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# ÁFRICA E OS ODS: OBJETIVOS COM FUTURO?

# Sino-Africa Relations and Implications for Neo-Colonialism: a Case of China's Involvement in Ghana's Textiles and Mining Industries and its Implications in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Ghana

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
## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. A historical overview of China-Africa's relations

China's sudden emergence on the African scene in the 1950s offers fresh insights for revisiting Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism. Admittedly, China was not involved in the colonization of African countries. Yet, neo-colonialism, according to Halperin (2020) might be used today to refer not only to relationships involving the both the former colonizers and colonized but also to that involving developed countries in general and developing countries. China has been Africa's largest trading partner since 2009 (China Daily, 2015). The 2018 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Investment Report indicated that China's \$53 billion Foreign Direct Investment stock was the third-largest in Africa in 2016 (Abegunrin *et al.*, 2020). The increased activities of China in Africa, according to Langan (2018) are an indication that "the natural resources of various African countries are attractive not only to Western enterprises, but also to China", and that "Africa's resource stands at the centre of China's energy security" (226).

Yet, some argue that China's "emergence" in Africa is not as sudden as it seems. Abegunrin *et al.*, (2020), for example, proposed that trade between China and some African countries can be traced to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and that "the European mercantilism in the so-called age of discovery (age of exploitation of Africa by colonial powers) aggressively ended Sino-Africa relations" (10).

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The irony of examining China-Africa relations through a neo-colonial lens is that China has consistently sought to present itself as a developing country, apparently to appeal to the idea of brotherhood and solidarity more convincingly between China and African countries. In fact, “it was Mao who emphasised the need for South-South engagement to carve out a distinct geopolitical space insulated from the USA and Soviet Union” (Langan, 2018: 91). Whether it is technical assistance, the building of roads, railways, dams, power stations, public buildings, transport or telecommunications projects, China is playing a critical role in raising productivity and reducing poverty by investing heavily in the much-neglected infrastructure sector of many African countries.

In 2005, marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Zimbabwe, former president Robert Mugabe stated: “We are looking to the east where the sun rises, and have turned our backs on the west where the sun sets” (The Guardian, 2005). Former president of Ghana (January 2009 to July 2012 vice-president at the time) John Dramani Mahama, also expressed a similar sentiment after signing a 3-billion-dollar deal with China in exchange for 13,000 barrels of oil per day.

He noted, “The process for accessing World Bank and IMF credit, unfortunately, has been quite tiresome. They come with a lot of strings, and the procedure for accessing the credit goes through quite a bit of rigmarole, and so it’s not easy... With the current financial crisis, it’s very difficult to go anywhere in this world and get \$3 billion” (Sanderson and Forsythe, 2012: 111).

These statements made by Mugabe and Mahama seem to suggest a growing preference for assistance from China to assistance from the West. Several reasons have been advanced to support this position firstly, China has continually stressed that its interest is in creating “win-win” opportunities for African countries. Secondly, China is filling critical infrastructure gaps cheaply, third, less bureaucratically, fourth, in a shorter time frame, and fifth, with no strings attached (i.e., no intention to manipulate political systems in African countries), as they appear to have no interest in political structures (Cheru and Obi, 2010: 2-3). China has declared that she “respects African countries’ independent choice of the way to development as well as their practices and efforts to promote economic and social development and improve people’s living standard” (China Daily, 2015). Because of that, China “never interferes in African countries’ internal affairs, never imposes its will on them, and attaches no political strings when providing aid to Africa” (China Daily, 2015). Also, various Africans countries’ preference for the Chinese, according to Cheru and Obi, (2010) seems to be fuelled by a “disillusionment with aid from the West—i.e., the tendency to give aid with one hand and to retrieve it with the other” (4).

Another reason is that, China also tends to paint a much more positive light about Africa, regarding African countries not as beneficiaries, but partners, and attempting to maintain a two-way relationship of equal partnership, rather than the donor-recipient relationship portrayed by the West. In this sense, terms such as “solidarity”, “common prosperity”, “shared future”, “affinity”, “multi-faceted exchanges”, “mutual trust”, “pragmatic cooperation” and shared “developing country” status are preferred to “aid” (China Daily, 2015).

For example, in January 2006, Beijing issued an “Africa Policy Paper” to propose ways to define its cooperation with Africa in various fields. Also, it stressed its long-term commitment to strategic partnership with Africa based on five principles. These are peaceful coexistence, including respect for African countries’ independent choice of development path, mutual benefit and reciprocity, interaction based on equality, consultation and cooperation in global affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006).

When this policy was updated in 2015, it reshaped the points that “China and Africa have always belonged to a community of shared future”. That is “both the Chinese dream and the African dream aim to enable people to live a more prosperous and happier life”, and that

“the development strategies of China and Africa are highly compatible”. The 2015 policy also maintained that “poverty is the common challenge confronting China and Africa” and that “given their respective strengths, China and Africa need each other for cooperation and development” (China Daily, 2015).

Nevertheless, the unanswered question remains; is China’s talk of cooperation mere rhetoric? Does the emergence of China liberate formerly colonized African countries from the trend of neo-colonialism or does it, rather, entrench it through new regressive linkages to the external? Is China a neo-colonizer? While some will debunk such a pattern of thought, others like Tutu have scorned the “win-win” doctrine China preaches, as well as China’s claim to be a “developing country” (cited in French, 2014: 193).

## 1.2. China-Ghana relations: an overview

The history of China’s relationship with Ghana is impossible to cover in a few pages. However, existing research on this area suggests that the China-Ghana relationship revolves around two key areas: diplomatic cooperation and economic cooperation, each of which features “sub-areas” (Tsikata *et al.*, 2008). Ghana received its first concessional loan from China in 1964, after which bilateral trade immediately began (Tsikata *et al.*, 2008: 24). This was after official diplomatic ties had been established between the two countries in 1960. The relationship between the two countries has been deepened through visits to either country by political elites of the other country. A notable of such visits (to Ghana) was in 2007 by the then President of China, Wen Jiabao, during which the two countries issued a joint statement on how to strengthen diplomatic ties between the two countries in trade, education, infrastructure, health, telecommunication, and culture (Idun-Arkhurst, 2008).

Idun-Arkhurst (2008) indicates that “over the decades, Ghana has provided critical diplomatic support to China, while China has reciprocated with material support for development” (2008: 4). China gave a \$2.4 million grant to Ghana to renovate the National Theatre, which was built by the Chinese as a gift in the early 1990s (Idun-Arkhurst, 2008). In April 2007, China also facilitated the construction of the Ministry of Defence office complex with a \$7.5 million grant (Tsikata *et al.*, 2008). This is aside from the debt relief of over \$25 million it granted Ghana (Idun-Arkhurst, 2008; Tsikata *et al.*, 2008). “China has become a major development partner for Ghana, concentrating its assistance especially on the development of roads, energy and telecommunications infrastructure, and on technical cooperation (including raising agricultural productivity in Ghana and supplying various industrial equipment)” (Idun-Arkhurst, 2008: 6-7). In the field of education, there are many scholarship and training programmes for Ghanaian students and public officials. In 2008, the Centre for Chinese Studies (now Confucius Institute) was established at the University of Ghana to teach and promote Chinese culture (Idun-Arkhurst, 2008: 12). From Idun-Arkhurst’s perspective, overall, Ghana’s part in the relationship seems to be as it has been with other Western countries. Ghana has kept exporting primary commodities such as cocoa beans, manganese, rubber, and sawn timber, while importing from China a wide range of manufactured goods such as clothes, bags and shoes among others (2008: 13). By 2005, Ghana’s largest import came from China (i.e., \$433 million) while exports from Ghana to China was just \$31 million (Idun-Arkhurst, 2008: 13).

## 2. Theoretical Framework, Review of Literature and Sustainable Development Goals

### 2.1. Neo-colonialism

The concept of “neo-colonialism” was developed in the 1960s by Marxian theorists to denote post-colonial forms of imperialism (Halperin, 2020). Scholars of postcolonial studies like Ashcroft *et al.* (2007) argue that neo-colonialism describes the continued control of former colonies through ruling native elites compliant with neo-colonial powers; the populations are exploited for labour and resources to fend for the badly needed finished physical or cultural commodities made by the metropolis.

The term neo-colonialism was first introduced to African scholarship in 1963 by the first president of Ghana, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, when the term appeared in the preamble of the Organisation of African Unity Charter title of his book, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. According to Saheed Adejumo (2002: 487), Nkrumah expanded the work of Russian political theorist Vladimir Lenin who described imperialism as “the highest stage of capitalism”. Adejumo adds that to Nkrumah, the practitioners of neo-colonialism wielded power without responsibility while those who suffered from exploitation had no potential avenue for redress.

Indeed, in his autobiography, Nkrumah (1957: VII) explained colonialism as “the policy by which a foreign power binds territories to herself by political ties with the primary object of promoting her own economic advantage”. In colonialism, therefore, members of the colonizing country acted as political leaders in the colonized country, but of course in the interest of the country they represented. Eight years after Ghana had gained independence, Nkrumah’s voice in *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* would sound more militant. Nkrumah’s argument in the book, as echoed in its title, points to the fact that he envisaged that the former colonial masters would, after granting formal independence to various African countries, attempt to replicate the system of colonialism, using subtler means (Nkrumah, 1965). Nkrumah’s tone was so militant that it is reported that the United States of America’s State Department sent a sharp note of protest to him. Also, an American “aid” to Ghana worth \$25 million was abruptly abrogated (Goodreads, 2009).

Unlike the colonial method of direct military control, neo-colonialism may use economics, globalization, cultural imperialism and aid to influence and control a country (Halperin, 2020). To Nkrumah, neo-colonialism is disguised colonialism, and though it could take many forms, neo-colonialism “is more often exercised through economic or monetary means” (Nkrumah, 1965: IX).

Nkrumah is credited with having possessed the almost prophetic ability to aptly decode and foresee further attempts by the former colonial masters at exploiting the former colonies using shrewder methods which were detrimental to the former colonies, nonetheless. “The neo-colonialism of today”, Nkrumah (1965: IX) wrote, “represents imperialism in its final and perhaps most dangerous stage”. In this sense, rather than applying force, the former colonizers would present themselves as friends, partners, companions, and resort to seemingly generous gestures of “aiding” former colonies in ways that might suggest a selfless interest in the former colonies’ development but in actual sense, would be exploiting these “less developed” countries (Nkrumah, 1965: X).

Nkrumah (1965: XII-XIII) further indicated that neo-colonialism would involve the continuation of unbalanced trade between African and former colonizers and other foreign nations. He also stressed that aid would be used to entice African political leaders to make seemingly beneficial but detrimental trade arrangements. Nkrumah’s (1965: XII) diagnosis was that

“aid” did not help the former colonies but instead, created “an ever-widening gap between the richer and the poorer nations of the world”. The apparent reason for this is that rather than engender meaningful economic or social development for their peoples, policies were formulated to suit the economic or political interest of donor countries than the developmental needs of the local citizenry.

“Aid”, was merely a tactic that procures minimal benefits from the recipients but long-term benefits for those who give it. That way, “control over government policy in the neo-colonial state may be secured by payments towards the costs of running the state, by the provision of civil servants in positions where they can dictate policy, and by monetary control over foreign exchange through the imposition of a banking system controlled by the imperialist power” (1965: IX).

According to Nkrumah (1965: XI-XII), a significant difference between colonialism and neo-colonialism is that, whereas in the former, the colonizers had a physical presence in the colonies, in the latter, African elites/leaders, “betrayers”, would serve as figureheads, representatives of the former colonizers, taking decisions in the economic interests of the former colonizers. Of course, the complicity of such representatives in the neo-colonial relationship would be influenced by personal benefits. In that sense, African countries might, while (seemingly) enjoying political independence, miss the real benefits of independence, namely the ability to realise and to enact self-determination based upon the social and economic needs of the local citizenry. That is to say that, in theory, the state may be independent, or at least, appear independent, but in reality, the major components of its affairs, inclusive of which are its economic system and political policy would be directed from outside (Nkrumah 1965: IX).

In short, the money given as aid would be a tactical move to reinstall foreign control over African countries, only from a distance. Nkrumah wrote:

“[the] hesitancy [of African states to cut ties to former colonisers] is fostered by the sugared water of aid; which is the stop-gap between avid hunger and the hoped-for greater nourishment that never comes. As a result, we find that imperialism, having quickly adapted its outlook to the loss of direct political control, has retained and extended its economic grip” (1965: 33).

Nkrumah is not alone in his argument concerning neo-colonialism. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (2005) lashes similar missiles against neo-colonialism as he explained its potential to further enslave African countries. He wrote:

*... you may see colonialism withdrawing its capital and its technicians and setting up around the young state the apparatus of economic pressure. The apotheosis of independence is transformed into the curse of independence, and the colonial power through its immense resources of coercion condemns the young nation to regression. In plain words, the colonial power says 'Since you want independence, take it and starve'* (Fanon 2006: 96).

Woodis (1967), a British writer, also critiqued this neo-colonial relationship between former colonizing countries and former colonies. He wrote:

*At the centre of all the activities of neo-colonialism lie its economic policies. These are directed to assisting the profit-making functions of the big monopolies, to providing the Western powers with the necessary economic powers in the new states to be able to wield political influence over the governments there* (86).

While there is a tendency to avoid the topic of neo-colonialism in modern discussions (Langan, 2018: 4), Nkrumah's thoughts seem valid in analysing modern development trends

involving Africa and external relations—China, in this case. Many scholars have kept questioning whether foreign aid to African countries is as altruistic as is often portrayed or if it is, instead, a means of “ensuring the compliance of certain African elites and in lubricating forms of corporate economic penetration detrimental to African populations” (Langan, 2018: 5). It is against this backdrop that Falola (2001) contests the proclivity to discard the concept of neo-colonialism within modern academic discussions. Falola (2001) wonders,

*How can one theory replace another so fast, how can scholarship resemble fashion and weather, changing so rapidly? Why should scholars of Africa follow and accept all fast-changing academic trends, if their conditions are either constant or changing for worse? Why should they keep replacing one mode of analysis with another if they are yet to overcome their limitations, both practical and intellectual? They can do so to participate in the debate in a ‘global academy,’ but they must consider the consequences for Africa (20).*

## 2.2. Review of Literature

Many studies have examined Sino-Ghana relations from different dimensions. Tsikata *et al.* (2008), for example, examined trade between the two countries and concluded that Ghana’s export to China is very low compared to imports. Quartey (2006) also investigated the challenges and prospects of Chinese emergence on the Ghanaian textiles market and concluded that the collapse of many Ghanaian- and African- textile firms is as a result of threats from Chinese textile firms. Bofo *et al.* (2019) also bemoaned the effects of imitation of local Ghanaian textiles designs and patterns by Chinese textile firms, as well as the increasing involvement of Chinese in small-scale mining in Ghana. In their contribution, Debrah and Asante (2019) examined the involvement of Chinese nationals in illegal mining in Ghana, and how the Ghanaian government’s efforts to address this challenge created diplomatic tension between the two countries. These studies have contributed greatly to Ghana-China discourse in diverse ways. This paper adds to the literature by examining Ghana-China relations in the mining and textiles industries through the lens of neo-colonialism. It seeks to explore the relations from a theoretical perspective to ascertain if China’s relations with Ghana exhibit a neo-colonialism paradigm.

## 2.3. The Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of global goals for equitable and long-term health at all levels, from the global biosphere to the local community. The goal is to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and ensure that everyone lives in peace and prosperity now and in the future. The goals were formally accepted by all UN member states in 2015 for the period 2016–30, in response to overwhelming factual and scientific evidence that the world needs a radically more sustainable approach. The Sustainable Development Goals (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015) are formally the goals of the United Nations’ “Transforming our World; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, an agenda which sets out the vision, principles and commitments to a fairer and more sustainable world for all (Morton *et al.*, 2017).

The 17 individual goals are **Goal 1:** No poverty, **Goal 2:** Zero hunger (No hunger), **Goal 3:** Good health and well-being, **Goal 4:** Quality education, **Goal 5:** Gender equality, **Goal 6:** Clean water and sanitation, **Goal 7:** Affordable and clean energy, **Goal 8:** Decent work and economic growth, **Goal 9:** Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, **Goal 10:** Reduced inequality, **Goal 11:** Sustainable cities and communities, **Goal 12:** Responsible

consumption and production, **Goal 13:** Climate action, **Goal 14:** Life below water, **Goal 15:** Life on land, **Goal 16:** Peace, justice and strong institutions and **Goal 17:** Partnership for the goals (UN, 2015).

As nations across the globe are making relentless efforts in achieving the SDGs, Ghana is also working hard to reach its target. Scholars have explored the in-roads made since Ghana's endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Arhin (2016) examined ways in which the changing development landscape is affecting the ability of NGOs to perform their expected roles toward the attainment of the SDGs. Danyo and Osei-Bonsu (2016) explored the effects of illegal small-scale gold mining in Ghana, through the lens of a conceptual model that links galamsey and its impact on the SDGs. The authors argued that the degraded galamsey-mines are important in achieving all three dimensions (social, economic, and environmental) of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Kumi *et al.* (2020) explored the specific case of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives taken in the mining and telecommunications sectors in Ghana in their bid to operationalize the SDGs. Bedi and Coffie (2020) assessed how partnerships related to financing have helped in achieving the SDGs. These studies have shown that efforts are being made to help achieve the SDGs in Ghana. The paper explores China's involvement. In Ghana's textiles and mining industries and its implications in achieving Sustainable Development Goals 6, 11, 14 and 17 in Ghana.

### 3. China's Involvement in Ghana's Textiles and Mining Industry

#### 3.1. Chinese illegal activities in Ghana's mining industry: an impediment on Ghana's efforts towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6, 14 and 17

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the trooping of irregular Chinese nationals into gold mining communities of southern Ghana has increased substantially (Crawford *et al.*, 2016). Many of these miners are believed to have come from Shanglin County of the Guangxi province of China and are tagged as the "Shanglin gang". To be fair, small-scale or illegal mining is not new to many gold mining communities in Ghana because local miners have been involved in the enterprise long before the arrival of the Chinese. However, environmental degradation has escalated thanks to the introduction of heavy machinery by the Chinese. Ghana being the second-largest producer of gold after South Africa, and with a weaker legal regime is struggling to deal with illegal Chinese miners who cut down trees and destroy even forest reserves and contaminate the land and water bodies in pursuit of gold (French, 2014: 201). The Sustainable Development Goal (6) [SDG 6] is about "clean water and sanitation for all" and the UN hopes that by 2030, it will achieve "universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all". SDG (14) seeks to reduce or prevent marine pollution by ensuring sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems; address the impacts of ocean acidification; regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices. SDG (17) refers to the need for cross-sector and cross country collaboration in pursuit of all the goals by the year 2030. It seeks to promote international trade and help developing countries increase their exports to ensure a universal rules-based and equitable trading system that is fair, open and beneficial to all (UNDP Website, Accessed 2021).

Firstly, Chinese engagement in illegal mining activities has contaminated most of the water bodies (rivers) in the rural areas of Akwatia, Kade, Wenchi, Topremang, Apinamang, Takrowase, Adankrono and Fenaso among others. This is because of the use of toxic substances such as mercury in the water from mining sites which find their way to other water



bodies. Such water is harmful for domestic and agricultural purposes therefore not good for domestic or even agricultural use. The increase in illegal mining activities has resulted in toxic pollution of water bodies as a result of cyanide spillages, acid extract drainage, tailings leakages, mine waste disposal, and mine pits. This is because the miners do not comply with environmental and mining laws; their harmful substances find their way into water bodies and contaminate them.

According to French (2014), the usual trend is that investors and migrants came to Ghana from China with one “declared purpose”, but would later be involved in other pursuits, such as illegal mining, which engenders the pollution of both soil and water bodies in different parts of Ghana (p. 201). One may argue that state institutions responsible for the implementation of national mining laws have been largely dormant, especially given that some Ghanaians have long been complicit in the illegal mining business. However, with the current trend of the destruction of major water bodies, one wonders if China’s diplomatic power is at play and has tied the Ghanaian government’s hands in enforcing its environmental and mining laws. Such reasoning appears to be true or at least close to the truth, especially because in cases where Chinese migrants were arrested for illegal mining, they were either set free or deported without facing any criminal charges (Hill & Rice, 2013).

However, as the country battles to contain Chinese illegal mining and its effects on Ghana’s water bodies, the country is likely to lose out on achieving SDG (6). In agreement with this assertion, Nti *et al.* (2020) argue that Chinese illegal mining in Ghana has caused land degradation, soil erosion, contamination of water bodies and adverse effects on marine life. They add that the pollution of these water bodies with toxic substances has made them not good for human consumption. Also, in 2017 and 2021, the Ghana Water Company was forced to shut down one of its water treatment plants in the Eastern Region of the country as a result of serious pollution of the Birim River which supplies water to the plant. In response to these developments, Quarshie (2017) predicts that, considering the rate at which major rivers in Ghana like Tano, Pra, Ankobra, Oti, Ofin, among others, have all turned into clayey, undrinkable, and are gradually drying out, if appropriate mechanisms are not put in place to avert the situation, the country may have to import water in the coming years. This shows that the future supply and sustainability of clean water to the Ghanaian populace is under threat. It implies that Ghana’s effort on achieving SGD6 is likely to be an exercise in futility.

In addition, Chinese illegal mining activities are degrading agricultural lands and forest resources significantly. It is reported that illegal mining activities are responsible for reduced rainfall patterns in severely affected mining communities. Also, illegal mining activities have led to the destruction of arable agricultural lands, deforestation and the generating of waste, causing pollution of the environment. In response, indigenes of some mining communities have reacted violently to Chinese encroachment and destruction of their farms, water bodies, and forest reserves (Hill & Rice, 2013). Thus, agriculture, which is the major source of livelihood in some communities, is being threatened by Chinese illegal miners’ aggressive search for gold and diamond. Agricultural lands are being rendered unproductive; water bodies are polluted by dangerous chemicals, making life difficult for these communities, Livestock and aquatic life are also harmed. With many heavily polluted water bodies in Ghana entering the sea, there are concerns about the sustainability of marine life in the polluted water bodies. Some of the chemicals used by illegal miners are poisonous to some marine populations. Recently, many dolphins were seen dead in some communities along the coast of Ghana. Though the authorities are yet to disclose the cause of this, there are worries that this may be as a result of pollution of the immediate coastal environment of Ghana. Meanwhile, SDG 14b specifically aims to minimise and address ocean acidification. Interestingly, Ghanaian authorities have been unsuccessful in their fight against the pollution

of water bodies by dangerous chemicals used by Chinese illegal miners. Also, with SDG 17 calling for collaboration between countries to achieve the SDGs, as well as the heavy Chinese involvement in the pollution of Ghanaian water bodies, one wonders whether there can be a collaboration between the Chinese and Ghanaian authorities to tackle this environmental canker. Indeed, attempts by Ghanaian authorities to involve Chinese officials in the fight against the menace have yielded no positive result. This negates the objectives of SDG 17.

### 3.2. Ghana's textiles market

Apart from the mining industry, the growing involvement of Chinese nationals in Ghana's textiles industry has been a great concern to local textiles manufacturers. Their main concerns are twofold. First of all, cheap imported Chinese textiles products are cutting many local producers from business, creating unemployment in the local textiles industry. Second, the Chinese have successfully managed to imitate local designs—which when imported into Ghana is sold cheaper (Adadevoh, 2006). This includes the kente cloth, one of Ghana's local and most prestigious cloths. Hitherto, three of Ghana's textiles companies, Akosombo Textiles Limited, Textiles Prints and Printex Ghana who have contributed significantly to improving the livelihood of Ghanaians are now either out of business or operating below their capacity. By 1997, for example, the textile industry employed a labour force of around 25 000 and contributed to 27 % of total manufacturing employment (Quarthey, 2006).

As may be expected, however, the Chinese imitations – although not as durable, because they are far cheaper (sometimes thrice cheaper than the original) –, are preferred and demanded as compared to the locally produced textiles. Because low demand of local prints most retailers of local textile companies have abandoned locally produced textiles and are into the retailing of cheap Chinese wax prints. As a result, some local textiles companies have resorted to the importation of semi-finished cloths for printing locally.

At the moment, Akosombo Textile Limited is the only company functioning. Printex Ghana and Ghana Textile Manufacturing Company have all closed down Ghana their weaving and spinning departments which employed the majority of the labour force (Eyiah, 2013). According to Eyiah (2013), all efforts by successive governments and stakeholders to revitalize the textile and garment industry has proved fruitless due to the increasing involvement of the Chinese in the local textiles industry.

Like in the small-scale mining business, it is difficult to compete with the Chinese due to superior technology and cheap labour. They always out-compete the locals. Members of the Textile, Garment and Leather Union (TEGLEU) bemoaned that the Chinese cannot be competed with and since there is no support, workers have to be laid off (Eyiah, 2013). Even though local producers try to be constantly ahead with design, the Chinese can catch up very fast (Tsikata *et al.*, 2008).

The importation of Chinese textile products increased from 17 per cent in 2000 to around 30 per cent in 2006 (Tsikata *et al.*, 2008). While various studies indicate the impact of Chinese textiles products on western economies, it appears their effects on African economies are devastating. In that sense, this predicament is not unique to Ghana.

### Chinese and Ghana's Textile Industry: A Case of Neo-colonialism

In explaining the concept of neo-colonialism, Kwame Nkrumah indicates that any state that is subjected to it, though independent in theory, has all the outward trappings and is at the mercy of the imperial power (Nkrumah, 1965). Nkrumah added that “the neo-colonial state may be obliged to take the manufactured products of the imperialist power to the exclusion

of competing products from elsewhere” (Nkrumah, 1965). As indicated earlier, the role of Chinese textile product in the continuing collapse of Ghana’s textile companies cannot be over emphasized. Just like other manufacturing sectors, counterfeiting and copying are great threats for the growth and sustainability of textile industries. In this regard, the Chinese have been identified as accomplices in the counterfeiting of Ghanaian textile products. Mashkuratu (2020) bemoaned,

*Chinese textile manufacturers copy registered designs that belong to textile companies in Ghana. They copy brands and salvage markings, labels, and logo of the Ghana standard board. These are copyright properties that are paid for by Ghanaian manufacturers to distinguish their products from imported ones. The Chinese manufacturers, however, pirate these copyright properties at no additional cost (70).*

Because the Chinese pirates possess superior technology and cheap labour, they print these textile designs in their metropolis (China) or in their locally established textile companies and release products back to the Ghanaian market at a cheaper price. While it may be true that government legislations and policies can limit or control the activities and the importation of Chinese textile products into Ghana, Chinese global power and the Agreement on Textile and Clothing which provides basis for eliminating restrictions on textile products pose great impediments on Ghanaian authorities, rendering their efforts fruitless.

Furthermore, some Chinese and Ghanaian collaborators are also taking advantages of porous Ghanaian borders to smuggle other Chinese textile products into the country. Quartey (2006) argues that the collaborators use unauthorised routes to smuggle Chinese textiles into the country. As such, the Ghanaian market is now dominated by Chinese products. This contributes to the collapse of many factories and renders the surviving ones inefficient (Quartey, 2006).

### **Chinese activities in Ghana’s textile industry: an impediment to Ghana’s efforts towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal [SDG 11]**

The target of Sustainable Development Goal 17 is to bring on board relevant stakeholders to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (UN-Habitat, 2016). This SDG comes in response to a growing concern of rural-urban migration and inadequate corresponding quality life of many city dwellers. Inadequate housing and other social amenities, security and infrastructure remain serious concerns to governments and other stakeholders of which Ghana is of no difference. The textile industry was considered by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah as a sector that can be used to transform the lives of Ghanaians across the country to reduce rural-urban migration to ensure a more resilient and sustainable development of urban areas of the country. As such, the Ghana Textiles Printing Company Limited (GTP) in Tema, the Ghana Textile Manufacturing Company (GTMC) in Tema, the Tema Textiles Limited (TTL), Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL) at Akosombo and other textile manufacturing companies were established to provide meaningful employment to city dwellers and rural folks across the country.

However, Chinese activities and involvement in the textile industry which greatly contributed to the collapse of most local textiles companies have increased the unemployment situation across Ghana. The workforce of Ghana’s textiles industry, which stood at over 25000 in the 1970s, reduced to 7000 in 1995 and further to 5000 in the early 2000s (Segbefia, 2017). The industry as at 2017 employed a little over 2000 workers (Segbefia, 2017). This has made many people who were employed by these companies in rural areas to move to urban centres in search of new employment opportunities. Their city counterparts have been redundant for years, while others ventured into other sectors of the economy. A study by Mashkuratu

(2020) confirms that several textile employees have been laid off whilst new textile graduates from training institutions such as the polytechnics and the universities remain unemployed. This has compounded and created complex situations especially in the two biggest cities in Ghana (Accra and Kumasi). These include street hawking, pollution, congestion resulting from inadequate housing infrastructure and increase in criminal activities. Over the years, Ghana's capital city, Accra and the second largest city, Kumasi have been struggling to deal with the increasing rate of slums in these cities. However, city planners are unlikely to make any positive strides to reduce pollution and the increasing rates of slums in the cities. It is important to mention that one of the ways to develop a sustainable city and community in a developing nation like Ghana, is to make jobs available in the rural areas in order to control the trooping of people into the already congested cities. This is because many of these textile factories that directly and indirectly employed many rural folks have collapsed because of the involvement of Chinese textiles in the Ghanaian market. It is certainly one of the factors that impede Ghana's efforts toward achieving SDG 11. The regulation of Chinese activities in the textile industry will drastically reduce the rate of the collapse of local textile companies as well as rural-urban migration, which will reduce congestion and pollution in the cities.

#### 4. Is China a Neo-Colonizer?

First, it is impossible to dismiss the benefits Ghana has enjoyed by her association with China. As has been previously mentioned, China has been providing valuable services in various sectors in Ghana. However, considering what is happening in Ghana's mining and textiles industries, it is difficult to accept the Chinese "win-win" rhetoric.

In the specific case of illegal mining, for example, Kwame Nkrumah argued in his *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* that the main reason for the colonization of Africa was to control Africa's resources and export them to feed the home industries of the colonisers. Nkrumah (1965) emphasised the role and activities of Western mining corporations in the European conquest of Africa. The then colonizers, through their mining corporations, extracted and exported gold, diamond, silver and other mineral resources to their countries.

Such a case is being replicated in Ghana's relation with China. China's illegal and small-scale mining activities in Ghana are motivated by the increasing demand for mineral resources in the Chinese industrial economy. Again, it must be emphasized that some Ghanaians had already been involved in illegal mining. However, it has never been on such a large scale, considering also, that Ghanaian locals only used traditional tools such as pickaxes and shovels in this enterprise. The Chinese, however, are using more sophisticated technology. French (2014) reports:

*We are extracting ten times more minerals than we were before, but we're getting a mere pittance for them. If you factor in all of the social and environmental costs of mining into the equation, then you are left with about a 10 percent return, and they are taking away all of our minerals* (201).

Like the former western colonizers, it appears that minerals and other raw materials are the main driving force of China's relations with Africa, betraying China's claims of mutual cooperation of a "win win". It seems ironic that China claims to be truly concerned about Ghana, but at the same time its nationals engage in activities that destroy farmlands, water, local businesses, and sources of livelihood.

What is more shocking is the inability of the Ghanaian government to enforce more stringent laws to govern the mining industry. Could it be because of the fear of sullyng the relationship with China, and, therefore, losing aid, investment, and other forms of assistance? Is Ghana,



therefore, in Nkrumah's words, accepting "sugared water" from China in exchange for being lax on certain laws, at Ghana's expense? Could it be that China's legitimate economic business in Ghana, in the form of monetary and infrastructural assistance indirectly cripples the efforts of Ghanaian officials in controlling the activities of the Chinese illegal miners? Could it be that a strict application of Ghanaian national mining laws could see the Chinese illegal miners put behind bars and could hamper the relationships between the two countries, which would eventually mean the loss of assistance from China?

According to Kelly (2017), the Chinese government has developed and implemented a neo-colonialist system in sub-Saharan Africa using soft power and critical foreign policy approach to protect China's massive manufacturing, trade, and construction sectors. Kelly (2017) seems to agree that China has effectively used legitimate trade to appeal to African leadership into abiding by and advancing Chinese business interests at the expense of African people's social and environmental concerns.

Perhaps, the situation is a little more complex in the textiles industry, particularly because the cheap products from China offer a sort of short-term relief (for those who purchase them), but is ultimately disastrous to the Ghanaian economy. The solution to these seems easy. The Ghanaian government could simply enforce more stringent rules concerning mining, stop, or at least limit the import of Chinese textiles products. Yet, this could possibly lead to the loss of Chinese aid and investments. In other words, the Ghanaian government accepts aid from China at the expense of the livelihood of the people in the country. The situation, therefore, does not seem like an apt representation of the "win-win" picture China has consistently tried to paint. It seems more like the rules of the game are decided by China in a way that totally favours China. In that sense, China is just in for business and uses the "win-win" rhetoric as a cover-up to appear more reliable than other countries. French (2014) reports a similar point:

*The Chinese decide what they want. They arrange the financing. They send their companies. Yes, they consult with the African governments a bit, but in a way it is only to tell them what [the Chinese have] already decided to do. Countries are not philanthropists. They are in business for themselves, and like many businesspeople, they will like to cheat you if you don't enforce your own rules and regulations. For African countries, the only safeguard is to try to negotiate advantageous conditions for oneself (200).*

Also, while China, as stated earlier, declares no political interests, French (2014) has cautioned about the political impact of China's engagement with the continent, saying investments from China are helping "oat despots and silence intellectuals" (218). Besides, China refuses to maintain diplomatic (as well as economic) ties with any country that recognizes Taiwan as an independent nation (Tsikata *et al.*, 2008: 5).

For people like Tsikata *et al.* (2008), the important question is whether Ghana is losing or winning in her relationship with China. While they do not provide a general answer, they narrow their answer to the area of Chinese aid:

*Is Ghana gaining or losing as a result of Chinese aid? We can say, again tentatively, that overall Ghana is gaining. By not relying exclusively on Western donors, Ghana is thus able to negotiate at least to some extent for more favourable conditions for aid. The Chinese are serving a wide variety of infrastructure needs which it would be quite difficult and/or expensive for Ghana to meet on its own or have met elsewhere (27).*

But even if this is so, when one factors in the ramification of China's involvement in Ghana's textiles and mining industry, the Ghana-China relationship appears to be an apt representation of what Nkrumah (1965) described as neo-colonialism. To

*attempt of a foreign power to thwart, balk, corrupt or otherwise pervert the true independence of a sovereign people is neo-colonialist... because it seeks, notwithstanding the acknowledged sovereignty of a people, to subordinate their interests to those of a foreign power* (Nkrumah, 1965: IX and Gyekye, 1969: 89).

To Nkrumah, a state in the grip of neo-colonialism is not master of its own destiny and with the current inability of Ghanaian authorities to deal with Chinese illegal mining and the control of Chinese textiles into the Ghanaian market, one can conclude that Ghana has not been a master of its own affairs in this regard. As a result, China qualifies to be described as a neo-coloniser.

## Conclusion

Sino-African relations continue to be examined through different academic lenses. This paper employed Kwame Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism to examine how the involvement of Chinese textiles in the Ghanaian market as well as Chinese illegal mining and pollution water bodies are hampering Ghana's efforts to achieve SDG 6, 11, 14 and 17, and whether this enforces Chinese neo-colonialism in Ghana. With regard to SDG, the paper argued that Chinese illegal mining has polluted many major water bodies in Ghana, thereby threatening the future provision and sustainability of clean water to the Ghanaian population. Also, the paper indicates that the pollution of these water bodies may have serious consequences for the future sustainability of the marine population and may also lead to Ghana's inability to achieve SDG14.

The paper also argued that the involvement of Chinese textile products in the Ghanaian market has led to the collapse of many textile products across the country, forcing many people to seek greener pastures in the cities, which has led to increased congestion and pollution in the main cities of Ghana. The paper concludes that, though Chinese assistance may look more appetizing than that of the West, Chinese activities in Ghana and their consequences on the country are very damaging. China's win-win rhetoric, especially, in light of the foregoing discussions, appears false. Indeed, a thorough examination of Sino-Ghana relations, and by extension, Sino-Africa, may, at least to some extent, be considered as fitting Nkrumah's conception of neo-colonialism.

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