparative framework to identify the domestic and institutional conditions under which debt vulnerabilities emerge. It reveals how fiscal risks and problematic lending outcomes are co-produced by both external financial strategies and internal governance failures. A CPE reading foregrounds the structural imperatives of capital accumulation and state rationalities that drive both borrowers and lenders, while also pointing to the potential for reform and resistance through improved institutional design and policy agency.

The three papers challenge prevailing orthodoxies about China's role in the Global South. They demonstrate that dependency is not a fixed condition, but a contested and negotiated process, shaped by power asymmetries, institutional capacities, and the strategic calculus of local actors. Through the CPE lens, Chinese influence is neither benevolent nor purely extractive. It is contingent, uneven, and always subject to mediation by political and economic structures at multiple levels.

The arguments presented by the three papers seek to reorient scholarly debates away from essentialist narratives and toward a more critical, relational, and empirically grounded understanding of Global South-China Relations. They underscore the importance of attending to both structure and agency in explaining the differentiated experiences of countries engaging with China. They cohesively advance critical understanding of China's global engagements – from bilateral aid relationships and infrastructure finance to high-stakes maritime diplomacy and collectively highlight the importance of balanced perspectives, rigorous analysis, and cooperative frameworks in navigating a rapidly shifting global order.

This collection serves as a vital resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners committed to equitable and sustainable international cooperation who want to understand the interplay between national interests, regional alliances, and global power dynamics. The three papers open new lines of inquiry into the forms of regional cooperation, institutional innovation, and policy adaptation that may emerge as responses to, and resistances against, the challenges and opportunities posed by Chinese power.

Grounded in CPE, CCPS Volume 10 (2024), Issue 2 draws on several interrelated concepts:

- **Uneven Development:** Exploring how China's engagement reinforces or disrupts spatial and sectoral inequalities across regions.

- **State Agency and Embedded Autonomy:** Analyzing how states mediate external pressures through policy innovation, institutional reform, or strategic resistance.
- **Structural Power:** Assessing how China's financial, diplomatic, and economic strategies exert influence beyond direct coercion.
- **South-South Relations:** Situating the engagements within broader efforts to reconfigure global hierarchies without replicating older forms of dependency.

This framework offers a coherent theoretical basis for understanding the contested dynamics of China's rise in the Global South and invites interdisciplinary dialogue across international relations, development studies, and regional studies.

As China's role continues to expand and as multilateralism enters a phase of profound stress and reconfiguration, academic inquiry must rise to meet the complexity of this moment. This publication aims to serve as both a reflection on current dynamics and a platform for future research on the evolving architecture of power, cooperation, and development in the 21st century. Through a critical political economy lens, this issue aims to provide a more nuanced, grounded, and ultimately empowering perspective on how the Global South can negotiate its place in a changing world.

This CCPS issue also features a review of Gregory O. Hall's book published in 2023 titled "[Examining US-China-Russia foreign relations: Great power politics in a post-Obama era](#)," by Jonald B. Dorado.

Reymund B. Flores, DPA*
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1. Scholars also highlight amplified contestations driven by China and India's rise, alongside the West's relative decline, as the world's center shifts from the Trans-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. <<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2024-45-southeast-asia-and-the-global-south-rhetoric-and-reality-by-hoang-thi-ha-and-cha-hae-won/>>.
2. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as China's massive infrastructure and financing effort now spans 165 countries, with over 20,000 projects valued around USD 1.3 trillion. <<https://orcasia.org/article/791/global-south-in-contending-global-linkages/>>.
3. Underpinned by its network of alliances and partnerships, the U.S.-led rules-based international order is under threat by an increasingly assertive China. A key to ensuring peace and stability in the SCS and beyond is a favorable balance of power. Without the U.S. as balancing force in the SCS, China would likely grow to become the region's hegemon and expand its gray zone coercion tactics as part of its maritime expansionist agenda. <<https://www.eurasiareview.com/12012023-the-us-and-south-china-sea-strategic-and-economic-imperatives-analysis/>>.
4. Experts point out that while China positions itself as a champion of South-South cooperation, critics caution against dependency, loss of strategic autonomy, and forms of neo-colonial dynamics. <<https://thedi diplomat.com/2024/12/chinas-g20-agenda-and-its-effect-on-multilateralism-the-emerging-global-south/>>.
5. On the flip side, many countries embrace China's investments as pragmatic paths to bridge development gaps—receiving infrastructure without Western-imposed conditions. <<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202412/16/WS675f6507a310f1265a1d2f76.html>>.
6. The establishment of Forum On China-Africa Cooperation has further spurred China's involvement in African infrastructure across diverse sectors critical to economic development and regional integration. Key areas include transportation, energy, telecommunications, and industrial parks, each contributing to Africa's efforts to modernize and expand its economic base. <<https://thebftonline.com/2024/07/10/africa-china-2-0-with-philip-akrofi-atitiantiph-d-chinas-role-in-african-infrastructure-development-through-focac/>>.

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Sino-Botswana Development Cooperation: Assessing the Opportunities and Risks in Chinese Economic Assistance

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Abstract

This research explores the connection between Botswana and China, particularly emphasis on the considerable influence of Chinese economic support for Botswana's growth in several areas, such as infrastructure, social welfare, and economic cooperation. It critically evaluates the advantages and difficulties presented by Chinese assistance, bringing to light problems including political ramifications, labour rights violations, environmental damage, and debt sustainability. The research emphasizes the importance of supporting stakeholder participation, accountability, and openness in assistance projects to guarantee sustainability and efficacy. Important conclusions highlight the need for evidence-based policy choices and strategic partnerships to maximize the benefits of Chinese help while reducing related dangers. The study's findings include suggestions for more research and ongoing observation of how Chinese assistance has affected Botswana's economic development, intending to promote a fair and advantageous bilateral relationship between the two countries. This paper offers a thorough examination of Sino-Botswana relations and the impact of Chinese assistance, which is beneficial for policymakers

and development professionals who want to advance sustainable and equitable development in Botswana.

Keywords: *China, Botswana, economic relations, Chinese aid, development aid*

1. Introduction

Botswana's growth trajectory has been impacted by Chinese support, especially in the areas of infrastructure, commerce, and employment. With Botswana's strong regulatory framework and dedication to openness, the two nations have established broad collaboration in a multitude of industries since establishing diplomatic ties in 1975, with infrastructure development being the main area of emphasis (Chen, 2009). As seen by initiatives like the Morupule B Power Station, Chinese investment has had a revolutionary impact on the development of infrastructure in Africa. China is investing heavily in Africa intending to close the continent's large infrastructure deficit, which is expected to cost between USD130 and USD170 billion a year (Vaidyanathan, 2022). By increasing connections and enabling commerce inside Botswana as well as with neighbouring nations, these initiatives have supported economic development (Zi & Mogalakwe, 2018). However, the inflow of Chinese businesses and traders has brought with it difficulties, such as language and cultural divides that have caused conflict at work and made local workers feel exploited (Moahi, 2015). Despite these problems, Chinese retail establishments have helped to reduce poverty and provide more job possibilities, which has encouraged local entrepreneurship (Sekakela, 2016). Trade between Botswana and China has significantly shaped the economic landscape of Botswana, particularly in terms of the types of goods exchanged and their impact on infrastructure development. Botswana primarily exports primary products to China, such as diamonds, which are a major component of its economy, contributing significantly to its GDP (Sekakela, 2016). In return, Botswana imports intermediate and capital goods from China, which are crucial for the country's infrastructure projects, including roads, power stations, and airports (Njoku et al., 2014). This trade dynamic has facilitated the

development of essential infrastructure, which is a core focus of Botswana's long-term national programs aimed at sustaining economic growth and attracting foreign investment. The political and governmental systems of Botswana have also been touched by Chinese support, both positively and negatively. Research has shown that Chinese assistance initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Botswana, have the potential to erode public confidence in governance by creating negative views of corruption and low evaluations of government efficacy (Akrofi & Atitianti, 2022). Chinese engagement in Botswana's labour market has indeed led to a toxic work environment and conflicts between Chinese employers and local workers. This tension is primarily driven by cultural and linguistic differences, as well as divergent work ethics and expectations. Chinese merchants, motivated by Confucian capitalism, often perceive their Botswana employees as having poor work ethics, while the local workers view their Chinese employers as exploiters of cheap labour (Gukurume & Matsika, 2022). Notwithstanding these obstacles, Chinese investments have made a substantial contribution to economic expansion, especially in industries like mining, where higher production is anticipated (Zi & Mogalakwe, 2018).

Concerns about the protection of decent labour under the international ILO framework have been raised by the preponderance of Chinese noncitizens in the workforce. The complicated character of these relationships is reflected in the media's portrayal of China-Botswana relations, which is a mixture of optimism and scepticism (Sautman & Hairong, 2009). In addition, despite efforts by regulators to restrict them, the flood of Chinese goods—which are often seen as being of inferior quality—continues to satisfy local demand. In terms of corporate governance, Botswana has created its code, although many businesses continue to use the South African King code, suggesting that new governance ideas have not yet been completely embraced (Zi & Mogalakwe, 2018). Instead of promoting drastic political and economic changes, democracy aid in Botswana has mostly concentrated on procedural democracy, which has assisted in maintaining elite privileges and power.

Since the two countries' diplomatic relations were established in 1975, there has been a significant shift in their bilateral relationship, which is now characterized by respect for one another, non-interference, and cooperation in a variety of sectors (Makhura & Rapanyane, 2020). This relationship was first

fueled by China's non-aligned stance and policy of non-intervention in domestic affairs, which have been the cornerstones of its foreign policy since 1954 (Kirby, 2020). Through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has improved Botswana's capacity to pursue sustainable development, China has been a major contributor to furthering Africa's development (Sekakela, 2016).

Reciprocal visits by high-ranking officials from both countries highlight the equality and respect that define their public diplomacy and sustain their bilateral relationship (Moahi, 2015). Cultural exchanges may be a part of diplomacy, as shown by the Confucius Institute in Botswana, which supports the Chinese language and culture (Alden, 2019). China has emerged as a significant economic partner for Botswana, investing in industries including mining, telecommunications, and infrastructure, despite the country's unrealized agricultural potential (Morapedi & Manatsha, 2015). China has shown its smart power strategy by providing major financial assistance for important infrastructure projects in Botswana, including stadiums, bridges, and roads. This policy combines economic aid with cultural diplomacy (Chen, 2009).

It is critical to understand how Chinese support has impacted Botswana's progress as the nation strives to achieve the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) and Vision 2036 (DU PLESSIS, 2016). Academic studies have emphasized a range of policies that China has put in place, including building projects and initiatives to increase capacity (Brautigam, 2009; Corkin, 2008). The literature does, however, also highlight the negative effects Chinese-funded projects have on the environment and society. For example, studies by Brautigam (2011) and Mohan and Tan-Mullins (2009) describe societal instability, violations of worker rights, and environmental damage linked to Chinese investments in Africa. To guarantee sustainable development results, these concerns emphasize the need to enhance transparency, accountability, and stakeholder participation in Chinese aid initiatives.

Scholars have also examined how China's economic presence in Africa affects political dynamics and the sustainability of debt. Researchers who have studied the effects of Chinese loans and investments on debt levels, fiscal governance, and political relations in African countries include Gallagher and

Myers (2019) and Alden et al. (2015). Their conclusions highlight how crucial it is to manage Chinese financing carefully to reduce debt risks and protect national sovereignty. Mwamfupe (2016) and Moyo (2013) highlight the importance of resource-led growth strategies and the components of effective development outcomes via comparative case studies of African countries such as Botswana and Zambia.

The study looks into how Chinese aid has impacted Botswana's growth in some areas. It attempts to provide a nuanced knowledge of the influence of Chinese help on Botswana's development through literature analysis, primary and secondary data analysis, and case studies of Chinese assistance programs in Botswana. To provide a more comprehensive view, quantitative analysis of project budgets, economic indicators, and result metrics were utilized.

Generally, this study aims to provide thorough and useful insights into the dynamics of Sino-Botswana relations and the significance of Chinese aid in Botswana's development trajectory.

Specifically, the study wants to:

1. Assess the extent and effects of Chinese assistance initiatives in Botswana in some areas, such as infrastructure, social welfare, and economic collaboration.
2. Identify and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of Chinese assistance in Botswana, with an emphasis on political consequences, labour rights violations, environmental damage, and debt sustainability.
3. Assess how Chinese assistance may affect social welfare, economic expansion, and environmental sustainability as they relate to Botswana's development trajectory.
4. Investigate the significance of stakeholder engagement, accountability, and transparency in Chinese assistance efforts in Botswana, as well as their function in guaranteeing the efficacy and long-term sustainability of aid projects.
5. Provide suggestions for more research and monitoring of how Chinese help has affected Botswana's economic trajectory, highlighting the need for strategic alliances and evidence-based policy choices to improve aid cooperation between the two nations.

The results of the analysis of this study can set the direction to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of China-Botswana cooperation, highlighting the significance of strategic alliances and evidence-based policymaking.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, academics have been more interested in China's rising influence in Africa, particularly its relationship with Botswana. Several research works have examined various aspects of China's complex connection with African countries, providing insight into its socio-cultural, political, and economic aspects.

One popular field of study is China's help to African nations in the form of aid and development assistance. The reasons, mechanisms, and effects of China's assistance initiatives in Africa have all been thoroughly examined by academics including Brautigam (2009) and Corkin (2008). They have emphasized the variety of Chinese assistance programs, from developing capacity to implementing infrastructure projects, and they have evaluated how well they work to advance the goals of sustainable development.

The environmental and social effects of Chinese-funded projects in Africa are a common issue in the literature. Research conducted in African nations by Mohan and Tan-Mullins (2009) and Brautigam (2011) has shown instances of environmental degradation, abuses of worker rights, and social dislocation linked to Chinese investments and infrastructure projects. To address these issues and guarantee sustainable development results, these academics stress how crucial it is to improve stakeholder involvement, accountability, and transparency in Chinese assistance programs.

The effects of China's economic involvement in Africa on political dynamics and the sustainability of debt have also been studied by academics. Scholars like Gallagher and Myers (2019) and Alden et al. (2015) have investigated how Chinese loans and investments affect the amount of debt, fiscal governance, and political ties in African nations. Their research shows that to reduce debt risks and preserve national sovereignty, cautious handling of Chinese funding is required, as is more openness.

Aside from doing empirical research, academics have also benefited from comparative case studies of African nations that have successfully used

their natural resources for development. Important lessons from nations like Botswana and Zambia, who have managed their resource richness to produce sustained economic development and poverty reduction, are offered in the works of Mwamfupe (2016) and Moyo (2013). These case studies provide important insights into what makes development results effective as well as the difficulties that come with resource-led growth initiatives.

In general, the material that is currently available emphasizes how complicated the interactions are between China and Botswana as well as how Chinese assistance affects sustainable development. Researchers add to a deeper understanding of the opportunities and difficulties present in China-African relations by combining insights from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. They also offer practitioners and policymakers useful information for advancing inclusive and sustainable development in Botswana.

3. China-Botswana Relations

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in January 1975, the relationship between China and Botswana has undergone significant changes. It currently covers a broad spectrum of fields, such as business, healthcare, education, building, politics, culture, and diplomacy. However, not much focus has been placed on cooperation in the agricultural sector (Makhura & Rapanyane, 2020). This collaboration stems from China's overarching goal to increase its global influence and reshape its national image, particularly in Africa, where it has strategic interests (Amupanda, 2020). This engagement is a component of China's African strategy, which is aimed at diversifying commerce, investment, and political influence. The aim to protect the energy supply in the long run and promote market interests drives this strategy (Lisimba, 2020).

China's exponential speed of participation in Botswana has elicited diverse reactions, as seen by the local media's coverage of economic activity, particularly in the retail, construction, and industrial sectors (Huang, 2021). China's public diplomacy activities define its approach to Africa, including Botswana. One such project is the Confucius Institute, which aims to deepen bilateral relations while promoting the Chinese language and culture (Zi, 2017). To optimize cooperation, especially in the agriculture industry, challenges including communication and cultural barriers must be addressed despite the advantages. Understanding current dynamics necessitates understanding the

China-African connections' historical context, which is rooted in anti-colonial struggles. For several African countries, including Botswana, China has become an important ally. China is a rising global power that is offering an alternative model of growth and contesting Western hegemony. These aspects of the country's rapid economic growth affect the connection.

From a political stance, China's backing for African liberation movements and its pursuit of political alliances against superpowers and the former Soviet Union strengthened connections with Botswana (Makhura & Rapanyane, 2020). Particularly once China opened to the outside world in the late 1970s, economic cooperation supplanted this political foundation (Amupanda, 2020). Africa was less important to China during the Deng Xiaoping period, but during the Jiang Zemin administration, significant economic growth was achieved, and this success continued into the twenty-first century, with a focus on acquiring raw materials from Africa (Lisimba, 2020). Strong democratic institutions and steady economic growth made Botswana a desirable destination for Chinese investment, particularly in infrastructure projects.

Chinese construction firms have been operating in Botswana since the 1980s when they completed projects such as building schools and hospitals and updating railroads (Zi, 2017). The complex relationship characterized by political, social, and economic exchanges exists between Botswana and China. The varying responses to the rapidly increasing number of Chinese citizens in the nation reflect this. Furthermore, by promoting Chinese language and culture, China hopes to improve bilateral ties via its public diplomacy programs, such as the Confucius Institute (Huang, 2021). More significant geopolitical shifts have also affected the connection; by 2012, China was Africa's main commercial partner, surpassing both the US and Europe (Lisimba, 2020). A multitude of historical, economic, and cultural factors have shaped the intricate relationship between Botswana and China, demonstrating how dynamic and ever-changing these relationships are.

When China and Botswana established diplomatic ties, their relationship underwent a significant upheaval. On February 6, 1975, official diplomatic links were established when Botswana recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the legitimate government of China. Botswana made this decision in response to the PRC's increasing global influence and its desire to maintain an

autonomous foreign policy (Zi, 2017). The forging of diplomatic ties prepared the groundwork for future partnerships based on equality and mutual respect in a variety of areas, such as trade, investment, and development assistance.

China and Botswana's economic cooperation has grown over the years, with an emphasis on trade, mining, and infrastructure development. When China and Botswana signed the Economic and Technical Relationship Agreement in 1986, it was a turning point in their economic relationship (Zafar, 2007). This agreement enabled Botswana's development projects to benefit from Chinese financial and technical support, particularly in the fields of agriculture and infrastructure. Through grants, loans, and assistance packages, China has made a significant financial and technical contribution. For instance, China pledged in 2018 to provide Botswana with USD\$14.7 million toward various development projects, such as building roads and putting in place healthcare systems. As to Keimetswe (2023), the aid agreements stated earlier have strengthened bilateral relations and facilitated Botswana's infrastructure improvements and socioeconomic growth.

Political and cultural contacts have had a major influence on relations between Botswana and China as well. High-level visits and discussions have strengthened the mutual understanding and collaboration among government officials. For instance, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2018 was attended by Mokgweetsi Masisi, the former president of Botswana (Schilirò, 2022). Cultural interactions have risen thanks to programs like the Confucius Institute at the University of Botswana, which promotes Chinese language and culture across the country. These contacts have improved intercultural understanding and led to the people of China and Botswana enjoying closer, more amicable relations today.

The historical synopsis of China-Botswana relations emphasizes the establishment of diplomatic ties, the expansion of economic cooperation and aid agreements, and the importance of political and cultural interactions. These advancements, in Thrall's (2015) opinion, have strengthened bilateral relations and prepared the way for future cooperation and partnership. Relationships between China and Botswana are dynamic and constantly shifting, reflecting larger trends in interactions between China and Africa. These patterns are characterized by opportunities as well as challenges brought about by political, economic, and historical factors.

4. Financial, Technical, and Comparative Views on Chinese Assistance to Botswana

China's help to Botswana has a considerable influence on the infrastructure, technology, and finance sectors, among others. China gives Botswana financial help in the form of grants, concessional loans, and assistance packages that are intended to complement various development initiatives. These subsidies support important initiatives in agriculture, healthcare, education, and infrastructure. For example, one of the most important infrastructure applications of Chinese assistance is the construction of roads and bridges, which improve connectivity and ease trade and commerce inside Botswana and with neighboring countries (Moahi, 2016). Furthermore, Chinese assistance is used to promote the development of healthcare facilities, educational programs, and agricultural projects that enhance the social welfare and economic opportunities for the people of Botswana.

China provides Botswana with significant technical support in addition to cash contributions. Supporting capacity expansion, knowledge transfer, and skill improvement across several industries are the goals of this help. For instance, China offers government officials and experts in Botswana seminars and training courses in the areas of infrastructure development, agricultural practices, and healthcare management. China assists Botswana in developing its institutional capacity and human capital via the transfer of its expertise and best practices, hence fostering self-sufficiency and sustainable development (Zi, 2014).

The efforts of Botswana to enhance its infrastructure have also been significantly impacted by Chinese help. Chinese assistance often leads to the funding and execution of large-scale infrastructure projects that fundamentally change Botswana's development environment. Building roads, dams, communication networks, and energy infrastructure boosts the country's ability to endure and adapt to modern problems while also promoting economic development. China encourages Botswana to invest in key infrastructure to create an environment that is favorable for long-term development, draw in investments, and advance social cohesion and inclusion.

An evaluation of the scope and magnitude of Chinese assistance initiatives in Botswana indicates an intricate network of development initiatives spanning many industries. Chinese assistance programs in Botswana are renowned for their vast extent and ambitious nature, with an emphasis on tackling the country's major developmental difficulties and advancing its socioeconomic objectives. These programs often need large financial investments, which makes it possible to carry out extensive infrastructure and development plans that radically change Botswana's economic trajectory (Sekakela, 2016). These initiatives include a wide range of sectors, including telecommunications, energy, transportation, healthcare, and education.

A range of technical cooperation initiatives and capacity-building initiatives are also included in Chinese assistance projects in Botswana. These comprehensive packages often include possibilities for skill development, technical competence, and information transfer in addition to cash help. Chinese help might, for instance, finance the construction of educational facilities in conjunction with workshops for teacher training or support the establishment of healthcare facilities in conjunction with programs for medical professional training. Chinese assistance programs are more effective and long-lasting when local institutions and stakeholders are given the autonomy to decide on their development objectives and initiatives thanks to this integrated strategy (Yanyin, 2015).

Analyzing the differences between help from China and other foreign partners may provide valuable insights into the dynamics of development cooperation and the impact of distinct types of aid on Botswana's development trajectory. Though it is important to compare Chinese help with that from Western countries, multilateral institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Chinese aid is a substantial source of support for Botswana (Chen, 2009). Comparing the financial terms and conditions of help from various sources is one crucial point of comparison. Compared to conventional Western help, Chinese aid often comes with better financial terms, such as longer payback terms, low-interest loans, and fewer requirements. Because of this, Chinese assistance is especially appealing to Botswana since it offers much-needed money for important development projects without imposing strict regulations or requirements.

Chinese assistance programs in Botswana are well known for their ability to move rapidly and adapt to shifting needs and priorities. On the other hand,

political circumstances, donor goals, and bureaucratic processes might cause delays and inefficiencies for help from other international partners (Fernando, 2007). But the analogy also highlights the possible drawbacks and restrictions of Chinese assistance. For instance, there are many complaints about the sustainability and the quality of projects financed by China; many infrastructure projects are accused of having inadequate building standards, weakened durability, and exorbitant long-term maintenance requirements. Assistance from other international partners, on the other hand, may place a higher priority on environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and quality control, producing more robust and sustainable development results.

Additionally, Chinese contractors and businesses often oversee Chinese assistance projects in Botswana, which may restrict chances for local participation, skill transfer, and capacity development. Alternatively, assistance from other foreign partners might prioritize community engagement, local ownership, and capacity development, enabling Botswana's institutions and people to become more autonomous and self-sufficient (Youngman, 2014). Policymakers and development professionals may find areas of collaboration, make use of the benefits of various assistance models, and deal with the difficulties and limitations that come with each by carrying out a thorough comparative study. Ensuring that the assistance partnership successfully supports fair and inclusive growth for all citizens of Botswana while supporting the nation's sustainable development objectives is the aim.

Financial, technical, and comparative aspects are all included in China's help to Botswana, which reflects larger patterns in Sino-African ties. China is a source of financial support for Botswana's economy via project assistance and development loans, which have increased investment and gross domestic savings (Broich, Szirmai, & Adedokun, 2020). This assistance fills in the gaps left by Western donors who have moved their attention to capacity development and governance reforms, especially focusing on infrastructure, agriculture, and industry (Assefa & Mengesha, 2020). Theoretically, Chinese help includes capacity building and technology transfer, especially in areas like agriculture where there is potential for major collaboration despite underdevelopment now. According to Wazha, Morapedi, and Manatsha (2015), Chinese infrastructure projects have also improved local labour markets

by generating short-term employment possibilities during construction and in adjacent industries.

Chinese assistance is different from conventional North-South Development Cooperation (NSDC) in that it is centred on reciprocal benefits and non-interference in domestic matters, rather than having strict conditionalities (Alhassan & Wang, 2018). This strategy has drawn criticism for possible geopolitical motivations while also receiving praise for its adaptability. Particularly in economic areas like construction and retail, media coverage in Botswana presents a nuanced picture of Chinese engagement, showing both hope and caution (Gellers & Jeffords, 2019). Furthermore, Botswana exports basic products and imports capital and intermediate goods from China, which influences Botswana's trade dynamics with other nations while also promoting local infrastructure development. Despite social isolation and competitiveness, Chinese merchants in Botswana find chances in the local market because of the country's distinct economic environment. Given the circumstances, Chinese assistance to Botswana is complex, offering both countries opportunities and difficulties while promoting economic growth.

5. Chinese Aid's Effects on Botswana's Economic, Societal and Environmental Policies

Botswana has seen the economic, social, and environmental policy ramifications of Chinese assistance in a variety of ways. Chinese assistance has been a major factor in Botswana's economic growth, especially in infrastructural projects. The financing and construction of large-scale projects including energy facilities, airports, bridges, and highways have improved the physical infrastructure of the country and generated jobs and economic development (Mphemelang & Velempini, 2021; Akhidenor, 2013). As a result of these infrastructural improvements, Botswana is now a key centre for commerce in Southern Africa, with lower transportation costs, more efficient logistical operations, and increased overall economic efficiency (Taylor, 1998).

Additionally, Chinese assistance has increased Botswana's commercial and trade potential. Chinese-funded initiatives have increased market access for Botswana's products and services, enabling easier trade flows, by enhancing infrastructure and production capacity. Economic diversification initiatives have been bolstered by the inflow of Chinese investment money,

which has lessened dependency on traditional revenue streams and fostered expansion in the mining, industrial, and agricultural sectors (Sekakela, 2016; Dintsi, 2019). Additionally, one of the main results of Chinese support has been the creation of jobs; infrastructure projects have increased employment indirectly in the retail, hotel, and transportation sectors while also offering a multitude of career prospects for engineers, labourers, and technicians (Li, 2016).

Chinese assistance has had a major social influence on local employment and poverty reduction. Infrastructure projects have improved local abilities in a variety of fields, including manual labour, professional, technical, and administrative roles, and generated temporary work possibilities (Mengesha, 2022). Furthermore, Chinese retail establishments in Botswana have encouraged local business and helped to reduce poverty despite obstacles including market saturation and cultural differences (Manatsha & Manatsha, 2016). China has contributed financially and technically to develop medical facilities, equipment, and capacity-building activities. Support for healthcare and education programs has also been considerable. Scholarships, teacher training programs, and educational materials have all contributed to the nation's increased human capital and better access to high-quality healthcare services (Kalusopa, 2009).

Chinese assistance has a mixed effect on the environment. Xu and Zhang, 2022; Xabadiya & Hu, 2019) Positive contributions include financing for pollution control, habitat restoration, and environmental conservation projects, as well as assistance for renewable energy projects like wind and solar power. The goals of Botswana's environmental sustainability, including lowering deforestation, halting desertification, and solving water shortages, are met by these initiatives. Large-scale infrastructure development, however, has dangers for nearby populations and ecosystems, such as heightened pollution, habitat destruction, and biodiversity loss. Concerns over resource depletion and environmental harm are raised by Chinese companies engaging in resource extraction operations including mining and forestry (Large, 2007). To reduce these risks, it is crucial to manage them well and put in place strict environmental safeguards, stakeholder engagement processes, and transparency regulations.

According to Madzoke and Wu (2024), Chinese help has given Botswana more policy leeway, enabling more adaptable economic plans and lowering reliance on conventional Western aid models. Strong labour regulations are necessary to maintain fair and stable globalization, as shown by the prevalence of Chinese non-citizens working on Chinese projects, which has prompted worries about local labour rights (Guo & Jiang, 2020). Chinese assistance has had a political impact on Botswana's domestic policy and development objectives. Some political players raise worries about debt sustainability, transparency, and possible undue political influence, while others favorably consider Chinese assistance as necessary support for infrastructure, economic growth, and poverty eradication (Thompson, 2005; Caruso, 2020).

In summary, while Chinese assistance has supported social welfare and economic growth in Botswana, it must be managed carefully to balance the advantages with policy and environmental risks. Botswana can improve the country's overall development trajectory by tackling these problems and ensuring that Chinese assistance promotes equitable and sustainable growth.

6. The Complexities of Chinese Aid in Botswana

Chinese help to Botswana is complicated, including elements of the political, labour, environmental, and economic spheres. The sustainability of the debt incurred via Chinese loans is a major worry. Although these loans sometimes have advantageous conditions such as extended payback durations and low interest rates, they have sparked questions about Botswana's capacity to manage and repay its growing debt in the long run (Singh, 2020). Multiple Chinese-funded projects have resulted in a debt buildup that might put a burden on Botswana's fiscal resources and could cause financial distress or the necessity for more borrowing to cover current obligations.

In Chinese loan arrangements, accountability and transparency are also divisive topics. The opaque terms and circumstances of these loans, according to critics, make it difficult to evaluate Botswana's debt commitments and their consequences for the financial health of the nation (Behuria, 2018). The usefulness and value for money of Chinese assistance are further questioned considering incidents including project delays, cost overruns, and quality issues in projects supported by China. Furthermore,

Botswana's growing reliance on Chinese funding raises concerns about the erosion of its sovereignty and independence in determining its development priorities because it may make it more vulnerable to Chinese influence in decisions about its foreign policy and domestic affairs (Hanauer & Morris, 2014).

Two major problems associated with Chinese help in Botswana are resource exploitation and environmental deterioration. Big infrastructure projects like dams, roads, and mining activities put Botswana's fragile ecosystems and wildlife in danger (Schoeman, 2008). These projects' construction operations may result in soil erosion, habitat damage, deforestation, and disturbance of natural watercourses. Moreover, Chinese trade and investment agreements may make it easier to exploit natural resources, which would worsen environmental deterioration and deplete priceless ecological assets.

There has been evidence linking soil contamination, water and air pollution, and health hazards for nearby populations to industrial projects supported by China, especially in the mining industry (Zezeza, 2014). These environmental hazards may increase due to inadequate enforcement of environmental legislation and oversight capacities, which can hurt the health and quality of life of impacted communities. The sustainability and resilience of Botswana's ecosystems and populations are at risk because of the drive to achieve short-term economic advantages, which often ignores the long-term effects of resource depletion and environmental deterioration.

Violating labour rights in projects financed by China is a fundamental problem as well. Chinese development and investment projects in Botswana often result in reports of exploitation, subpar working conditions, and violations of labour laws (Zezeza, 2014). Chinese corporations undermine local employment possibilities and attempt to build local skills by often using cheap labour practices and favoring Chinese migrant workers over local ones. Workers on Chinese-funded projects confront some difficulties, including long working hours, low pay, poor access to housing and healthcare, and few channels for resolving grievances (Large, 2008).

There is disagreement on the political ramifications of Chinese assistance as well. There are still worries over China's use of assistance as geopolitical leverage, even though Chinese help is often portrayed as being exempt from the strict requirements usually placed by Western donors. Chinese assistance,

according to critics, is consistent with Beijing's larger geopolitical goals and foreign policy, including gaining access to natural resources and boosting its diplomatic influence (Moyo, 2020). This connection begs the issue of how much Botswana's sovereignty and capacity to freely pursue its own national goals may be jeopardized by Chinese assistance.

The assistance relationship is further complicated by the perceived power differential between China and Botswana. Although Chinese finance is a useful source of assistance for Botswana's economic and infrastructure projects, there are worries that China may have too much influence over the country's internal and external policies (Thrall, 2015). Dependency might result from this imbalance of power, making it more difficult for Botswana to exercise its sovereignty and adopt policies that run counter to China's interests.

To overcome these obstacles, Botswana must increase responsibility, openness, and monitoring in its interactions with Chinese assistance. To reduce the risks connected with Chinese-funded projects and make sure they successfully support Botswana's sustainable development objectives, it might be helpful to strengthen local capacity for project review, implementation, and monitoring (Omoruyi, 2015). Maintaining Botswana's independence and adaptability in determining its development path may be facilitated by a well-rounded and varied approach to foreign collaborations.

7. Enhancing China-Botswana Cooperation: Strategies for Sustainable Development and Transparency

A multimodal approach that makes use of shared strengths and tackles critical areas for improvement is required to strengthen China-Botswana cooperation for sustainable development and transparency. Primarily, agricultural cooperation has to be greatly improved. Agricultural cooperation has been historically neglected in comparison to other sectors. However, it may be reinvigorated via knowledge transfer, education, marketing, irrigation, and the development of rural infrastructure. By using China's vast agricultural production knowledge, Botswana may increase its food self-sufficiency (Wazha, Morapedi & Manatsha, 2015). According to Kgomotso and Moahi (2015), encouraging academic partnerships and research collaborations like the ones started by the University of Botswana may also improve

understanding and creativity amongst parties involved in environmental conservation and cultural heritage preservation.

China-Botswana cooperation is still based on infrastructure development, with Chinese investments in projects such as the Morupule B Power Station establishing a standard for open and responsible operations (Chen, 2009). To preserve amicable relations, it is important to tackle labor-related disputes and guarantee equitable labour practices by comprehending the legal and cultural distinctions in labour laws between the two nations (Zhou, 2023). By strengthening cultural relations and enhancing China's reputation, expanding public diplomacy via programs like the Confucius Institute may boost China's standing and create a more cooperative atmosphere (Zhou and Ma, 2022).

As a worldwide economic superpower, China offers trade and investment possibilities for Botswana, allowing it to diversify its exports and draw in capital across a range of sectors. According to Eisenman and Heginbotham (2019), Botswana's natural resources, which include minerals and agricultural goods, are in high demand in China and provide a means for the country to capitalize on this market. Companies from both nations may create synergies and maintain economic development via joint ventures and collaborations (Tsaurai, 2014).

Another critical area for partnership is human capital development. Training initiatives and scholarship programs may enable China to provide top-notch education and technical capabilities in vital disciplines such as STEM (Omoruyi, 2015). Botswana can establish a skilled labour force that promotes innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development by sending professionals and students to study and train in China. Additionally, involvement in information exchange programs, research partnerships, and capacity-building efforts may improve Botswana's competitiveness in the international market and fortify its human capital foundation (Meidan, 2006).

Encouraging interpersonal communication may help Botswana and China become more amiable and understanding. Cultural and educational events like language classes, academic exchanges, and festivals may promote intercultural cooperation and communication while fortifying cultural links (Schilirò, 2022). Mutual respect and appreciation may be fostered in both

nations' cultural contexts by including cultural and heritage treasures in conservation plans.

Strategic project selection may assist Botswana by concentrating on sectors like infrastructure, healthcare, education, and renewable energy that are in line with its long-term development goal and strategic objectives. It is essential to maintain openness and accountability throughout the negotiation and implementation of projects sponsored by China (Singh, 2020). Botswana could enhance its regulatory frameworks and procurement processes to guarantee the transparency of assistance agreements and the ethical and efficient use of money. Credibility and public confidence may be increased by making assistance agreements, project budgets, and spending reports publicly available (Moyo, 2020).

The viability of assistance efforts depends on increasing local ownership and participation. Project preparation, implementation, and supervision stages should include civil society groups, local communities, and pertinent stakeholders to guarantee that initiatives are adapted to local goals and requirements (Dintsi, 2019). Creating strategic partnerships with international organizations, development partners, and donor agencies may provide Botswana access to the knowledge, resources, and best practices it needs to manage and maximize the advantages of foreign assistance (Omoruyi, 2015).

According to Thurl (2015), Botswana needs to give precedence to all-encompassing development plans that integrate sustainability concepts into every sector of the economy, to guarantee sustainable development results. To guarantee compliance with environmental laws and encourage responsible resource management, institutional capacities and regulatory frameworks should be strengthened. A sustainable culture will be promoted, and locals will be empowered to participate in sustainable development projects via investments in human capital development, education, and awareness-raising initiatives (Tsaurai, 2014).

Establishing protocols for the public publication of assistance agreements, project budgets, and spending reports may help improve accountability and openness in aid projects. It is essential to establish autonomous supervision entities and regulatory agencies to oversee project execution and investigate misbehaviour (Zhou & Ma, 2022). Aid management will be even more transparent and accountable if stakeholder participation is prioritized, and technology is used for project monitoring and data distribution

(Zhou, 2023). Through the implementation of these techniques, Botswana may successfully advance its objectives for sustainable development, minimize related risks, and maximize the advantages of Chinese help.

8. Conclusion

The relationship between China and Botswana as well as the effect of Chinese aid on the country's development have been thoroughly examined throughout this research paper. One of the most important conclusions is the size and reach of Chinese aid programs in Botswana, which cover social welfare, infrastructural development, and economic collaboration. Aside from that, issues with the sustainability of debt, breaches of labour rights, environmental damage, and political ramifications of Chinese aid have all been brought up. Nonetheless, chances to improve collaboration and optimize the advantages of Chinese assistance while minimizing hazards have also been found, emphasizing Botswana's potential for sustainable development results.

The research emphasizes how complex the connection between China and Botswana is, with both opportunities and difficulties. Chinese assistance has aided Botswana's development tremendously, but it also presents issues with responsibility, sovereignty, and dependence. To guarantee the efficacy, integrity, and sustainability of aid projects, it is critical to promote openness, accountability, and stakeholder engagement. The report also emphasizes the necessity of a strategic and well-balanced approach to China-Botswana collaboration, emphasizing equality, respect for one another, and shared prosperity while tackling issues with debt, the environment, labour, and politics.

Research on the effects of Chinese aid on Botswana's development must continue because of the dynamic character of development cooperation and the ever-changing nature of relations between China and Botswana. To fully grasp the long-term effects of Chinese aid, including its political, social, economic, and environmental facets, more research is required. In addition, continuous oversight and assessment of aid initiatives are required to determine their efficacy, pinpoint obstacles, and support fact-based policy choices. To maximize the advantages of Chinese aid for sustainable development outcomes, Botswana can improve its ability to

negotiate the difficulties of relations with China by conducting thorough research and monitoring activities.

The analysis emphasizes the significance of a nuanced and balanced strategy for China-Botswana collaboration, one that takes advantage of the advantages brought about by Chinese assistance while tackling the related difficulties. Botswana can improve the efficacy and integrity of aid projects by promoting accountability, openness, and stakeholder involvement. This will help the country achieve its sustainable development goals and build a win-win cooperation with China. Sufficient investigation and oversight are critical to guarantee that Chinese assistance augments Botswana's developmental trajectory, advocating for equitable growth, social fairness, and ecological durability to the advantage of all concerned parties.

Notes

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From Declarations to Negotiations: ASEAN's Role in Managing the South China Sea Dispute

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Abstract

In 2023 and 2024, tensions in the South China Sea (SCS) escalated among some claimant states, especially between the People's Republic of China and the Philippines over the Shoals of Scarborough, Second Thomas, and Sabina. Having been a stakeholder in the disputes for decades, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) released the *Foreign Ministers' Statement on Maintaining and Promoting Stability in the Maritime Sphere in Southeast Asia* in December 2023, a timely response to the developments. ASEAN's participation in the South China Sea disputes has been reflected in several ways but mostly through diplomatic documents and communications. The article examines the regional bloc's participation in the maritime disputes through its statements/declarations on the SCS, and chairman's statements from ASEAN summits and summits with dialogue partners and the United Nations. ASEAN member states' efforts in engaging with China in negotiations on concluding a Code of Conduct in the SCS and the challenges faced by ASEAN in dealing the disputes will also be clarified. Although ASEAN's participation in the SCS disputes have been mostly reflected in its Chairman's Statements, it can be recognized as continuous collective efforts of a regional mechanism in dealing with a common but critical challenge in the Indo-Pacific region.

Keywords: *ASEAN, South China Sea, China, South China Sea Dispute*

1. Introduction

The disputes in the South China Sea (SCS) have been ongoing for decades but have become more heated and complicated since China used force to attack Vietnamese forces in the Spratly Islands in 1988, and China signed a contract with a US company to explore oil and gas located on Vietnam's continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in May 1992. In 2009, China formally claimed sovereignty over about 80 percent of the SCS (Mastro, 2021) when it submitted the nine-dash line map to the United Nations (UN). Tensions escalated when the Scarborough Shoal incident occurred between China and the Philippines in 2012, leading to the latter's filing of the case with the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), which was established under the Annex VII of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Although the PCA Ruling on 12 July 2016 states that 'China's claims to sovereign rights jurisdiction, and to "historic rights", with respect to the maritime areas of the South China Sea encompassed by the so-called "nine-dash line" are contrary to the Convention' (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016), tensions in the disputed waters have not cooled down. In recent years, there have been tensions between the Philippines and China over the Scarborough Shoal, the Second Thomas Shoal, and Sabina Shoal. Various efforts have been undertaken to cool tensions and mitigate disputes among the claimant states, including those by ASEAN. ASEAN serves as the most important forum for raising and discussing the issues across its platforms and mechanisms. Four out of six claimants in the SCS are ASEAN member states; thus, despite differing views, ASEAN has collectively undertaken actions to prevent disputes and conflicts in one of the busiest trade routes in the world.

The 1967 Bangkok Declaration, which established ASEAN, does not explicitly mention working together to resolve security challenges. However, the changes in the security environment in the Southeast Asian region have forced ASEAN to pay attention to security challenges, including non-traditional security such as human security since the late 1980s. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the US withdrawal of bases in Southeast Asia in the early 1990s created a 'power vacuum' situation in the region. In 1988, China used force to invade a number of features under Vietnam's control in the Spratlys. Subsequently, in 1992, the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and Crestone Energy entered a cooperation contract for the joint exploration of oil block located in Vietnam's continental shelf and EEZ. Those events left ASEAN countries with a sense of insecurity. From pursuing 'regional solidarity

and cooperation under all circumstances, especially whenever pressures and tensions of any kind, arising from within the region or from without, challenge the capacity, resourcefulness, and goodwill of the ASEAN nations' (ASEAN, 2012c) as stated in the Manila Declaration in December 1987, ASEAN shifted 'towards a higher plane of political and economic cooperation to secure regional peace and prosperity' (ASEAN, 1992) in the Singapore Declaration of 1992. In this context, ASEAN as a bloc started to engage in the SCS disputes with the issuance of a declaration on the SCS in July 1992.

Because AMS were mindful to be 'bound by geography, common objectives and shared destiny' (ASEAN, 2008: 1), they have a protracted process of involvement in the SCS dispute. ASEAN - act as 'the primary driving force' of the region (ARF, 1995) at the second ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) held in August 1995, 'a forum for open dialogue and consultation on regional political and security issues, to discuss and reconcile the differing views between ARF participants in order to reduce the risk to security' (ARF, 1995). Then, at the fourth ASEAN Summit held in Bangkok in December 1995, ASEAN itself states that it 'shall seek an early, peaceful resolution of the South China Sea dispute and shall continue to explore ways and means to prevent conflict and enhance cooperation in the South China Sea' (ASEAN, 1995). ASEAN's involvement in the SCS dispute was institutionalised by the 2008 ASEAN Charter, 'the legal and institutional framework for ASEAN' (ASEAN, 2008: 3). The Charter states that ASEAN 'shall maintain and establish dispute settlement mechanisms in all fields of ASEAN cooperation' (ASEAN, 2008: 23). As an intergovernmental organization (ASEAN, 2008: 8), ASEAN's decision-making works based on consultation and consensus as the basic principle (ASEAN, 2008: 22). ASEAN Summit is 'the supreme policy-making body of ASEAN' (ASEAN, 2008: 10). In addition, some ASEAN statements/declarations have been released by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meetings whose role is to, as written in ASEAN Charter, 'undertake other tasks provided for in (the) Charter or such other functions as may be assigned by the ASEAN Summit' (ASEAN, 2008: 12).

The article examines ASEAN's role in the SCS dispute by (1) analyzing the statements/declarations, Chairman's statements, joint statements with dialogue partners, and (2) discussing the COC negotiations with China. After the 1988 incident, ASEAN was concerned about instability and insecurity in the SCS, and before the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea was released, ASEAN organized workshops on the SCS held in Bali in 1990 and Bandung in 1991 (ASEAN, 1992). However, the inclusion of SCS disputes in the

1995 ASEAN Chairman's statement and the subsequent chairman's statement has rendered such workshops unnecessary.

2. ASEAN Statements/Declarations on the South China Sea

When the tension in the SCS arose in the late 1980s, ASEAN as a bloc officially participated in efforts of preventing maritime conflicts in the region. 'Perhaps responding to the growing assertiveness of China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, and certainly to the growing potential for conflict' (Severino, 2010: 41), especially after Chinese used force to attack on Vietnamese forces in the Spratlys in 1988, and China's conclusion a contract with US-based Crestone Energy to explore for oil and gas in a block that included Vanguard Bank, on Vietnam's continental shelf and EEZ, and 600 miles from China's Hainan island, in May 1992, the ASEAN foreign ministers adopted the ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea in July 1992. The Declaration emphasizes 'the necessity to resolve all sovereignty and jurisdictional issues pertaining to the South China Sea by peaceful means, without resort to force', at the same time urges 'all parties concerned to exercise restraint with the view to creating a positive climate for the eventual resolution of all disputes.' In particular, in the Declaration, the Foreign Ministers of the AMS at that time commended that they applied the principles contained in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia as the basis for establishing a code of international conduct over the South China Sea, (Centre for International Law). By releasing the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea, ASEAN officially engaged in the SCS dispute as a regional organization. After Chinese occupation by force of Mischief Reef which was then under the Philippine control (Tran, 2020) in February 1995, the Statement of the Recent Developments in the South China Sea was released by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers in March 1992. In the statement, ASEAN Foreign Ministers express their 'serious concern over recent developments which affect peace and stability in the South China Sea'. They 'call upon all parties to refrain from taking actions that destabilize the region and further threaten the peace and security of the South China Sea.' The Mischief incident was directly named in the statement: 'We specifically call for the early resolution of the problems caused by recent developments in Mischief Reef.' As a grouping, ASEAN also exerted pressure on China in response to the latter's use of force and non-transparent actions in the South China Sea.

'At the first meeting of ASEAN and Chinese senior foreign-ministry officials, which happened to have been scheduled to take place in Hangzhou in April 1995, the ASEAN delegations pressed China on South China Sea issues, including the significance of the nine bars on Chinese maps, which dangerously skirt the gas-rich Natuna group of islands of non-claimant Indonesia, as well as on China's presence on Mischief Reef' (Severino, 2010: 43).

Despite the Philippines' ongoing lawsuit against China with the PCA, China conducted 'rapid and large-scale land reclamation works in seven features in the Spratlys' (Japan Ministry of Defense, 2021) since the end of 2013. China also increased activities infiltrating into the EEZs and continental shelves of some other claimants in the SCS, including those of Vietnam. From May to July 2014, Beijing deployed the Haiyang Shiyou 981 oil rig sitting about 70 miles inside the EEZ that extends 200 miles from the Vietnamese shore (Taylor, 2014). In response to the Chinese activities, the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN countries while attending a meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 10 May 2014 released ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Current Developments in the South China Sea in which, the ministers 'expressed their serious concerns over the ongoing developments in the South China Sea, which have increased tensions in the area'. They 'urged all parties concerned, in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)'. They also 'called on all parties to the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) to undertake full and effective implementation of the DOC in order to create an environment of mutual trust and confidence' and 'emphasized the need for expeditiously working towards an early conclusion of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC)' (ASEAN, 2014a).

Recently, amid Chinese and the Philippine tension over the Scarborough Shoal, and Second Thomas Shoal in the SCS, ASEAN Foreign Ministers released a Statement on Maintaining and Promoting Stability in the Maritime Sphere in Southeast Asia on 30 December 2023. In the statement, the Foreign Ministers expressed their 'concern the recent developments in the South China Sea that may undermine peace, security, and stability in the region', 'reaffirmed the need to avoid actions that may further complicate the situation and pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS'. They were committed to working towards the early conclusion of an effective and substantive COC that is in accordance with international law, including the

1982 UNCLOS. In the statement, the Ministers reaffirmed their unity, solidarity, and shared commitment to maintaining and further strengthening stability in the maritime sphere (ASEAN, 2023a).

ASEAN as a grouping first became involved in SCS dispute in July 1992 (Thayer, 2017) with the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea and other statements which have timely responded to the developments on the ground. The moves reflect ASEAN's concern over China's actions in the SCS. In their statements, ASEAN countries have also proposed parties concerned about exercising restraint, proposing resolutions of disputes, and requesting parties concerned to undertake full and effective implementation of the DOC, and establishing a code of international conduct over the SCS (the 1992 Declaration) or working towards an early conclusion of the COC (ASEAN, 2014a; ASEAN, 2023a).

3. The South China Sea Dispute in ASEAN Chairman's Statement

ASEAN Summit, as stated in the 2008 Charter, is 'the supreme policy-making body of ASEAN' (ASEAN, 2008: 10). ASEAN Chairmanship prioritizes the issues of its rotation-chair's agenda (Farhana, 2022). Chairman's statements released at the end of the summits reflect AMS' shared views over domestic, regional, and international issues, among others. Along with releasing specific statements/declarations, ASEAN has included the SCS dispute in its chairman's statements at summits. As mentioned above, the SCS issue was first mentioned by ASEAN through the workshops held in Bali in 1990, and Bandung in 1991, respectively. However, in the Bangkok Summit Declaration of 1995, ASEAN officially began to include the content of the dispute in its chairman's statement. The Bangkok Summit Declaration of 1995 writes:

'ASEAN shall seek an early, peaceful resolution of the South China Sea dispute and shall continue to explore ways and means to prevent conflict and enhance cooperation in the South China Sea consistent with the provisions of the TAC and the ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea of 1992 as well as international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea' (ASEAN, 1995).

Then, in the press release of the ASEAN's informal summit in 1996, ASEAN continued to reiterate the content of the SCS dispute as it did in the previous year. However, the SCS dispute did not appear in the Press Statement of the

2nd ASEAN Informal Meeting of Heads of State/Government of the Member States of ASEAN held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in December 1997 (ASEAN, 2012d).

In 1998, when Vietnam assumed the rotating Chairmanship of ASEAN, the content of the SCS dispute was re-included in the chairman's statements of the summit. In the Hanoi Declaration of 1998, the collocation of dispute settlement mechanisms was changed in comparison with the previous ones. Instead of being placed last as in the Bangkok Declaration of 1995 and the Press Statement of the First Informal Summit in 1996, the international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS is put first and the spirit of the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea comes second (ASEAN, 2012b). From 2002 when the DOC was signed between ASEAN and China to the 12th ASEAN Summit held in the Philippines in January 2007, the ASEAN chairman's statements only revolved around the implementation of the DOC, no legal mechanisms for resolving the dispute were stated.

After being absent from the statements of the 13th, 14th, and 15th ASEAN Summits respectively, the SCS was re-introduced in the 16th ASEAN Chairman's Statement chaired by Vietnam in April 2010 when the statement mentions about the enhancement of utilizing ASEAN's existing tools and mechanisms such as, the DOC (ASEAN, 2010), among others. In an especially important development, the Chairman's Statement of the 17th ASEAN Summit held the same year in Vietnam offers a 10-line paragraph mentioning about the SCS. In the statement of the summit, ASEAN leaders reaffirmed the importance of the DOC, which embodies the collective commitment to promoting peace and stability in this area through dialogue and cooperation and peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with universally agreed principles of international law including the 1982 UNCLOS and other relevant international maritime laws. The leaders also stressed the need to intensify efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the DOC and move toward the conclusion of a regional COC (ERIA, 2010). Since then, the ASEAN Chairman's statements mentioning the SCS dispute all have reaffirmed the need to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. Also, from this summit onwards, the implementation of the DOC and working towards a COC continued to be included in ASEAN's chairman statements, with the exception of the 21st summit commenced in Cambodia (ASEAN, 2012a) in November 2012, the incident occurred after ASEAN failed to

issue a joint communiqué for the first time at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting held July of the same year due to disagreements over the SCS issue.

China's reclamation and militarization of features in the Spratlys since the end of 2013, and especially Chinese Haiyang Shiyou 981 oil rig deep and total placement in the continental shelf and EEZ of 200 nautical miles from the Vietnamese coast, a new content was added in the SCS paragraph(s) of the chairman's statements of ASEAN summits thereafter, namely freedom of navigation and overflight. Freedom of navigation and overflight over the SCS was first mentioned in ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Current Developments in the South China Sea released on 10 May 2014 at AMS Ministers Meeting held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. In the statement, the Foreign Ministers 'reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace and stability, maritime security, freedom of navigation in and over-flight above the South China Sea' (ASEAN, 2014a). Just one day later, AMS issued the Chairman' Statement of the 24th ASEAN Summit, in which leaders state that they 'reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace and stability, maritime security, freedom of navigation in and over-flight above the South China Sea' (ASEAN, 2014f). Since then, this content has been included in all Chairman Statements of ASEAN Summits if the statements mention the SCS dispute.

Similarly, since the 24th ASEAN Summit, ASEAN's Chairman Statement has just begun to contain content expressing the concerns of the ASEAN leader's situation or on-going developments in the SCS. In the Chairman's Statement of the 24th ASEAN Summit, AMS leaders 'expressed serious concerns over the on-going developments in the South China Sea' (ASEAN, 2014f). At the 26th ASEAN Summit held in 2015; the issue of land reclamation was also first included in the Chairman's Statement. In the statement, some leaders of ASEAN shared their serious concerns on the land reclamation being undertaken in the SCS, which has eroded trust and confidence and may undermine peace, security, and stability in the SCS (ASEAN, 2015a). Since China's militarization of some features in the Spratlys was publicised by Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) in 2014 (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative), AMS began to share their concerns on the increased presence of military assets and the possibility of further militarization of outposts in the SCS (ASEAN, 2015b). From the 28th and 29th ASEAN's Summits held in Vientiane, Lao PDR in 2016, ASEAN countries started emphasizing the importance of non-militarization and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities in the SCS (ASEAN, 2016c). Land reclamation and the importance of non-militarization and self-restraint continue to be reaffirmed in ASEAN's next chairman statements.

Thus, in the contents included in the chairman's statements of its summits, ASEAN has closely updated developments on the ground of the SCS dispute to present the grouping's viewpoint, from bringing international law to priority position in resolving the dispute to fully and effectively implementing the DOC, building a COC, expressing concerns over land reclamations and militarization actions, and promoting the importance of non-militarization in the SCS.

4. ASEAN's Role in the COC Negotiations with China

ASEAN involvement in the SCS dispute could also be seen from its efforts as a group in negotiating with China to conclude a COC. China, for its part, has had a "dual track" approach on the SCS issue. One track, China and ASEAN have worked together on the DOC and a prospective COC. The other track, it has involved the directly concerned parties working bilaterally to address their differences and finding a way forward on the SCS issue (Fook, 2024). The first codes of conduct in the SCS were adopted bilaterally between the Philippines and China, and the Philippines and Vietnam in 1995, and the proposal for a regional Code of Conduct was then endorsed at the 29th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia in the same year (Beckman and Vu, 2022: 348-349). In March 1999, under the chair of the Philippines, ASEAN assigned the Philippines and Vietnam to draft ASEAN's COC. The draft was presented to China during the 6th ARF Meeting in July 1999 (Le, 2019: 2). ASEAN and China concluded the first round of consultation on the Regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea in Hua Hin, southern Thailand in March 2000. In the consultation, both sides 'exchanged their respective COC drafts in March 2000 and agreed to draw up a consolidated text (Thayer, 2018) and reaffirmed their desire to have the COC as a set of general guidelines for managing the disputes in the SCS (ASEAN, 2000). However, AMS and China 'could not reach agreement on four major issues: the geographic scope (inclusion of the Paracels), restrictions on construction on occupied and unoccupied features, military activities in waters adjacent to the Spratly islands, and whether or not fishermen found in disputed waters could be detained and arrested' (Thayer, 2018).

Therefore, 'pending the peaceful settlement of territorial and jurisdictional disputes' (ASEAN, 2002), ASEAN and China signed the DOC at the ASEAN Summit held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in November 2002. In the declaration, the parties reaffirm their respect for and commitment to the

freedom of navigation in and over-flight above the SCS, undertake to resolve their territorial and jurisdictional disputes by peaceful means, without resorting to the threat or use of force, through friendly consultations and negotiations in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS (ASEAN, 2002). By signing the DOC, China for the first time accepted a multilateral agreement on the SCS dispute (Buszynski, 2003: 343). It took two years of discussions before AMS and China reached an agreement on the terms of reference establishing the ASEAN-China Joint Working Group to Implement the DOC (JWG-DOC) (Thayer, 2018).

In the end of 2005, the conclusion of a COC was officially set out when ASEAN and China in the Chairman's Statement of the ninth ASEAN-China Summit agreed to 'look forward to the eventual conclusion of a regional code of conduct in the South China Sea' (ASEAN, 2005). However, while China 'vigorously resisted a binding COC with the ASEAN as it insisted that such an agreement should be reached through consensus with the AMS' (De Castro, 2020: 340), ASEAN could not adopt a common policy on the South China Sea dispute due to the regional organization was divided into two factions, the claimant and the non-claimant states (Thayer, 2014). As a result, until April 2013, ASEAN and China agreed to work toward the adoption of the COC based on consensus (ASEAN, 2013a). In September 2013, ASEAN and China commenced formal consultations on the COC at the 6th Senior Officials' Meeting on the Implementation of the DOC (SOM-DOC) and the 9th JWG-DOC in Suzhou, China (ASEAN, 2013b). In October of the same year, AMS and China agreed to continue to maintain the momentum of the regular official consultations and work towards the adoption of the COC as provided for by the DOC (ASEAN, 2013b).

Thanks to the efforts, mostly by the AMS, ASEAN and China at the 17th ASEAN-China Summit held in November 2014 in Myanmar voiced to support the adoption of the first list of commonalities on COC consultation as early harvest measures to promote and enhance trust and confidence in the region (ASEAN, 2014b). The 10th Senior Official Meeting on DOC held in Chengdu, China in October 2015, discussed and formulated two preliminary leaving documents, namely, the list of crucial and complex issues and the list of elements for the outline of a COC, and confirmed that the Second List of Commonalities of the COC consultation, the Term of Reference of the Eminent Persons Group (EPEG) and the aforementioned documents would be the main outcomes of the 2015's COC Consultation (Mission of the People's Republic of China to ASEAN, 2015).

In August 2017, the Foreign Ministers of AMS and China adopted the Framework of the COC, and at the 20th ASEAN-China Summit held in Singapore in November 2017, AMS and China announced a new step that they would officially commence substantive negotiations on the text of the COC (ASEAN, 2017c). In another step, AMS, and China at the 15th SOM-DOC in Changsha, China, on 27 June 2018 agreed on a Single Draft COC Negotiating Text (SDNT) (ASEAN, 2018e). At the 21st ASEAN-China Summit held in Singapore in November 2018, they noted that they looked forward to the completion of the first reading of the SDNT by 2019 (ASEAN, 2018a). As planned, ASEAN and China completed the first reading of the SDNT and commenced the second reading process of SDNT at the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) 10+1 Session with China on 31 July 2019 in Bangkok. They also expressed the aspiration to conclude the COC within a three-year timeline or earlier, as proposed by China (ASEAN, 2019b).

Despite the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, the second reading of SDNT was undertaken. In addition, AMS and China reached a new consensus on the legal framework of the COC when, in the Chairman's Statement of the 23rd ASEAN-China Summit which was chaired virtually on 12 November 2020 by Vietnam, they were 'encouraged by the progress of the substantive negotiations towards the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of COC in line with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS' (ASEAN, 2020b). In another step, AMS, and China in 2021 reached a provisional agreement on the Preamble section and the progress of negotiations on the Objectives section under the General Provisions of the SDNT (ASEAN, 2021). In early 2023, a proposal to develop guidelines for accelerating the early conclusion of an effective and substantive COC was introduced (ASEAN, 2023e).

After efforts made, the second reading of the SDNT was completed at the 39th JWG-DOC which was convened in May 2023 in Ha Long, Vietnam. At the 39th JWG-DOC, the Guidelines for Accelerating the Early Conclusion of an Effective and Substantive COC was also finalised. The Guidelines was then endorsed ad referendum by the SOM-DOC and adopted by the PMC+1 Session with China in July 2023 (ASEAN, 2023b: 16). The 21st SOM-DOC held in Beijing on 26 October 2023 announced the official launch of the third reading of the text of the COC, and agreed to implement the guidelines for accelerating the conclusion of the COC as adopted by the ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in early 2023 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

In sum, after more than 20 years since AMS and China concluded the first round of consultation on the COC in March 2000 in Hua Hin, Thailand and more than three years since the first reading of the SDNT was completed at the ASEAN PMC 10+1 Session with China on 31 July 2019 in Bangkok, the COC has not been concluded but ASEAN as a grouping has been making efforts to work closely with China to finalize the code.

5. The SCS Dispute in the Chairman's Statements on ASEAN-Dialogue Partners' Summits, and of ASEAN-UN Summits

To maintain its centrality, ASEAN in its Charter issued in 2008 states that, the purpose No.15 of ASEAN is to maintain the centrality and proactive role of ASEAN as the primary driving force in its relations and cooperation with its external partners (ASEAN, 2008). In other words, enhancing relations and cooperation with its external partners, especially dialogue partners significantly contribute to maintain and cement ASEAN's centrality. As a result, ASEAN and a number of its dialogue partners have shared their views on the SCS dispute in bilateral statements of their summits.

With China, right in the Joint Statement of the Meeting of Heads of State/Government of the AMS and the President of the People's Republic of China in Kuala Lumpur in December 1997, AMS and China agreed.

'... to resolve their differences or disputes through peaceful means, without resorting to the threat or use of force, the parties concerned agreed to resolve their disputes in the South China Sea through friendly consultations and negotiations in accordance with universally recognized international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea' (ASEAN, 1997).

To date, besides China, AMS have regularly engaged with China in efforts to implement the DOC, moving towards concluding a COC to promote and enhance trust and confidence, and maintain peace and stability in the SCS. Moreover, the U.S. is the country outside the region that has the strongest involvement in the SCS dispute. One of the first documents showing ASEAN efforts to 'engage' the US in the dispute is the Joint Statement of the 4th ASEAN-U.S. Leaders' Meeting held in 2012. In the statement, ASEAN and the U.S. recognized the importance of the DOC and welcomed its implementation and looked forward to the early conclusion of a Regional COC (The White House, 2012). Since then, the SCS dispute appears in all summit's statements

between ASEAN and the US. When the SCS heated up due to Chinese placement of the oil rig in Vietnam's EEZ and continental shelf in 2014, the Chairman's statement of the second ASEAN-US Summit (November 2014) expressed their concerns over the situation in the SCS (ASEAN, 2014d).

In the context of Chinese land reclamation and militarization in the SCS, AMS and the US in their Joint Statement on the Strategic Partnership (2015) reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace and stability, ensuring maritime security and safety, and freedom of navigation including in and over-flight above the SCS and the commitments to ensuring the resolution of disputes by peaceful means in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the UNCLOS, and supported ASEAN-China on-going efforts to fully and effectively implement the DOC in its entirety, and to work toward the expeditious conclusion of an effective COC (ASEAN, 2015c). Importantly, the US was among the first ASEAN's dialogue partners that supported the legal framework that the COC belongs to since in the Chairman's Statement of the 6th ASEAN-China Summit held in Singapore in November 2018, AMS and the U.S. noted negotiations towards the early conclusion of an effective COC consistent with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS (ASEAN, 2018c).

Japan is also an ASEAN's dialogue partner having active involvement in the SCS dispute, at least from bilateral statements between them. In the Chairman's Statement of the 16th ASEAN-Japan Summit held in Brunei Darussalam in October 2013, AMS and Japan just underscored the importance of maritime security, freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce, and to ensure the resolution of disputes by peaceful means in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the UNCLOS in Asia-Pacific region (ASEAN, 2013c). In the statement, the SCS was not directly named. It was at the 17th ASEAN-Japan summit held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar in November 2014, AMS and Japan began to share common view on the SCS, including the importance of peaceful resolution of disputes and issues in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including UNCLOS, full and effective implementation of DOC, and called for continued substantive consultations for the early conclusion of the COC (ASEAN, 2014c). The Chairman's Statement of the 19th ASEAN-Japan Summit held in Laos in 2016 mentioned about 'the importance of non-militarization' (ASEAN, 2016b) in the SCS. The 'freedom of navigation in and over-flight above the South China Sea' was mentioned for the first time in the same summit (ASEAN, 2016b). Similar to the US, at the ASEAN-Japan Summit held in

Singapore in November 2018, AMS and Japan also noted negotiations towards the early conclusion of an effective COC consistent with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS (ASEAN, 2018b).

In the case of India, the first bilateral document between ASEAN and India at summit level mentioning the SCS dispute is Chairman's Statement of the 14th ASEAN-India Summit held in September 2016 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. In the statement, AMS and India emphasized the importance of maintaining peace, security and stability, unimpeded commerce, freedom of navigation in and over-flight above the SCS, underscored the importance for the states concerned to resolve disputes through peaceful means in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. In the statement, India and AMS urged all parties to show utmost respect for the 1982 UNCLOS, which establishes the international legal order of seas and oceans (ASEAN, 2016a).

Importantly, India was the first ASEAN dialogue partner that urged AMS and China to conclude a COC consistent with the 1982 UNCLOS. In the Chairman's Statement of the 15th ASEAN-India Summit held in November 2017 in the Philippines, ASEAN and India urged the parties to conclude a substantive and effective COC consistent with universally recognised principles of international law and the 1982 UNCLOS. In the same statement, India and ASEAN also reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, maritime safety and security, rules-based order and freedom of navigation in and over-flight above, and reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, emphasized the importance of non-militarization and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states in the SCS (ASEAN, 2017a).

Regarding Australia, it was at the ASEAN-Australia Leaders' meeting celebrating the 40th Anniversary of ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations in 2014, this country and AMS were for the first time committed to promoting maritime cooperation, including freedom of navigation and overflight, marine environmental protection, unimpeded commerce, non-use of force or threat of use of force, and the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, and through the appropriate ASEAN mechanisms (ASEAN, 2014g). However, it was at the first ASEAN-Australia Summit held in Vientiane in Laos in 2016, the SCS dispute was explicitly mentioned for the first time. In the chairman's statement of the summit, AMS and Australia underlined the importance of maintaining peace, security and stability, freedom of navigation in and over-flight above the SCS underscored the importance for

the states concerned to resolve disputes through peaceful means in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, and emphasized the importance of non-militarization (ASEAN, 2016d). Similar to the U.S. and Japan, Australia and AMS in the ASEAN-Australia Informal Breakfast Summit held in Singapore in November 2018 for the first time mentioned about the conclusion of an effective COC consistent with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS (ASEAN, 2018d).

Among ASEAN's first dialogue partners in Asia-Pacific, South Korea is the latest country to mention the SCS dispute in a bilateral summit statement. At the 17th ASEAN-South Korea Summit held in Manila, Philippines in January 2017, AMS and South Korea 'reiterate the importance of maintaining peace and security in the region, including freedom of navigation in and over-flight above the South China Sea' (ASEAN, 2017b). The conclusion of an effective COC consistent with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS was first mentioned by ASEAN and ROK in the 21st ASEAN-South Korea Summit virtually chaired by Vietnam in October 2020 (ASEAN, 2020a). Emphasizing the importance of non-militarization in the SCS was stated for the first time between the two in the 24th ASEAN-South Korea Summit held in Jakarta in September 2023 (ASEAN, 2023d).

In the statements, including those between ASEAN and China, key issues in the SCS dispute such as the freedom of navigation in and over-flight in the SCS, resolving disputes through peaceful means in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, full and effective implementation of the DOC, and the early conclusion of an effective and substantive COC are mentioned. Adding the contents about the SCS dispute in ASEAN and its dialogue partners' bilateral statement further confirm ASEAN's participation as an organization of its members, and importantly, ASEAN's dialogue partners can raise their shared voices - the collective voices - with AMS about the dispute in regional forums. Engaging the UN, the largest international organization, in the SCS dispute is a major step in ASEAN's efforts to internationalize the dispute. It seems that after the activities of land reclamation and militarization of the SCS conducted by China since the end of 2013 was publicized, the UN has paid more attention to the dispute. At the 6th ASEAN-UN Summit held in Nay Pyi Taw in 2014, although ASEAN and UN did not explicitly mention about the SCS, they acknowledged the importance of implementing universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS (ASEAN, 2014e). However, at the ninth ASEAN-UN Summit held in the Philippines in November 2017, two sides dedicated a paragraph of

the chairman's statement to mention about the SCS. In the statement, they urged the parties to continue working towards the full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety and the early conclusion of an effective and substantive COC (ASEAN, 2017d). Contents such as the conclusion of an effective and substantive COC consistent with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, respecting the rights and interests of third parties, and the importance of upholding international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS are reflected in the Chairman's Statement of the 11th ASEAN-United Nations Summit held in Jakarta in September 2023 (ASEAN, 2023c).

6. Challenges

ASEAN has made efforts to get involved in the SCS dispute over the past three decades, but clearly, the organization has faced many challenges. There are efforts that have not achieved the desired results. Regarding efforts to issue statements reflecting the developments on the ground in the SCS, AMS withdrew a strongly-worded statement that expressed the region's deep concerns over tension in the SCS in a meeting in the Chinese city of Kunming between foreign ministers from ASEAN and China less than a month before the PCA ruling (Latiff, 2016). In July 2016, at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Conference held in Vientiane, Laos in July 2016, Cambodia also voiced that it would block any mention of the PCA ruling in the AMM statement (Mogato, Martina, and Blanchard, 2016). Before that, in 2012, ASEAN could not release AMM joint communiqué due to disagreement of some AMS over adding the Scarborough Shoal incident between the Philippines and China (Bower, 2012) in the statement.

There are summits where ASEAN did not include the SCS dispute in its chairman's statements. In fact, after ASEAN and China signed the DOC in 2002, measures to handle disputes in the SCS were not mentioned in many ASEAN's chairman statements of the summits. Even in the three ASEAN's summits held in 2007, 2008 and 2009 respectively, the SCS dispute is not stated in the chairman's statements.

In addition, in the context of China's increasing influence on ASEAN, some ASEAN's statements have begun to show division among its member states when they mentioned the SCS dispute. After the release of the Statement of ASEAN Foreign Ministers on the Current Development in the SCS in Myanmar in 2014, ASEAN's collective spirit was affected, at least through the bloc's documents. Although still expressing the association's general views, the

solidarity of ASEAN was challenged since phrases such as 'some leaders' and 'some ministers' appear when referring to the SCS issue in a number of ASEAN documents. Chairman's Statement of the 27th ASEAN Summit (Kuala Lumpur, 21 November 2015) states that: 'We shared the concerns expressed by some Leaders on the increased presence of military assets and the possibility of further militarization of outposts in the South China Sea' (ASEAN, 2015b). In the ASEAN summit commenced in Indonesia in September 2023, the Chairman's Statement reads:

'We discussed the situation in the South China Sea, during which concerns were expressed by some ASEAN Member States on the land reclamations, activities, serious incidents in the area, including actions that put the safety of all persons at risk, damage to the marine environment, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions, and may undermine peace, security, and stability in the region' (ASEAN, 2023f).

Regarding the COC negotiations between ASEAN and China, the process began in the late 1990s but after many rounds of reading, the parties have only reached agreement on one of major differences: building a COC in accordance with the 1982 UNCLOS while other differences such as the scope of COC, the possibility of participation of countries outside the region in the SCS, among others, have not been reached. In addition to China's unwillingness to build a legally binding COC, non-claimant countries themselves are not keen on strongly demanding China to do so. Perhaps because of the consensus principle that ASEAN and China reached before (as mentioned above) and equally important is the consensus principle of ASEAN as stipulated in the Charter, if an ASEAN member country as non-claimant considers economic benefits with China, it is highly likely that they will avoid putting pressure on China in building a COC.

Regarding the Chairman's Statements of ASEAN-Dialogue Partners' Summits, however, depending on which country is the ASEAN chair, one sensitive issue namely militarization of the SCS is included in or excluded out of the statements. For examples, when Cambodia and Laos chaired ASEAN in 2022 and 2024 respectively, ASEAN-China Chairman's Statements do not state about the importance of non-militarization (ASEAN, 2022a; ASEAN, 2024) as the statements released in 2020 (Vietnam's Chairmanship) and 2023 (Indonesia's Chairmanship) did respectively (ASEAN, 2020b; ASEAN, 2023g). Likely, when mentioning the serious concerns on the land reclamations, militarization,

activities, and serious incidents in the SCS, the 26th ASEAN-Japan Chairman's Statement released in Cambodia in 2022 emphasized that the concerns were expressed by some AMS (ASEAN, 2022b) only. However, the 27th ASEAN-Japan Chairman's Statement released in Indonesia in 2023 states that 'We emphasized the importance of non-militarization' (ASEAN, 2023h). In another example, the Chairman's Statement of the 10th ASEAN-UN Summit held in Thailand in 2019 did not mention the dispute (ASEAN, 2019a).

There are reasons of the challenges, but perhaps the biggest one is that China has not changed its claim, which accounts for more than 80 per cent of the SCS in the orbit of the nine-dash line map which was rejected by the PCA's ruling in 2016 (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016: 117). The next reason is that, among AMS, besides four claimants namely Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam, there are non-claimants including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Singapore, and Thailand. Indonesia's Natuna EEZ overlaps China's nine dash line in the SCS. Closed economic relations of some non-claimants with China reduce ASEAN's unity in engaging with China on the SCS dispute. Indeed, China was Laos' second largest trading partner (accounting for 26.68% of the latter's total trade in 2022) (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2023: 68-69), and the latter's largest investor (Lao Investment Promotion Department, 2022). China is the largest trading partner, accounting for 21.16% of Cambodia's total merchandise trade value in 2021 (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2021). China was the largest trading partner and a top source of investment in Thailand in 2022 (Yang, 2023).

7. Conclusion

From speaking up to protect the rights, safety and sovereignty of member countries in the 1992 Declaration and the 1995 Statement on the SCS, ASEAN was assigned to be the primary driving force in August 1995 at the second ARF, and then ASEAN itself was committed to seeking an early, peaceful resolution of the dispute and the continuity of exploring ways and means to prevent conflict and enhance cooperation in the SCS at the fourth ASEAN Summit in December 1995. The legal framework for ASEAN was institutionalized by the 2008 ASEAN Charter since the Charter states to maintain and establish dispute settlement mechanisms in all fields of ASEAN cooperation. Making use of the assigned and committed role in dealing with disputes in the region, ASEAN has a protracted process of involvement in the SCS dispute. ASEAN has released

specific declarations and statements on the SCS dispute. It has also been engaged in the disputes adding the SCS dispute content in its summit chairman's statements, its bilateral chairman's statements with dialogue partners, and the UN. Through the statements, principles and measures such as peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation in and over-flight above the South China Sea, the need to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with the 1982 UNCLOS, and the early conclusion of an effective and substantive COC that is in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, among others. ASEAN has also been active as a grouping in engaging China in efforts to conclude a COC. However, the situation of claimants and non-claimants in the SCS dispute, and most of AMS closed economic relations with China are major challenges for AMS in their involvement in the SCS dispute.

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Notes

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Beyond the Debt Trap Narrative: Structural Risks and Strategic Choices in Africa–China Infrastructure Partnerships¹

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Abstract

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – one of China's key foreign strategy of expansion and integration continues to be applauded as well as criticized for a number of reasons including debt-trap diplomacy. Notwithstanding the accusations that China provides loans to developing countries under opaque loan terms intentionally to leverage the strategic national assets or political favours when the debtor country defaults on a loan, African countries continue to turn to China for financial resources. Thus, it is within the lines of reason to not only recognize the agency of African countries who willingly look to China to provide finances for infrastructural development but also evaluate relevant dynamics at play that shape a country's susceptibility to debt-trap diplomacy in order to best understand how to mutually benefit from African-China relations. We analyze factors like level of economic development, Infrastructure quality, quality of political institutions, debt risk, number of troubled transactions, volume of BRI operations, value of construction contracts, and gross revenue of construction contracts that may indicate the likelihood of a country's ability to offset its debts to China in order to not fall prey

to the alleged “debt-trap diplomacy”. To do this, we study cases of debt-trap diplomacy in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. We also evaluate the positions of eight African countries with elevated levels of borrowing from China with respect to the factors that indicate their chances of being prone to falling into the debt trap. After multiple in-depth case studies, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is applied as an analytical tool to find a combination of factors like high debt risk, a high volume of troubled transactions, low revenue of infrastructure projects, high levels of corruption and low government accountability that constitute factors impacting the likelihood of a debt trap.

Keywords: *Debt-Trap Diplomacy, Belt and Road Initiative, China-Africa relations, Debt Sustainability, Infrastructure financing*

1. Introduction

As China continues to expand its influence across the African continent, a narrative trailing its engagement is the potential of economic and political exploitation encapsulated in the term “debt-trap diplomacy.” The term debt-trap diplomacy as developed by Chellaney (2017) is regarded as a Chinese Foreign policy tool often used to describe predatory lending practices associated with the BRI wherein China provides finances in form of loans to developing countries under shady loan terms, with an intention to leverage strategic national assets or political favours when the debtor country defaults on a loan.

This phenomenon has gained momentous attention not just for its implications on economic autonomy and geopolitical relations but also on national sovereignty. Following United States (US) Secretary of State – Mike Pompeo’s accusation of China of using Debt-trap diplomacy in 2019, the BRI has come under considerable criticism particularly for its general lack of transparency and its support for undemocratic and authoritarian states (Brands, 2018; Schaffar, 2020; Rasheed, 2022) in developing countries. Nonetheless, given China’s continuous investments across Africa, it is pertinent to understand the institutional and socio-economic factors that increase the

risk of falling prey to debt-trap diplomacy or enhance its chances of benefitting from the BRI. Thus, the key research question guiding this paper is: What socioeconomic and institutional factors enhance or mitigate the susceptibility of African countries to Chinese debt-trap diplomacy, especially within the context of the BRI? We seek to primarily argue that a nuanced evaluation of the interplay of several factors like governance structures, economic institutions and so on is essential for understanding the dynamics of African-China relations instead of the simplistic portrayal of China's exploitation of African countries as suggested under the context of debt-trap diplomacy.

With Africa playing a key role in China's global strategy via the BRI, several scholars (Taylor & Zajontz, 2020; Liu et al, 2020; Kalu et al, 2022; Chiyemura et al, 2023; Brown, 2023) have highlighted its potential to stimulate economic development via large-scale infrastructural projects in the region but have also raised concerns about the abilities of participating countries to sustain the debts incurred in the process. It is worth underscoring that many African countries have in recent times turned to China instead of western financiers and International Financial Institutions for financial aids and investments to address vital infrastructural deficits given the seemingly less complicated and easy process of obtaining loans from China. With Chinese firms accounting for about 16 per cent of construction FDIs in the continent (Statista, 2024), development programmes and huge infrastructural projects provide a channel for substantial capital injection. In 2023 alone, African countries were estimated to have received over USD 21 billion in BRI projects (De Kluiver, 2024). Thus, African governments' decisions to participate in the BRI should be studied through the context of its agency and domestic institutional capacities amongst other factors.

This article aims to identify the combinations of factors indicative for countries that are prone to debt trap diplomacy under the BRI. To achieve the research goal of this paper, we combine in-depth case studies of well-known cases of "alleged" debt-trap diplomacy in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Tajikistan. Following this, we conduct a QCA of eight African countries with substantial debt exposure to China in order to comprehensively examine the factors that may predispose them to debt vulnerability.

The novelty of this paper lies in its focus on the contextual factors that influence African countries' engagements with China. While the extant literature extensively discusses the risks connected with the BRI in general, and debt-trap diplomacy as a strategic tool of Chinese foreign policy, little attention has been given to the internal factors at play in African countries that impact their susceptibility to such unfavourable outcomes. In addition, this work aims to contribute to the knowledge on the importance of economic resilience and structural governance issues in addressing excessive external borrowing which is prevalent in many African countries. Moreover, since African countries continue to seek financial aids from China, this paper may serve to be useful in risk assessment strategies and to inform policy decisions on how to effectively benefit from economic partnerships with China.

2. Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical model consists of theories that serve to explain factors leading to debt trap diplomacy. First as asserted by Sutherland et al (2020), countries with an elevated level of institutional fragility are considered as very risky for foreign direct investments (FDIs). When political accountability, the state and the rule of law are non-complementary, political institutions become weakened or ceases to function, thus leading to institutional ineffectiveness (Fukuyama, 2014). Under such conditions of institutional inefficiencies and ineffectiveness, institutional friction is bound to impede not only political and social processes but economic functioning as well. Similarly, Acemoglu and Robinson's (2013) extractive institutions embodies institutional deficiencies that inhibit political and economic progress. Under extractive institutions, vices like corruption, lack of transparency, restricted human rights, poor regulatory mechanisms, lack of political accountability and weak governance structures become prevalent which makes a country vulnerable to debt-trap. In addition to institutional weaknesses, countries can become economically vulnerable when they are often lured into borrowing from developed countries or international financial institutions under the guise of necessary development (Stiglitz, 2002) which then leads to unsustainable levels of debt. As a con of globalization, Stiglitz argues that developing countries who are reliant on foreign aids or loans to facilitate development in their countries are often subject to unfavourable loan conditionalities and can be exploited due to information asymmetries inherent in such processes that overtime cause them

to become debt vulnerable. Given this, developing countries with a high debt burden are at a higher risk of falling prey to debt-trap diplomacy under the BRI.

Some African countries are regarded (Kunawotor et al, 2020; Asongu & Nnanna, 2020; Horn et al, 2023) as having weak institutions with elevated levels of political instability, high levels of corruption, low government accountability, restricted freedoms and impediments to human rights. It is therefore to be assumed that these drawbacks would negatively impact the efficient use of financial loans obtained from China leading to mismanagement of BRI projects and low revenue from projects, thus rendering the countries incapable of servicing their debts. We opine that a combination of factors like high debt risk, a high volume of troubled transactions, low revenue of infrastructure projects, elevated levels of corruption and low government accountability that are associated with weak institutions rather than individual factors alone, determines the outcome of debt-trap.

3. Methodology

This work adopts a mixed methodological approach, combining multiple case studies and QCA to examine the factors likely to lead to debt-trap diplomacy within the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. Our sample includes a total of 11 countries - 8 African countries selected based on their high share of borrowing from China (Djibouti, Kenya, Zambia, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Angola, Nigeria and South Africa) and 3 countries with cases of alleged debt trap diplomacy (Sri-lanka, Tajikistan and Pakistan) to serve as comparative cases. The countries with cases of debt trap are the control group while the African countries are analyzed for key factors that may lead to the outcome of a debt trap.

The key dependent variable in this paper is the likelihood of the occurrence of a debt trap whilst the independent variables consist of a range of factors indicating susceptibility to debt trap diplomacy. Following our theoretical framework, these factors within the context of this study includes; (i) Level of economic development, measured by gross national income (GNI); (ii) Infrastructure quality; (iii) Quality of political institutions, measured by Voice and accountability Index; (iv) Debt risk, measured by Debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio; (v) Number of Troubled transactions; (vi) Volume of BRI

operations; (vii) Value of Construction Contracts ; and (viii) Gross revenue of construction contracts.

The use of case-study as a qualitative research method allows for an in-depth investigation of phenomena within its real-life context, thereby enabling us to examine underlying factors impacting the emergence of the likelihood of a debt-trap, as well as a nuanced understanding of the dynamics and processes at play. Further, we employ QCA – an analytical technique that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches using Boolean algebra, to identify what conditions that may lead to a specific outcome. QCA is best suited in this study as it facilitates a systematic comparison of multiple cases whilst considering their varying complexities and details.

We sourced secondary data from reliable databases. Observational data on GNI, infrastructure quality, and voice and accountability index are gotten from the World Bank's Development Indicators Database. Debt-to-GDP is sourced from the International Monetary Fund's Economic Outlook database. Data on value of Construction Contracts, BRI projects, Troubled Transactions and revenues are sourced from American Enterprise Institute's China Global Investment Tracker. We use time series data covering the period of 2013-2018 to analyze BRI projects, Troubled Transactions, and revenues while cross-sectional data was collected for GNI, Debt-to-GDP, infrastructure quality, and Voice and Accountability Index.

In our study, we used the mean value of the empirical data as the threshold (*the data is provided below*). The QCA method allows entering variables in different measurement formats into the model, as well as manual coding of variables in cases where this is necessary for the correct representations of data with a heterogeneous distribution within the segment being studied. The study also used csQCA with a dichotomized data format, where coding "1" does not mean the presence of an indicator as such, but an increased value within the data array for this indicator or in relation to a specific case under study. Accordingly, "0" does not mean the absence of an indicator, but its lower value within the study.

4. China–Africa Relations and Belt and Road Initiative

The current Non-intervention policy in China's provision of loans and aids to the African continent has made them very favorable in the eyes of the African

leaders. This is in line with China's interest in Africa which it is actively pursuing via development assistance as a particularly important instrument. This “no-string-attached” policy differs from that of monetary donors such as the International Monetary Fund, European Union, and other international institutions which tend to link development aid to the promotion of political transparency, food governance and human rights protection in the African countries. It is therefore not surprising that China's contributions to the infrastructure of African countries have been highly praised by their leaders, highlighting visible improvements that contribute to the expansion of economic activity, job creation for local workers, and tangible improvements to bridges, roads, rails and other transportation networks, all of which benefit ordinary citizens (Hanauer & Morris, 2014, Chiyemura et al, 2023). However, Chinese investment on the continent has also been criticized as being opportunistic (Kalu et al, 2022; Chiyemura et al, 2023; Brown, 2023).

In 2013, President Xi Jinping introduced the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, then commonly known as the One Belt One Road Initiative. Now, BRI involves 152 countries and international organizations in Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. The project also includes a series of “pearls” along the Indian Ocean. The BRI development strategy seeks to build connectivity through six major economic corridors based on the geographic location to the Maritime Silk Road. These corridors are China-Pakistan, New Eurasia Land Bridge, China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Indochina Peninsula, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar, China-Central Asia-West Asia (HKU Data Repository, 2022). Countries not located along these corridors are also welcome to join the initiative by becoming a signatory country with China. The Signatory countries are mostly African and Latin-American countries (IISS, 2022). Under the BRI, infrastructure development would be primarily funded by foreign direct investment and low-interest rate loans with a long shelf life before repayment. On the long run, the BRI is expected to help create markets for China's products and foster cost-effective trading with countries.

Studies (Ehizuelen and Abdi, 2018; Dumor & Yao, 2019; Lisinge, 2020) show that the BRI has the potential to significantly improve trade, increase foreign investment, improve the quality of life and living standards, and lift millions out of poverty in China and participating countries especially along

the corridors, focusing on policy reforms that expand trade, increase transparency, address social-environmental risks and improve debt sustainability. Transportation along the corridor will help reduce time on travelling by at least 12 per cent and increase investments and trade by 2.8 per cent to 9.7 per cent for the corridor countries and 1.7 per cent to 6.2 per cent for other participating countries (Zhao, 2021). As a result of the transport networks, low-income countries would see an increase in FDI inflows which could boost income in the country and consequently reducing poverty levels.

4.1 Debt-Trap Diplomacy

The term debt-trap diplomacy first appeared in the mainstream media in 2017 when an Indian professor of Strategic Studies at the New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research (Chellaney, 2017) used it to describe an alleged motive of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Brahma Chellaney's (2017) analysis and the use of the term "debt-trap diplomacy" has since gained much recognition and other commentators have adopted the term especially Western media to warn African and Asian countries to desist from falling into China's "debt trap" disguised as well-intentioned diplomacy and a win-win foreign policy as President Xi Jin Ping often claims.

A broad definition of debt-trap diplomacy is a type of diplomacy between countries in which the creditor country deliberately extends excessive credit to the debtor country with the alleged intention of extracting economic or political concessions when the debtor country is unable to service its debt obligations (often asset-based lending) (Fredmond, 2020). China has been accused of practicing debt trap diplomacy through its Belt and Road initiative, in which it continually extends excessive loans to poorer less developed countries who could never realistically pay it off and at the same time, using geopolitical and strategic natural resources as concessionary collaterals.

Sri Lanka seems to be the main case around which the discourse on debt-trap diplomacy has ensued even though given the broad definition, other cases like Tajikistan, Pakistan, Laos etc. can be included. We propose a definition of debt-trap diplomacy slightly different from the above-stated ones but relatively the same since they carry the same underlying connotation of taking over a country's national asset. To this end, we provide several criteria

along which we can qualify a phenomenon as “Debt trap diplomacy” following Fredmond’s (2020) definition of debt-trap diplomacy.

- When a debtor country is led into a cycle of reborrowing or rolling over its loans due to the inability to make the scheduled payments when due.
- When a country’s strategic national asset is taken over and controlled by a creditor country in the event of defaulting on a loan.
- When a creditor country provides financial assistance to another country on the condition that it exerts political, military, and economic influence over the debtor’s domestic and international affairs.
- When a creditor country provides financing for a project in another country and a state-owned enterprise of the creditor country assumes 90 per cent or more management control.

The above criteria are interrelated and cannot be stand-alone reasons for qualifying a phenomenon as debt trap diplomacy. The cases of debt-trap diplomacy in our sample meet at least two of the given criteria. While some cases meet all three of the criteria, meeting at least two of the criteria is an indication that a country might be susceptible to a debt-trap since some cases covering repayment of loans for instance are yet to reach their maturity thus enabling us to observe and analyze the responses of the creditor country.

4.2 Phases of the Debt-Trap Diplomacy Cycle under the BRI

Sam Parker and Gabrielle Chefitz of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard Kennedy School, identify stages and patterns that can lead to the debt trap diplomacy cycles (Parker & Chefitz, 2018).

The Contract phase. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China primarily works with the EXIM (Export-Import) Bank of China and China Development Bank to finance infrastructure development projects along the Silk Road corridors and in signatory countries. The terms of the loans have attractive features such as longer-term loan periods than other Institutions (especially Western Institutions), extended grace periods and less bureaucratic procedures. This is a double-edged sword because, on the one hand, it appeals to fragile economies and low-income countries that find it difficult to access financial assistance from international financial institutions. On the other hand, the easy access to financial assistance allows corrupt leaders to

misappropriate funds for private interests. Another element of this phase is the lack of adequate research to determine the economic viability of proposed projects. Most politicians readily sign contracts and financial agreements for projects without a clear understanding of the projects, the economic viability, and the productivity of such commitments. Most do not care because they would be out of office before the bill comes due and they would not be responsible for the failure of such projects.

The construction and operation phase. Several elements in this phase contribute to the poor management of projects and inefficient construction of infrastructures which in turn affects the quality of the project and curtails the estimated potential benefits. Problems related to the construction usually include budget overruns, mediocre quality of construction, poor supervision of workers leading to very lax safety standards. During operation, most of these projects fail to yield expected returns to offset the cost of construction and make a profit. In Sri Lanka and Laos for example, there have been protests over failure to create jobs for locals as Chinese nationals are mostly employed to run the facilities, worsening environmental conditions such as pollution, concerns of projects prioritizing Chinese interests, compromise state sovereignty or exasperating corruption. In some cases, public pressure led governments to freeze or cancel Chinese contracts.

The debt collection phase. The debt collection phase is the most controversial part because it is the anchor of the debt trap diplomacy claims. How China deals with failures to service debts is what people point to when making accusations of debt-trap diplomacy against China. In most cases, when a country is unable to pay back their debts, China extends the grace period and offers debt forgiveness in exchange for control over strategically located assets, some form of economic concession and political influence.

5. Cases and Variable for QCA Analysis

The following variables (factors) were selected for QCA analysis:

Economic development. According to Amartya Sen (2014), development is about creating freedom for people and removing obstacles to greater freedom. Barriers to freedom, and hence to development, include poverty, lack of economic opportunity, corruption, poor governance, lack of education and lack of health. The Belt and Road initiative targets developing

and underdeveloped countries. Middle-income to low-income countries in terms of GNI per capita in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the corridor countries receive the bulk of the BRI funding. We use the Atlas method of the GNI per capita as a measure of economic development. While we recognize that GNI per capita may not completely reflect a measure of welfare or level of development, GNI per capita has been shown to be closely correlated with other measures of development like the quality of life, school enrollment, access to health care etc. The World Bank classifies the countries of the world into 4 categories – Low income (less than USD 1026), Lower middle income (USD 1026 – 3995), Upper middle income (USD 3996 – 12375), and High income (> 12375). The threshold for the economic development variable in our analysis is set at the mean value of USD 2464. Countries above this amount are assigned “1” which means “fully in” or “0” which means fully out. All the countries in our sample are developing countries and fall into the middle-income category except Ethiopia which falls into the low-income category and is classified as least developed countries. The sizable proportion of countries borrowing excessively from China are either developing or underdeveloped countries with inefficient institutions, dependence on commodity exports, low standards of living etc. They tend to look to China for financial assistance to build structures to improve living conditions and stimulate economic growth.

Infrastructure. China's BRI aims at promoting infrastructure development to boost transportation connectivity, trade facilitation, capital flow and so on. The bulk of China's loans and investments has been to less developed countries with limited infrastructure development capabilities. These investments are mostly concentrated in the energy and transport sectors. In Sri Lanka, China has been a major player in post-war Sri Lanka's infrastructure development. Among the main Chinese projects is the USD 1 billion Hambantota Development Zone, Railway construction for the Djibouti-Addis Ababa route in Ethiopia estimated at USD 1.3 billion, Angola Caculo-Cabaca Hydropower Project estimated at USD 4.5 billion, Uganda's Karuma hydropower station estimated at USD 1.4 billion and several railways and road constructions across the continent. To measure infrastructure, we extract infrastructure from the weighted average of the Logistics Performance Index (LPI) compiled by the World Bank. The LPI ranks countries on six dimensions one of which is the quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure (e.g., ports,

railroads, roads, information technology). Our threshold for the infrastructure variable is the mean value of countries in our sample which is 2.465 on a 5 point scale with 5 being highly developed infrastructure and 0 being very poor infrastructures. Countries with a score above 2.465 are assigned “1” and countries below 2.465 are assigned “0”. We observe that the majority of the countries in our sample are above the 2.465 threshold. Even though most of the observed countries are above this threshold, they only manage to do so marginally. This tells us that the level of infrastructure is either fairly or poorly developed. Africa is in dire need of infrastructure and requires an estimated USD 130-170 billion a year (estimated by African development bank –AFDB) to bring up its infrastructures to relatively developed standards. China is the largest financier of infrastructure projects in the continent mainly due to its minimal loan requirements. The lack of infrastructure in Africa, combined with minimal requirements for Chinese loans can explain African countries' gravitation to China for financial aids especially with an expressed desire on the part of China to bridge the infrastructural gap which is mutually beneficial.

Voice Accountability index. The political regime under practice in any country can enable us to understand the procedural nature and accountability of such governments per the bilateral agreements they enter with other countries. The more democratic a country is, the greater its legitimacy and accountability afforded to its people. Countries with low levels of transparency within the government administration are less accountable with how funds are used to build infrastructure (Sohail and Cavill, 2008; Iyoha and Oyerinde, 2010). Less accountability and less transparency, which are synonymous with less democratic regimes, increase the risk of mismanagement and misappropriation. As a measure of accountability, we use the voice and accountability index, a dimension of the aggregate World Governance Index. The voice and accountability index reflects perceptions of the extent to which a country's citizens can participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and free media. The scale ranges between – 2.5 to 2.5 where -2.5 is approximately weak and 2.5 is approximately strong. The threshold for this variable is the mean value of countries in our sample which is -0.71. Countries below -0.71 are assigned “0” and countries above are assigned “1”. Overall, we observe that the majority of the countries in our sample are well below this threshold. To some extent, this reflects the extremely low level of government accountability and transparency. This is also related to corruption. The levels of corruption

associated with each country can in a way enable us to see why some of these countries are not able to pay back their debts within the given timeframe due to the misappropriation of the funds lent to them. Countries, where alleged cases of debt trap diplomacy have occurred, are known to have elevated levels of corruption.

Debt risk. Countries typically incur debt as a way to raise funds to invest in their economic growth without raising taxes. If used properly, public debt can allow the government to build infrastructures, invest in education and so on thereby improving the standard of living of a country's citizens. The level debt risk of a country is measured by comparing it to the total economic output (GDP). We use the debt-to-GDP ratio as a metric to determine the debt risk of the countries in our sample, which also indicates how likely a country can pay off its debt. According to the World Bank, the critical point of public debt is at 77 per cent. At this tipping point, a country is considered to have high debt risk. The threshold for the debt-to-GDP ratio within our analysis is thereby set at 77 per cent. Countries with a debt-to-GDP ratio lower than 77 per cent are assigned "0" and countries above are assigned "1" indicating high debt risk. While most of the countries observed can be regarded as a low-average risk, countries like Angola and the Congo Republic are significantly substantial risk and this might affect their abilities to pay back the loan. High probabilities of defaulting on loans may indicate that they have given up an economic asset or some sort of political influence.

Troubled transactions. These are investment transactions that involved funding from the Chinese government but did not close for one reason or another. They mostly include funding on infrastructure development. The higher the amount sunk into a project that has minimal prospects of being recovered, the higher the debt accumulation and debt book progression. Based on data sourced from the American Enterprise Institute's China Global investment tracker, the figures represent the estimated accumulated sum within the years 2013-2018 quoted in millions of US dollars. Pakistan has the highest value of the controversial transaction, followed by Ethiopia. We find that the majority of the countries do not have recordings of troubled transactions but a significant number of countries do. Countries that have any amount of troubled transactions are assigned "1" and countries that don't have any are assigned a "0".

Volume of operations. American Enterprise Institute's China Global investment trackers were used to analyze this variable. Projects under the BRI mainly include infrastructure development in transportation, mining, energy sector and IT and communications. According to the BRI website, many of the BRI branded projects already started before 2013 (when the BRI came into force) but they have gained momentum under the BRI. Pakistan has the largest number of BRI projects. The mean value of 18.3 is used as a threshold. Countries with BRI projects above this threshold receive "1" and countries below receive "0". The number of BRI projects in a country is significant and increases the risk of falling into the debt trap. This is because a higher number of projects means higher loan amounts given the riskiness of each project and a high number of projects means increased risks.

Value of Construction contracts. As the name implies, these are the amounts allocated for infrastructure projects. The figures for each country are quoted in millions of US dollars and represent accumulated estimated cost figures from 2013-2018. The mean value of USD 8263.33 million is used as the threshold. Countries with values above this amount are assigned a "1" and countries below this amount are assigned a "0".

Gross revenue of construction contracts. This represents the number of revenues from construction projects evaluated in the variable "construction contracts." For our control groups (Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Tajikistan) we assigned "0" due to the absence of data. Overall, we find that for the majority of countries in our sample for which data are available, gross revenues are higher than contract costs. The mean value is once again used as the threshold for coding. Countries with revenues higher than USD 10.2 billion are assigned "1" and countries below this figure "0". If a country can break even and generate revenue to cover its costs, it means that it is less likely to be in debt trap and shows that the investment in the projects is actually productive.

Regarding the cases for the QCA analysis procedure, 11 countries were selected including 8 African countries analyzed for key factors that may lead to the outcome of the debt trap and three countries with cases of debt trap as the control group. Let us take a closer look at each of the cases.

Djibouti

Djibouti is home to China's only overseas military base. The latest International Monetary Fund (IMF) assessment highlights the highly risky nature of Djibouti's

borrowing system (IMF, 2019). Much of the debt is government-guaranteed public enterprise debts and is owed to China Exim Bank. According to Lendon (2018), China has provided about USD 1.4 billion for Djibouti's major investment projects, which is approximately 75 per cent of Djibouti's GDP. Future projects reportedly include a new port, two new airports, a toll road and an oil terminal. While some Chinese debt has been offered at below-market rates, which may likely reduce the risk of default, others, such as the financing for the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway, are reported to be approximately at commercial rates (Lendon, 2018). Despite the International Monetary Fund's cautions, there is no indication that new financing will be limited to projects that generate enough revenue to meet debt service criteria.

Kenya

Kenya's total public debt is currently about USD 60 billion, about 60 per cent of its GDP. China is Kenya's largest bilateral lender, accounting for nearly 72 per cent of all its external debts (Vines, 2023). In December 2019, Kenya launched a freight service on a new extension of a Chinese-built railway line at a cost of billions of dollars. The new service runs from Kenya's capital, Nairobi, to the Naivasha Inland Container Depot and is part of the greater Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), connecting Nairobi to Mombasa, Kenya—the largest and most important port in East Africa. Kenya has accepted more than USD 5 billion from China for the construction of the SGR since 2013, making it the largest infrastructure project since the country's independence (Otele, 2022). However, in its first year of operation, the project reported losses equivalent to USD 98 million, rendering Kenya's servicing of the loans unsustainable and unmanageable (Flurry, 2019). Critics say that the SGR is unlikely to turn a profit, as trucking remains a cheaper option for most freight.

Zambia

Zambia's borrowing from Chinese sources has increased in recent years. The Zambian government reported a whopping 9.4 billion USD of external debt in June 2018, which represents 34.7 per cent of its GDP; up from USD 1.9 billion at the end of 2011, or 8.4 per cent of GDP, it reached about 2.3 billion USD at the end of 2017 according to official sources. The country's external debt-to-GDP

ratio is estimated at 119 per cent in 2022 (World Economics, 2022), while the country has defaulted on a couple of loans in 2019 and even more in 2020 given the constrictions of the COVID pandemic. Zambia's GDP has halved over the past three years, the kwacha currency has depreciated by almost 17 per cent against the US dollar over the past year, and inflation is running at almost 10 per cent. The main creditor is China's EXIM Bank. Other loans have come from the China Development Bank and China National Aero-Technology Import & Export Corporation (CATEC). In 2018, it was widely speculated that Zambia were in talks with China over a possible takeover of the country's electricity company, ZESCO, after defaulting on loan repayments (Ajetunmobi, 2018). While the company is currently under the management of the Zambian government, it is suspected that Zambia's growing debt to China may present similar opportunities, with China actively involved in discussions to restructure Zambia's debt (Sinyangwe, 2022).

Ethiopia

Ethiopia has been a major beneficiary of Chinese investment. In Ethiopia, China financed the 475 million USD light railway system in the capital and USD 86 million ring road. Since 2000, China has financed other key infrastructure too, helping to add more than 50,000km of new roads. China also built the 750km Ethiopia-Djibouti Railway, at a cost of USD 3.4 billion, which opened in 2016. China's Exim Bank provided about 70 per cent of the funding (TheDiplomat.com, 2018). In 2017, a McKinsey report (Jayaram et al., 2017) showed that the growth in Chinese investment in Ethiopia has been uniformly high, at an average growth rate of more than 52 per cent a year. To pay for all of these major developments, Ethiopia has taken out more loans from China, with state policy banks extending it to more than USD 12.1 billion since 2000, according to the China Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins University (CARI, 2020). The Horn of Africa has accumulated tens of billions of dollars in debt, with reports suggesting that nearly half of Ethiopia's foreign debt is owed to China, with public debt standing at 59 per cent. In September 2018, the president of Ethiopia reached an agreement with China to restructure the repayment period of loans from 10 to 30 years (Runsewe, 2018). As a result, Ethiopians are wary of future loans from China, as lenders are likely to take collateral in the form of resources and possibly some form of land.

Cameroon

Cameroon's total debt is about USD 10 billion, of which nearly a third is owed to China, according to the IMF. In 2019, China wrote off a chunk of Cameroon's debt, the debt was worth USD 78.4 million (CGTN Africa, 2019). Since the turn of the century, China has provided debt relief to Cameroon: In 2001, it canceled USD 34 million in debt, in 2007, it forgave another USD 32 million, and in 2010, USD 30 million was cancelled (CGTN Africa, 2019). In 2011, China agreed to build and finance a new port in the fishing town of Kribi. Cameroon's existing port of Douala was overworked, run down, and restricted by its location. When completed in 2035, Kribi Port will be the biggest deep-water port in the region. It will handle exports of Cameroon's iron ore, bauxite and other minerals and could serve the Chad-Cameroon Petroleum Development and Pipeline Project, which pumps oil from landlocked Chad. The first two phases of the project will cost USD 1.2 billion and will be constructed by China Harbor Engineering Company. In addition, CHEC has promised to develop a railway to an iron ore deposit and is building a USD 436 million motorway to link the new port with Douala. The Kribi port will also extend the reach in West Africa of China's Maritime Silk Road, an initiative that Senegal signed on to in 2018 (Marsh, 2019). It is an important part of China's massive, multinational One Belt One Road economic development plan. China's activities in Cameroon are not limited to the new port: As of 2014, it was responsible for 90 per cent of the country's road construction and rehabilitation, and Chinese companies have built hydropower plants and dams there.

Angola

Since 2002, after the end of Angola's civil war, China has played a key role in rebuilding the country by building railways, hospitals, roads, and schools. (Brock & Joe, 2015) China has loaned to Angola over USD 60 billion since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1983. At the end of 2017, Angola's debt to China stood at USD 21.5 billion – about half of its external debt. Many Angolans are reportedly wary of their country's partnership with China, in part because oil repayments for debt leave Angola with little crude

oil to export to global markets – one reason for the country's liquidity crisis. As of February 2018, Angola's reported foreign exchange reserves stood at USD 12.8 billion, slightly more than a third of what they were in 2013 (Chazan, 2018). Chinese debt repayments are believed to be linked to the price of oil at the time they are negotiated, so Angola has to export more crude oil when its value falls. Repayment has become increasingly difficult as Angolan production has slumped in recent years due to declining investment in the country's aging offshore fields, and the fall in the price of oil has made extraction less profitable.

Nigeria

Loans from China account for 80 per cent of all bilateral loans to Nigeria, according to data from the country's Debt Management Office (DMO, 2020). China provides loans to build power plants, airports, and railways, helping to bridge a huge infrastructure gap in Africa's largest oil producer. But loans from China account for only 8.5 per cent of Nigeria's total debt stock of about USD 81 billion. Since 2002, Nigeria has received 17 Chinese loans to finance projects in various sectors. The transportation and information and communications technology (ICT) sectors have six projects each financed by loans from the Chinese bank, while the power, agriculture and water sectors have three and two projects, respectively, tied to Chinese debt. *"Most of the funds given out go back to them by way of supplies, construction contracts with all the equipment brought over from China itself"* states Obadiah Mailafiya, a former Deputy Governor of Nigeria's Central Bank, who played a major role in Nigeria's debt relief negotiations with the Paris Club of public creditors in 2005 (Guardian News, 2019). *"The Chinese come into places where nobody wants to go," due to the Western media's painting of Africa as "a continent of poverty, disease and chaos,"* Obadiah Mailafiya said. *"That makes it difficult for African countries to go into the euro/dollar markets to source for loans and financing,"* he added in an interview with a media outlet (Guardian News, 2019). For the Nigerian banker, who is also a former official of the African Development Bank, all the Chinese need is for you to show them where the road or the dam is to be constructed and they get on with it, the EXIM Development Bank of China standing by, to provide necessary money. Obadiah Mailafiya encourages African governments to make sure that

they read the small key points of the “conditionalities” defined by the Chinese. In his view, this would prevent China from laying claim to some of their assets, as it is doing in Kenya and Zambia. Mailafiya also shares “very worrying” allegations, which he says are “hard to prove”, that the Nigerian government has pledged some oil fields as collateral for the Chinese loans (Guardian News, 2019).

South Africa

From 2000 to 2017, China provided loans to the tune of USD 3.7 billion to South Africa. According to the South African Reserve Bank’s September 2017 quarterly bulletin, government debt reported in June 2017 was 51.6 per cent of GDP, up from 47.8 per cent recorded the previous year. Since 2017, the state of South Africa’s government debt has become a major issue in Parliament and the country as a whole. In 2018, the issues surrounding the national debt began to scare away international traders. Former President Jacob Zuma had used debt to fund social programs without raising taxes. However, this policy has become unsustainable. Although South Africa’s debt-to-GDP ratio is relatively modest, the government has to offer high-interest rates to attract traders to its bonds. As a result of high interest rates and the government’s debt expansion, interest payments rose from South African Rand (ZAR) 57 billion in 2010 to ZAR 162 billion in the first quarter of 2018. This means that the government had to spend about 13 per cent of its revenue on interest payments in 2018. In September 2018, President Ramaphosa visited China on official business. The visit followed Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to South Africa, during which the two countries signed many bilateral agreements, including a ZAR 33.4 billion loan from the Chinese Development Bank (South African Government, 2018). As for another loan of ZAR 370 billion received in 2018, supposedly for an economic stimulus package, the government refuses to provide any details about it - not the currency, interest rates, what it will be spent on, repayment period, etc. Adding to the obscurity is that government officials have repeatedly called the ZAR 370 billion ‘a gift’.

Republic of Congo

As of 2018, Congo's external debt stood at USD 5.8 billion, according to data from Trading Economics (Trading Economics, 2020). The country owes nearly USD 9 billion to Chinese state-owned enterprises and other creditors. Since March 2017, the government has been trying to get help from the IMF to revive an economy that barely grew in 2018 after declining in the previous two years due to falling oil prices. About 34 per cent of Congo's foreign debt is owed to China. A report from the French Embassy in Congo from February 2018 quoted the Finance Ministry and put Congo's foreign debt to China at USD 2.7 billion (SCMP, 2019). The IMF said in November 2018 that Congo needed to take a number of measures before the lender would agree to a bailout, including reforms to improve governance and transparency and adjustments to the state budget. It also demanded "explicit financing assurances" from creditors, including debt relief, before considering a bailout (Bavier, 2017). In April 2019, China agreed to restructure debt owed by the Republic of Congo. Under terms of the restructuring deal, the repayment of Central African Franc (CFA Franc) 944 billion will be extended an additional 15 years. Congo, however, must pay off a third of that amount by the end of 2021 and China will not reduce the amount of principal owed. Later in 2019, the IMF approved a bailout worth nearly USD 449 million for OPEC member Congo Republic on, potentially setting a precedent for other nations struggling under the weight of large debts to China.

6. Results of the analysis

The empirical data for the analysis of the variables were taken from World Bank sources (Economic development-GNI, debt-to-GDP ratio), Logistics performance index (Infrastructure), World governance index (voice index), American Enterprise Institute's China Global investment tracker (troubled transactions, quantity of operations, construction contracts). We used data from IMF, World Bank, analytical reports, and databases as well as academic literature to conduct a case study of the particular countries under research.

Debt risk of countries is usually evaluated by considering variables such as debt service ratio, export fluctuations, imports/GNP ratio, debt-GDP ratio, per capita GNP, growth of exports, growth rate (Suter, 2019; Saini and Bates,

1984), political instability and institutional efficiencies, inflation (Balkan, 1992; Ahuja et al 2017). While these variables are important for understanding overall country risks, they do not sufficiently offer an in-depth understanding of the tendencies towards debt trap especially under the conditions of Chinese bilateral loans and the BRI. Since Chinese loans are specifically obtained for capital projects intended to become profitable enough to offset the debts, we consider indicators that directly influences the progress or the lack of progress towards this goal.

The dependent variable (outcome) is debt trap and the independent variables include factors that are indicative of a country being prone to fall into the debt-trap diplomacy (economic development, infrastructure, voice accountability index, debt risk, troubles transactions, the quantity of operations, construction contracts and gross revenue of construction contracts) (See Table 1). In accordance with the established threshold values, data processing in QCA allowed us to arrive at a dichotomized data table (see *data table provided at the end of this article*) suitable for further analysis by csQCA (crisp set QCA, operating within the framework of Boolean algebra).

6.1 Major Findings

The possibility of a debt trap can arise when there is a high debt risk, low quality and returns on infrastructure projects with the presence of troubled transactions.

The analysis of the results obtained from the Tosmana QCA software indicates that the critical factors that can lead to debt trap are a combination of high debt-risk and low quality of physical infrastructure in contrast with considerable amounts of construction contracts without the possibility of attaining enough revenue to pay for their debts. This combination of factors leading to debt trap was positive for all our control countries, i.e., Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. Another combination of factors that showed a positive sign towards debt trap was the combination of almost all the possible various factors with the necessary condition being the inability of those infrastructures to raise enough revenue to pay for that debt. High debt risks and the inability of the Chinese built projects to yield enough revenue to repay the cost of those projects can be seen to be the most influential determinant in yielding a

positive outcome for debt trap in this model. That is, the presence or absence of the factors used here does not imply causality by itself, but in combination with other factors. The returns on these construction projects, the interest rate on these investments, and the number of years to repay the loans are crucial in determining the country's debt risk in relation to these projects and its gross debt-to-GDP ratio.

From our analysis, we observe that some countries are more vulnerable to face the debt trap than others. For example, Zambia with a combination of high debt risk, low revenues on construction projects and presence of troubled transactions are more likely to fall into a debt trap diplomacy than Nigeria. Countries like Djibouti and the Republic of Congo are also likely to fall into a kind of debt-trap diplomacy in their relations with China as they have a higher debt risk with a lower revenue on the projects constructed in their respective countries. In conclusion, we can logically infer that the combination of factors like high debt risk, a high volume of troubled transactions, low revenue on infrastructure projects and high levels of corruption associated with the low level of government accountability are the critical factors indicating the likelihood of a country falling into the debt trap.

7. Policy implications and risk management strategies for better outcomes

In order to better deal with debt default situations concerning BRI and African countries, the above-highlighted risks must first be mitigated as much as possible.

First, to address political risks, the leadership of African countries should refute allegations of selling their votes to China in UN General Assemblies and push for better labor practices with China for African workers working on projects in Africa. It is also crucial that governments educate their people about the benefits of Chinese-funded infrastructure projects and provide adequate security for these projects.

Second, it is especially important to avoid unnecessary spending by taking all measures to prevent corruption. All parties involved in all stages of these projects from project negotiation, procurement and public tendering, to implementation and evaluation can achieve this through transparency.

Third, a thorough analysis of the economic viability of projects must be conducted to prevent the implementation of projects that do not deliver the expected benefits.

After mitigating the above risks, the following steps should be taken to avoid becoming a debt-trap:

- Countries should reject the option of leasing national assets to China as part of the terms of debt financing. Trade agreements could be possible alternatives to leasing national assets. For those that have leased their assets, they should renegotiate for a fairer share of revenues (at least a 70-30 split – 70 per cent for China and 30 per cent for the country).
- Countries that have overestimated the benefits of projects should renegotiate debt financing terms for uncompleted projects, seek debt relief from China, and possibly seek a bailout from international organizations.

8. Conclusion

China's contributions to the infrastructure of African countries have been highly praised by their leaders, illustrating the visible improvements that contribute to expanded economic activity, job creation for local workers, and tangible improvements to key infrastructure, all of which benefit ordinary citizens, albeit indirectly. However, Chinese investment in the continent has also been criticized as being opportunistic. This criticism is made in the sense that companies seek out niche markets regardless of the political environment, often seizing investment opportunities that others have ignored or even abandoned. This has led to accusations that China is engaging in debt-trap diplomacy in Africa.

In order to define the factors that could lead to African countries becoming debt-trapped, we attempted to define the term “debt-trap diplomacy” by presenting several criteria that define the concept. These include: (1) When a debtor country is led into a cycle of re-borrowing or rolling over its loans because it is unable to make scheduled payments when due; (2) When a country's strategic national asset is taken over and controlled by a creditor country in the event of a loan default; (3) When a creditor country provides financial assistance to another country on the condition that it exerts

political, military, and economic influence over the debtor's domestic and international affairs; and (4) When a creditor country provides financing for a project in another country and a state-owned enterprise of the creditor country takes management control of 90 per cent or more. Other quantitative factors such as GNI, infrastructure and voice index, debt-to-GDP ratio, BRI projects, construction contracts and revenues were also identified.

The results of the QCA analysis of the selected countries as well as the control group suggest that a combination of factors such as high debt risk, a high volume of troubled transactions, low revenue of infrastructure projects and high levels of corruption associated with low government accountability are constraining factors on the likelihood of a country falling into the debt trap.

This paper then offered policy actions for countries at risk of falling into the debt trap across Africa and possible actions to manage relations with China for countries that are already faced with such risks. It was suggested that countries at risk should first try to mitigate the risks of BRI in the country and then reject the option of leasing national assets to China as part of the conditions for debt financing. For countries already affected, they should renegotiate for a fairer share of the revenues from leased assets. They should also renegotiate the terms of debt financing for unfinished projects, seek debt relief from China and possibly seek a bailout from international organizations.

As for the limitations of the study, in this case they are mainly related to the mixed methods approach. The use of a quantitative approach would have allowed for more extensive over-case generalizations of the findings. However, QCA as a specific research method shows itself to be a more sensitive tool to the peculiarities of specific cases which is important for the goals of this research. Thus, the results obtained within the framework of our study can become the basis for further research with a greater coverage of generalizations.

Notes

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Data Availability



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Book Review

Gregory O. Hall, *Examining US-China-Russia Foreign Relations: Great Power Politics in a Post-Obama Era*, Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2023, 166pp. + xvi.

Gregory Hall offers a compact yet rigorous analysis of what he calls the evolving strategic triangle between the United States (US), China, and Russia contextualized in the post-Obama administration. Through the lens of neoclassical realism, Hall explored in greater depth the changing nature and function of the US–China–Russia strategic triangle from the end of the Cold War up to the present by updating his previous analysis in 2014.

The book is divided into two parts consisting of a total of seven chapters. For the first part, Chapter 1 provides an overview of relevant International Relations (IR) and foreign policy theories and explains the refined strategic triangle framework. Chapter 2 surveys the global landscape in the contemporary period, with special emphasis on the interests and maneuverings of the great powers. Chapter 3 surveys the presidency of Donald J. Trump and US domestic and external affairs during his tenure. Meanwhile, Part 2 updates and expands on the discussion in the previous study of the functioning of the strategic triangle dynamic. In Chapter 4, the author explained why the triangle endures as an important feature of international politics. Chapter 5 surveys the domestic environments of the great powers. Chapter 6 presents an overview of great power relations in the 21st century revealed as a series of epochs in the affairs of the strategic triangle. Lastly, Chapter 7 examines the Russia–Ukraine crisis and its implications for the strategic triangle. The concluding chapter highlights important findings of the study and briefly considers critical issues and prospects for the future of triangular affairs and beyond.

Themes and Analysis

Hall's main contention is that since the mid-2000s, the politics of US-China-Russia strategic triangle have been increasingly influenced by factors related to their respective domestic environments. Hall utilizes agency and context for each of the three great powers, expanding on previously established frameworks to include a comparative analysis of each actor's domestic environment for foreign policy and the interplay between the domestic and external contexts. In IR terms, the book identifies and illustrates how factors including systemic, state and societal, individuals, and small groups influence the foreign relations of the US, China, and Russia. Hall concludes by exploring the future prospects for great power relations and for global affairs. Incorporating both theoretical and empirical data to offer a fresh and timely look at the myriad challenges facing the three powers, this book provides an excellent companion to students of foreign policy, international security, and post-Cold War international politics.

The book highlighted Hall's three major findings. First, the international system remains in transition. Second, the strategic triangle itself is adjusting to this global power shift, highlighting China's evolution as the world's number two great power due to the worsening US–China (Axis-1) and US–Russia (Axis-2) relations. His third major finding pointed out that key domestic dynamics are having a greater influence on the politics of the strategic triangle in the early 21st century.

Writing Style and Accessibility

Hall follows a clear, logical structure by introducing a conceptual framework early on, rooted in neoclassical realism, and then he systematically applied it to various case studies involving each of the three major powers. While Hall is grounded in international relations (IR) theory, he avoids excessive jargon. He connects abstract ideas to concrete policy actions, making his arguments relevant to both scholars and informed general readers. Each chapter in the book has a clear purpose, and there's little repetition. This economy of language makes it efficient to read without sacrificing depth. He adopts a scholarly tone—measured and impartial – even when discussing controversial events like Russia's invasion of Ukraine or US-China trade tensions. He rarely editorializes, keeping the focus on strategic implications.

Hall writes with upper-level undergraduates, graduate students, and policy analysts in mind as readers do not need deep IR training to follow his arguments, though some basic knowledge of Cold War history or international politics helps.

Key concepts, such as neoclassical realism, strategic triangle theory, and authoritarian populism are explained clearly. He also tried to provide a comprehensive context by providing real-world examples from the Trump era, the Russo-Ukrainian war, and China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific help make theoretical points more digestible and engaging. The author provided up-to-date and relatable concepts which could be easily grasp and understood by the reader.

Overall Assessment

Hall offers a concise yet analytical entry into the interplay between systemic dynamics and domestic forces shaping the US-China-Russia relations. By integrating IR theory with current geopolitical events and domestic contexts, the book serves as an effective primer for students and scholars of contemporary international politics.

It is safe to conclude that Hall's book is theoretically sound, but not overly technical. It is well-organized, concise, and readable, which could also serve as a good entry point for intermediate readers of IR and foreign policy. Incorporating both theoretical and empirical data to offer a fresh and timely look at the myriad challenges facing the three powers, this book provides an excellent companion to students of foreign policy, international security, and post-Cold War international politics.

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