Presidential Extraversion:

Understanding the Politics of Sino-African Mega-Infrastructure Projects

Abstract

The past two decades have witnessed increasing scholarly analysis of China's growing presence in Africa. How does African agency operate within the asymmetric power relations between China and African states? How do African actors use foreign-sponsored projects to achieve domestic objectives? Some analyses take a China-centered perspective, with divergent views about how Chinese economic engagement promotes or inhibits African development. Scholarly work increasingly recognizes the agency of African actors. I advance upon the *African agency* argument by proposing a concept of *presidential extraversion*. I argue that Chinese-sponsored projects in Africa have coincided with the host ruler's strategies for political survival. Internationally, African rulers have strategized among their available options to ensure that the state received foreign finance and services on the most favorable terms. Domestically, they have instrumentalized Chinese-sponsored projects and loans to demonstrate their performance legitimacy and sustain patronage networks. I process-trace the Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway and Angolan Kilamba Kiaxi housing project, primarily relying on evidence collected in Kenya, Angola, and China from 2017-2019. The findings challenge the neo-dependency argument and show that despite Sino-African power asymmetry, African leaders have had the agency to shape this relationship to their advantage. The presidential extraversion argument advances upon African extraversion theory by locating the agency within the African political leaders rather than elites broadly.

Highlights

- Chinese-sponsored mega-infrastructure have coincided with African rulers' strategies for political survival.
- African rulers have strategized within their available options to ensure that the state receives foreign finance and services on the most favorable terms, and have domestically instrumentalized Chinese-sponsored projects and loans to demonstrate performance legitimacy and to sustain patronage networks.
- Despite power asymmetry, African states, and rulers in particular, have exercised agency in shaping the Sino-African relationship to their advantage at the project level.
- The understanding of Sino-African relations should take a balanced view that draws on materials and presents perspectives from both China and Africa instead of relying overly on one side.

> [In the Standard Gauge Railway project,] it looks like we were imposed on this project by the Chinese, it looks like a giant guy and a very weak and small guy who do not know what he is doing in the picture. But this is not the case.
>
> — Atanas Maina, Former Director of Kenyan Railway Corporation[1]

> This is purely a commercial project. The client pays, we construct; the client does not pay, we stop.
>
> — CEO of a Chinese State-owned Enterprise in Angola[2]

1. Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed an expansion of Chinese-financed and -constructed infrastructure projects in Africa, relieving the continent's infrastructure deficit. Sub-Saharan Africa lags behind other developing regions on most infrastructure development indicators, and African leaders call for greater international support (Foster, Butterfield, Chen, & Pushek, 2009). The African Development Bank (2019) estimated the finance needed for African infrastructure development at US$130-170 billion per year (AfDB, 2019). In 2018, total commitments to infrastructure in African countries exceeded $100 billion for the first time (US$100.8 billion, with US$25.7 billion from China; ICA, 2021), still without meeting the infrastructure financing gap.[3] China’s loans to the continent skyrocketed from US$130 million in 2000 to US$9 billion in 2018, reaching US$29 billion in 2016 (Brautigam, Hwang, Link, & Acker, 2019). From 2000 to 2018, transport infrastructure accounted for 30% of Chinese loans to Africa, followed by the energy (25%) and mining (13%) sectors (Brautigam, Hwang, Link, & Acker, 2019).

[1] Interview with Atanas Maina, Kenyan Railway Corporation, Nairobi, 13 August 2019.

[2] Interview with anonymous interviewee, Chinese state-owned enterprise, Luanda, 11 November 2018.

[3] Researchers also identify that African infrastructure deficit is not simply the lack of finance (Wethal 2019), but connected to the weakness of domestic construction sectors (Zawdie & Murray, 2013), policy-making and service delivery capacities (Nissanke & Jerve, 2008), and operations and maintenance (World Bank, 1994).

African countries' engagement in Chinese-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects that would otherwise have been unaffordable or against commercial rationale has led to concerns over African debt sustainability (Onjala, 2018; Carmody, Taylor, & Zajontz, 2021) and accusations of debt-trap diplomacy (Chellaney, 2017; Green, 2019).[4] Financed by China Export and Import Bank (EximBank) through a combination of commercial and concessional loans, the US$3.8 billion Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) Phase 1 was the most expensive project in Kenyan history and generated debates over the project's commercial viability and Kenya's debt sustainability (Taylor, 2020). Natural resource revenues allowed Angola to engage Chinese finance through the "oil-for-infrastructure" scheme for its ambitious post-war reconstruction program. With Chinese financial and technical support, Angola was able to carry out the US$3.5 billion Kilamba Kiaxi social housing project, the largest Angola has ever undertaken, followed by multiple other infrastructure projects (Redvers, 2012).

How does African agency operate in the asymmetric power relations between China and African states? How do African actors, particularly presidents, use foreign-sponsored projects to achieve domestic objectives? Some researchers emphasize China's interest in resource extraction, infrastructure construction, and export markets, and perceive China-Africa economic cooperation as converging towards long-established patterns of asymmetrical economic relations, deepening the continent's dependence vis-à-vis external economies (Taylor & Zajontz, 2020). This argument has even led to speculation about Chinese "neo-colonialism" in Africa (Mead, 2018). These analyses, following the dependency theory, tend to perceive China as the driving force, with limited recognition of African agency. More positively, some researchers recognize that Chinese-sponsored infrastructure projects serve to fill the continent's infrastructure gap and boost economic growth (World Bank 2009), increase

[4] There are many scholarly literature debunking the so-called "debt-trap diplomacy," see, for instance (Brautigam, 2020; Carmody, 2020).

foreign investment and technology transfer (Chen & Landry, 2018), and grant African countries leeway to choose from multiple sources of finance (Greenhill & Prizzon, 2013).

Other scholars recognize the agency of African recipient countries. Researchers on African agency argue that African elites have historically been active agents in the asymmetrical relationship with external powers (Bayart & Ellis, 2000). In addition to this classical *African extraversion* argument, some researchers recognize the active role of African governments in negotiating development investment (Mohan & Lampert, 2013; Scoones, Amanor, Favaretoc, & Qie, 2016; Soule-Kohndou, 2019). African elites triangulate Chinese and Western offers to extract the best deals (Zeitz, 2019, 2020; Phillips, 2018; Cabestan, 2020). Some scholars find that developing countries engage in grandiose infrastructure projects, usually sponsored by foreign countries, to enhance national or international recognition (Strange, 2020; Steinberg, 1987; Van Der Westhuizen, 2007). These scholars emphasize the agency of African bureaucracies or broadly-defined elites. Less attention, if any, has been paid to the agency of individual African presidents.

I advance upon the African extraversion theory by proposing a *presidential extraversion* argument that centers on the agency of African rulers in materializing foreign-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects. I argue that Chinese-financed and -constructed projects in Africa have coincided with the host-country ruler's political survival strategies. Instead of reducing their dependence vis-à-vis external economies, African rulers have instrumentalized their dependent positions. Internationally, they have strategized amongst available options to ensure foreign finance and services on the most favorable terms. Domestically, they have instrumentalized Chinese-sponsored projects and loans to demonstrate their stewardship to the people, and sustain the patron-client networks upon which their power relies.

The presidential extraversion argument makes three theoretical and empirical contributions to the understanding of Sino-African relations and African politics. First, it challenges neo-dependency arguments in Sino-African relations, which portray Africa as deprived of agency in shaping national development strategies. I show that despite Sino-African power asymmetry, African leaders, motivated by domestic political survival, have leeway in maneuvering Chinese deals to their own benefit. Second, the presidential extraversion argument advances upon the classical African extraversion theory by locating the African political leaders as the extraversion agents. The classical extraversion theory considers the agent of extraversion as loosely defined elites. I argue that it was not elites *per se* but African political leaders who exercised the strategy of extraversion to achieve political survival. Thirdly, this paper also makes a timely empirical contribution by documenting two Chinese-sponsored infrastructure projects in Africa, drawing on fieldwork and interviews as well as secondary literature from China, Kenya, and Angola to provide insights into the interactions between African and Chinese actors, covering perspectives from both sides.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. Section two elaborates on the theoretical debate between dependency and extraversion theories. I argue that in the dependency-extraversion debate, African extraversion theory identifies the general dynamics of African agency, but does not precisely locate the agents. I argue that it is largely presidential agency that shapes bilateral mega-infrastructure projects. This is followed by a description of methodology. In sections four and five, I present evidence from case studies in Kenya and Angola. Section six comparatively discusses the two case studies. The article concludes by discussing scope conditions and broader contributions.

2. Theoretical framework

This section provides the theoretical framework for understanding African agency in the asymmetric power relations between China and Africa and how African actors, particularly presidents, use foreign sponsored projects to achieve domestic objectives. I first discuss the political implications of mega-infrastructure projects, arguing that they are material and symbolic expressions of state power frequently instrumentalized by the state to fulfil political agendas. I then summarize the classical dependency theory and review the neo-dependency argument in Sino-African debates. This is followed by a discussion of the African extraversion theory and African agency argument. I then explain how this article advances upon the classical extraversion theory by emphasizing the agency of African presidents in Sino-African infrastructure cooperation.

2.1 Political implications of mega-infrastructure projects

The current African infrastructure boom is in many aspects similar to that of the 1960s and 1970s (Wethal, 2019), but with an expanded portfolio of available external finance (Zeitz, 2019). Post-independence African countries welcomed the first infrastructure spending boom, largely financed by international lending from multilateral and bilateral donors and creditors (Jerve & Nissanke, 2008; Mold, 2012; Wethal, 2019). From the early 2000s, in addition to Chinese state financing,[5] bilateral aid agencies and multilateral banks have financed infrastructure projects in Africa, contributing to a second boom in African infrastructure development (Wethal, 2019). Bond markets also began to take an interest, providing flexible and rapidly disbursed, although considerably more expensive, financing options (Zeitz, 2019).

Mega-infrastructure projects are "large scale, complex ventures that typically cost US$1 billion or more, take many years to develop and build, involve multiple public and private stakeholders, are transformational, and impact millions of people. (Flyvbjerg, 2017, p. 2)" They are material and symbolic expressions of state power (Monson, 2009). Transport infrastructure holds the potential to control the movements of people and goods and the locations of

[5] Much of Chinese state financing to Africa via policy banks such as the EximBank or China Development Bank is not counted as Official Development Assistance (ODA), therefore does not count as Chinese foreign aid. See analysis in (Dreher, Fuchs, Parks, Strange, & Tierney, 2018) and (Brautigam, 2019).

production and consumption, enhance international trade, promote national economic growth, and provide economic opportunities for those with access to the roads and railways. Housing projects offer shelter to the urban poor (Holston, 2008).[6] Dams provide irrigation and electricity, and alter the physical landscape (Mohamud & Verhoeven, 2016). Oil pipelines fulfill industrial purposes (Barry, 2013). Beyond their material functions, infrastructure projects also embody state-sponsored imaginaries of modernity, transformation, and development (Harvey & Knox, 2015). The development of the interstate highway network in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s was a demonstration of an American vision: it not only represented the apogee of American technology, but also, as Lewis put it, embodied "all our dreams for what America might become – one nation, indivisible, bound for all time by concrete and asphalt strands. (Lewis, 2013, p. 318)" Harvey and Knox examined the promise of political freedom manifest by roads in Peru (Harvey & Knox, 2015).

Precisely because of their material and ideological functions, mega-infrastructure projects are often instrumentalized by the state to fulfill certain political agendas. Herbst argues that railways and roads served as tools of colonial power-projection in Africa, enhancing policy reach and state control over a large but less populous landscape (Herbst, 2000). Mohamud and Verhoeven examined the role of dam construction on state- and nation-building. In Sudan, dam-building played a role in the construction, consolidation, and expansion of states, as well as restructuring local and regional political economies, as well as in contention and cooperation in transboundary waterscapes (Mohamud & Verhoeven, 2016). Dam-building in Rwanda was a symbol of a "High-Modernist" ideology that overemphasized science and technology as drivers of modernization while ignoring context-specific knowledge (Dye, 2016).

[6] It is worth pointing out that housing projects planned as projects for the poor may end up only available for middle-class residents, as the Angolan case shows.

2.2 Dependency theory

The supposed dependence of post-colonial Africa has been one of the most-discussed features of African countries' relationship with the rest of the world. Originally developed in the 1960s to explain the underdevelopment of Latin America, dependency theory was applied to Africa after the Arusha Declaration of 1967 in Tanzania (Leys, 1996). Dependency theory can be summarized as follows. First, African countries have disadvantaged positions and functions in global production. International trade is generally characterized by African countries exporting primary materials to more advanced economies while importing value-added, manufactured products (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). Second, African countries are dependent on foreign capital, personnel, and know-how for domestic development. Therefore the transformation of primary material is controlled by foreign capitalists, with little profit accruing to the dependent countries. This form of development enables a balance of capital transfer advantageous to advanced economies and detrimental to developing economies (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). Third, the economic development of the dependent countries has benefited a small group of African elites at the expense of the economy and population of the country as a whole. And fourth, as a result, there is insufficient capital accumulation to sustain self-generating capitalist development in the dependent countries, and dependence thus strengthens over time (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979; Leys, 1996). This theory considers the external determinants of African development as primarily negative (Leys, 1996).

Recent debates on China's growing presence in Africa have revived dependency theory. Deepening dependence has purportedly been enabled by China's purchase of natural resources and African countries' indebtment, with a large portion of debt from Chinese loans for infrastructure construction. China's interest in African natural resources, and the "oil-for-infrastructure" scheme (or the "Angola model", see Corkin, 2011, 2016; Mohan & Lampert, 2013; Campos & Vines, 2008) echo dependency arguments about exploitation of mineral resources and raw materials from peripheral countries, as well as the development of capitalist enclaves managed by local (dependent) capitalists. As most African countries are dependent on multilateral and bilateral donors as a crucial source of their financial revenues, high debt levels are not uncommon in the continent.[7] International borrowing has therefore become the primary concern of contemporary African dependence arguments (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). Even in non-resource-rich countries, some researchers argue that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which emphasizes inter-connectivity through infrastructure and trade, reproduces dependency by further indebting African countries (Taylor & Zajontz, 2020).

2.3 A strategy of extraversion and African agency

Admitting dependence as an unfavorable structural condition facing African countries, the African extraversion school argues that "subjection can constitute a form of action" (Bayart & Ellis, 2000, p. 219). Asymmetry between sub-Saharan Africa and the international economy is real, but Africans have been active agents in the dependence of their societies (Bayart & Ellis, 2000). The export of raw materials and foreign assistance have formed integral parts of African elites' calculations for power since independence (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p. 111), allowing elites to nourish the patronage systems on which their power has rested (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p. 115). In this way, dependency has allowed African elites to maintain the survival of the state and their personal rulership, while national improvement has been neither the priority nor the outcome of postcolonial governance (Clapham, 1996; Whitfield, Therkildsen, Buur, & Kjær, 2015).

African ruling elites have preferred to take a short-term view, seeking to maximize revenues from the export of existing resources at the expense of economic diversification or future investment (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p. 113; Kelsall, 2013). African incumbents today

[7] This dependence on external finance and expertise was one of the reasons adduced for the failures of the African infrastructure boom in 1960s-70s (Mold, 2012; Wethal, 2019).

also prefer to use international support as a means of extracting rents and maintaining both state and personal power (Clapham, 1996). Alternative strategies such as levying taxes would carry high political costs because they would generate demands for governmental accountability (Tull & Blasiak, 2011). Financial support from donors has allowed African states to dispose of greater financial resources than they otherwise would have (Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Whitfield et al, 2015; Prizzon, Greenhill, & Mustapha, 2017; Zeitz, 2019, 2020; Woods, 2008).

The divergences between dependency and extraversion are twofold. Dependency theory, stressing that "structure matters," implies the immobility of African states in their dependent relationship with the rest of the world, while the extraversion theory holds that subjection can lead to action, and emphasizes the role of African agents in managing and benefiting from dependency (Bayart & Ellis, 2000). Secondly, the theories disagree about the possibility of development, especially capitalist, under dependency. Dependency arguments argue that capitalist development is unachievable under dependency (Leys, 1996; Fieldhouse, 1999). According to the extraversion school, capitalist development may be achieved if it coincides with rulers' aspirations for the prolongation of their incumbency and/or self-enrichment (Clapham, 1996, p. 5). Common interest between rulers and capitalists is not impossible, because rulers frequently seek personal survival and legitimacy by supporting domestic capitalists and strengthening the economy.

Sino-African literature in the past decade has witnessed a gradual shift towards African agency. The debate has moved beyond *whether* African states have agency under Sino-African power asymmetry to focus on *who* exercises agency and *how*. Lonsdale's "agency in tight corners" captures African agency in the sense that even in the tight structural corners of international relations, African individual and collective agency can still bear causal fruit (Lonsdale, 2000). By distinguishing agency and power, Carmody and Kragelund (2016) argue that “African agency” is not opposed to “Chinese power”, and that African states have been able to exercise agency at the margins in order to capture a greater share of national resource rents for themselves or their treasuries (Carmody & Kragelund, 2016).

Existing scholarly work focuses on bureaucracies, elites, or society as the loci of host country agency. Soule-Kohndou (2019) demonstrates the agency of bureaucrats in small states like Benin during their negotiations with global powers like China (Soule-Kohndou, 2019). Zhou (2022) evaluates the Uganda Road Authority’s agency in managing Chinese and traditional financiers and contractors. Cerutti, et al. (2018) highlights the role of local government officials and traditional authorities in facilitating, restricting, and regulating access to natural resources sought by Chinese traders (Cerutti, et al., 2018). Oya and Schaefer (2019) reports that African governments impose conditions on the share of local workers to be hired by foreign contractors; although, if the governments prefer speedy delivery of the projects over skills transfer, they will be more lenient (Oya & Schaefer, 2019). Mohan and Lampert (2013) documents the roles of Ghanaian and Nigerian businessmen in facilitating the access of Chinese traders and investors to Africa, but also in mobilizing for or against Chinese businesses (Mohan and Lampert 2013). Procopio (2018) studies the governance-agency nexus, investigating the inter-relational decision-making process between Kenyan elites and civil society when interacting with external actors (Procopio, 2018).

China provides African countries with “agency of choice” vis-à-vis traditional donors (Prizzon, Greenhill, & Mustapha, 2017; Wethal, 2017; Zeitz, 2019, 2020; Woods, 2008; Zhou, 2022). The flexibility of Chinese state financing (and international bond markets) also allows African governments to decide which projects to develop (Wethal, 2017, 2019). Zeitz (2019) finds that the Ghanaian government was able to leverage the entry of China when negotiating with traditional donors. However, researchers have noted African governments’ limited capacity to exercise power when negotiating with China owing to their domestic politics and bureaucratic negotiation capacity, and specific requirements from China EximBank (Zeitz, 2019; Wethal, 2017).

2.4 Argument: presidential extraversion through mega-infrastructure projects

This paper advances upon classical extraversion theory by emphasizing *presidential extraversion:* the agency of African political leaders in instrumentalizing Sino-African mega-infrastructure projects for their own political survival. Classical extraversion theory captures the direction and incentives of African agency, but does not answer the questions of *where* among the elites agency is located and *how* it is exercised. This paper focuses on the agency of individual political leaders, i.e. presidents, although the leader may elsewhere be an advisor to the president or prime minister, a minister, or governor. I argue that foreign-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects have coincided with African rulers' political survival strategies, and been used effectively by the rulers.

Internationally, African rulers have strategized amongst their available options to ensure foreign finance and services on the most favorable terms (Humphrey & Michaelowa, 2013; Pfeiffer & Englebert, 2012; Zeitz, 2019; Fraser, 2009). Domestically, they have instrumentalized foreign funding and foreign-sponsored projects both to demonstrate performance legitimacy, as proving their worthiness of obedience requires economic growth (White, 1986), and to maintain legitimacy through provision of patronage via informal, personalized patron-client networks built upon mutual expectations (Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Beresford, 2015).

The reality of asymmetric power between Africa and the international system may reduce the range of actions available to African rulers when they interact with external actors, but it does not eliminate their options entirely (Tull & Blasiak, 2011). However, far from seizing opportunities to reduce dependence, African leaders have actively participated in inserting their societies as dependent partners in the world economy to fulfill their political ambitions. African rulers have tended to maximize revenues from the export of existing resources at the expense of economic diversification. When negotiating international financial support, African states have a degree of choice over whether to accept aid from a particular source at a particular time (Whitfield & Fraser, 2009, p. 28), and when donor-sponsored programs undermine rulers' ability to distribute patronage, they may resist those programs (Whitfield & Fraser, 2009, p. 29). The emergence of creditors such as China, less interested in imposing political and economic conditions than their Western counterparts, has granted African rulers the agency of choice: they can afford to triangulate between traditional and emerging donors to extract the best deals (Zeitz, 2020; Phillips, 2018; Cabestan, 2020), or achieve previously unfeasible developmental plans. Domestically, such foreign-sponsored projects are likely to be instrumentalized to achieve African leaders' domestic political survival.

It is not necessarily African elites *per se*, but political leaders specifically who actively used foreign-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects to achieve domestic political survival. African rulers speak eloquently to domestic and international audiences about their performance delivering mega-infrastructure projects, whether or not they are genuinely interested in the projects' functionality. Indeed, the visible and costly nature of foreign-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects makes them easy objects of rulers' instrumentalization, and the fact that projects can be instrumentalized for political purposes further incentivizes leaders' commitment to project success.

3. Methods and case selection

I elaborate this presidential extraversion argument through case studies of the Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya and the Kilamba Kiaxi social housing project in Angola. These cases are selected as typical cases of China-Africa mega-infrastructure cooperation. Focusing on typical examples helps us to learn about the causal mechanisms exemplified in the case and hence to maximize anticipated informativeness (George & Bennett, 2004; Fairefield & Charman, Forthcoming). Kenya and Angola have strong economic cooperation with China. From 2000 to 2018, Chinese financiers signed 256 loan commitments with Angola worth US$43.2 billion, and 40 loan commitments with Kenya worth US$9 billion, representing the largest and fourth largest recipients of Chinese loans among African nations (Brautigam, Hwang, Link, & Acker, 2019). 2018 data shows that China is Angola's largest trading partner, absorbing 59% of Angola's exports; while China is Kenya's largest importer, amounting to 21% of Kenya's imports in 2018 (World Bank, n.d.b). Kenya and Angola have starkly different trade characteristics and loan types with China, expressing different types of dependent relationships with the international economy. Kenya is not reliant on natural resources, but primarily exports primary commodities such as agricultural and horticultural products, while importing manufactured goods, and has been in trade deficit with China. Angola is endowed with natural resources and has run a trade surplus with China. Chinese imports from Angola are essentially oil. Indeed, using oil-backed loans for infrastructure development has been termed the "Angola model (Corkin, 2011, 2016; Mohan & Lampert, 2013; Campos & Vines, 2008)."

Kenya and Angola represent starkly different political system, but the presidential extraversion argument applies to Chinese-sponsored infrastructure in both countries. Under pressure from international donors, Kenya democratized in 1991 and has experienced presidential turn-over twice since then. The current president Uhuru Kenyatta was elected in 2013 and will exhaust his tenure in 2022. Angola is a party-state under the dominance of the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA). At times the MPLA holds window-dressing elections which it wins by landslide. João Lourenço, president since 2017, was hand-picked by previous president José Eduardo Dos Santos, who had occupied the presidency for three decades (Pearce, Peclard, and Soares de Oliveira, 2018).

Evidence for the process-tracing exercise was collected primarily from extended fieldwork in Kenya, Angola, and China from 2017-2019. This article draws on interviews with

Chinese contractors, financiers, and embassies, as well as the Kenyan railway corporation, and the Kenyan and Angolan Ministries of Transportation and of Finance. I also interviewed Kenyan and Angolan business representatives, Kenyan, Angolan, and Chinese media, think tanks, academics, and international organizations. I conducted 14 interviews in China, 74 interviews in Kenya, and 64 interviews in Angola.[8] The majority of the case study material on Kilamba is from secondary sources, complemented by interviews with informants in Angola.

Despite the strength of interview as a method of information gathering,[9] researchers have also identified disadvantages, particularly in terms of objectivity (Weiss, 1995; Kapiszewski, MacLean, & Read, 2015). Respondents may offer self-serving and distorted accounts, and any one interview provides a narrow viewpoint. To mitigate this risk, I interviewed Chinese and African stakeholders from a variety of organizations to gather different perspectives on the same issue. Interviews were semi-structured: I prepared a set of questions and themes, but did not limit the conversation to these. A majority of the interviewees requested not to be recorded but allowed the author to take notes. Most interviewees also preferred not to be quoted with their names and affiliations. Interview data was triangulated with secondary resources including media reports and publications by civil society organizations obtained from internet searches. Kenya has a relatively open and lively media, and the SGR is extensively covered in Kenyan, Chinese, and international media. Despite the relatively closed media environment in Angola, the salience of the Kilamba Kiaxi project made it a popular subject of media and scholarly investigation.

[8] The Angolan interviews did not include informants directly involved in the Kilamba Kiaxi project, due to the different focus of my fieldwork in 2018-19 on the Caminho de Ferro de Benguela (Benguela Railway). But both the railway and the Kilamba housing project are the priorities of Angola's National Reconstruction Program, initially under the administration and financial scheme of the GRN and the China International Fund (CIF), and transferred to line ministries and Chinese state finance and construction companies. Therefore, although there are not many direct citations, interviews on the Benguela Railway enhanced my intuitive understanding of the Kilamba housing project.

[9] Interviews allow researchers to gather information to generate detailed, holistic descriptions, capture varying perspectives, discuss processes, unearth competing interpretations of events, identify the micro-foundations of macro-patterns, and frame hypotheses (Weiss, 1995; Kapiszewski, MacLean, & Read, 2015). They also generate meta-data on the interviewees' expression, tone, and behavior that allows researchers to make a more informed judgement of evidentiary values of the data (Ibid).

4. Kenyatta's extraversion through the SGR

This section presents the Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway case study. Subsection 4.1 demonstrates the structural asymmetry between Kenya and China, exemplified in bilateral trade and debt. Subsection 4.2 shows that Kenya was aware of its imbalanced relationship with China, but still initiated the SGR and sought financial and technical support from China. Subsection 4.3 illustrates how the multi-billion loans and imports that accompanied the SGR project arguably deepened Kenya's dependence. The final subsection 4.4 discusses the two domestic incentives for president Uhuru Kenyatta's instrumentalization of the SGR and China's support in general: legitimacy and patronage.

4.1 Sino-Kenyan structural asymmetry

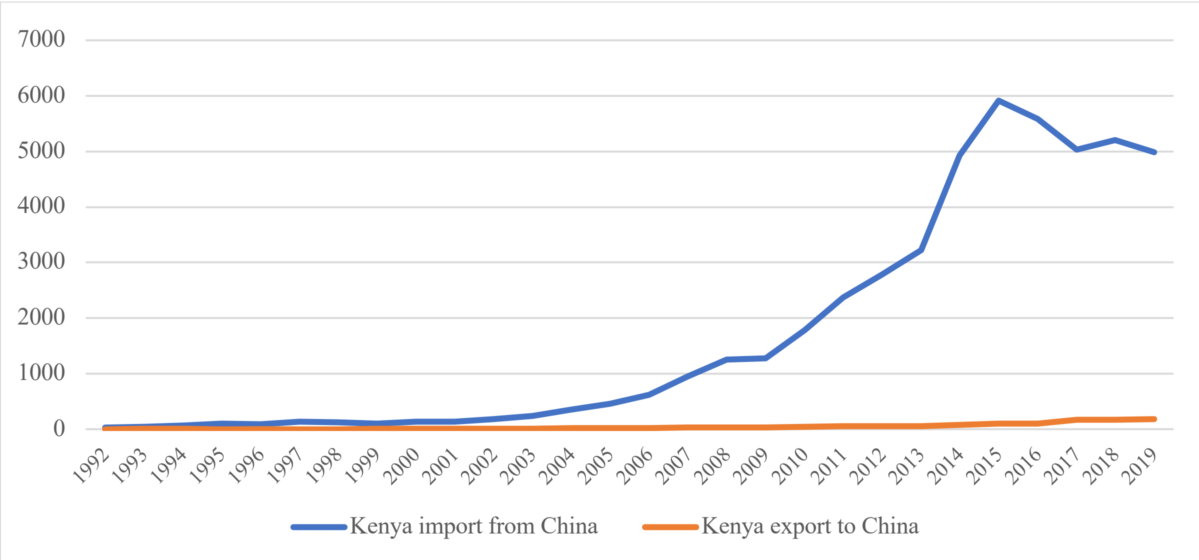
Like many other African countries, since independence Kenya has been integrated into a global economy dominated by Western states and more recently China. The result of integrations is unfavorable to Africa and deepens pre-existing dependence (Taylor & Zajontz, 2020; Taylor, 2020; Carmody, 2020). Structural dependence between African states and China is illustrated in the export of primary goods from Africa, and manufactured goods and loans from China. Kenya's exports to China were valued at US$149 million, while imports from China were US$3.6 billion during 2019, according to the UN-COMTRADE database on international trade. Table 1 shows the top five exported and imported goods between Kenya and China in 2007 and 2019. In 2007, a year before SGR initiation, Kenya exported primary products and imported, in much larger amounts, manufactured goods: a typical scenario for dependency theory. One key component of the Chinese-sponsored railway project is the import of Chinese machinery, locomotives, and rail-tracks. These imports further deepened the Sino-Kenyan trade imbalance. In 2019, after a year of SGR operation, Kenya was still in trade deficit with China, exporting mostly primary products and importing manufactured goods.

Table 1. Kenya's top five trading goods with China

Kenya exports to China (2007)		Kenya imports from China (2007)	
Copper and articles thereof	$6mn	Electrical machinery and equipment	$134mn
Vegetable textile fibers not specified elsewhere, paper yarn, woven fabric	$3mn	Nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances	$72mn
Coffee, tea, mate, and spices	$3mn	Vehicles other than railway or tramway rolling-stock, and parts and accessories	$68mn
Organic chemicals	$2mn	Cotton	$54mn
Raw hides and skins and leather		Plastics and articles thereof	$41mn
Kenya exports to China (2019)		**Kenya imports from China (2019)**	
Ores slag and ash	$98mn	Electrical, electronic equipment	$720mn
Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products	$9mn	Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers	$636mn
Raw hides and skins and leather	$9mn	Articles of iron or steel	$172mn
Lac, gums, resins	$7mn	Vehicles other than railway, tramway	$170mn
Vegetable textile fibers not specified elsewhere, paper yarn, woven fabric	$6mn	Iron and steel	$128mn

Source: UN-COMTRADE

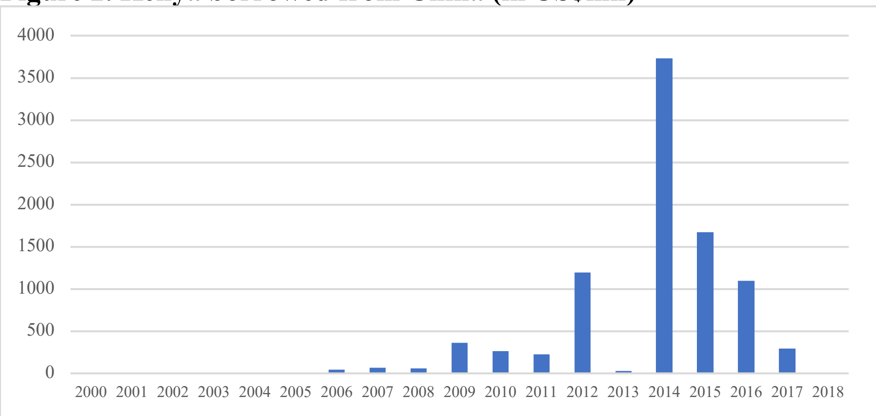
Figure 1.Kenya-China bilateral trade



Source: UN-COMTRADE

The expensive SGR and associated loans have raised questions regarding Kenya's debt sustainability. China's role in Kenya's infrastructure development began with the building of the Thika Superhighway (2009-2012) at a cost of US$314 million during the last term of Mwai Kibaki, Kenyatta's predecessor (Taylor, 2020). The stock of debt from China started rising steadily in 2011 and has grown since due to continued bilateral engagements in infrastructure development (Taylor, 2020). Kenya has borrowed from a variety of bilateral and multilateral financiers, with 30% from China. The country's external debt stock reached US$31 billion in 2018 (World Bank, 2021). Instead of seeking to reduce debt from China and other creditors, Kenya sought Chinese funding for the costly railway projects. Kenya's total debt to China skyrocketed from US$12 million in 2005 to US$9 billion in 2018, with the SGR Phase 1 and 2A responsible for US$3.7 billion and US$1.5 billion respectively (Brautigam, Hwang, Link, & Acker, 2019). Figure 2 shows China's loans to Kenya, and the SGR Phase 1 and 2A comprised a majority of lending in 2014 and 2015. It can be argued that Kenya was well aware of its dependent position with China prior to the SGR, but instead of seeking to escape it, Kenya initiated this expensive railway and sought to engage further.

Figure 2. Kenya borrowed from China (in US$mn)



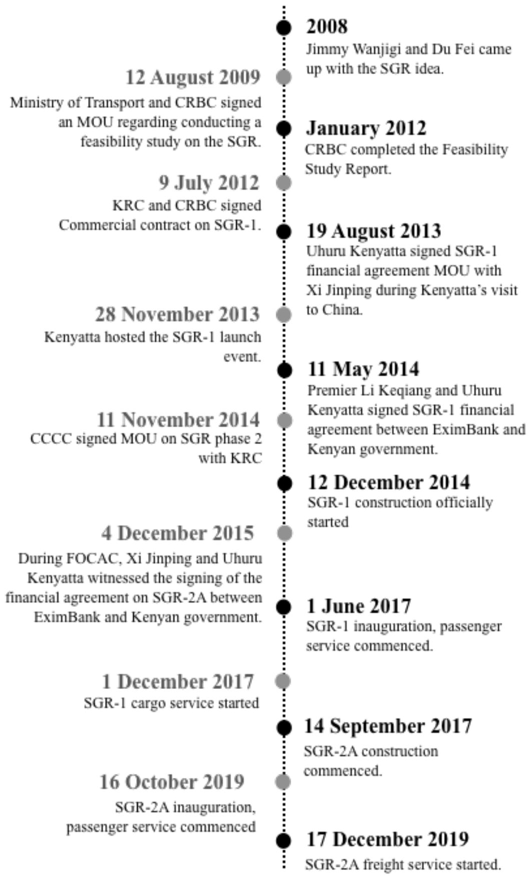
Source: (Brautigam, Hwang, Link, & Acker, 2019)

4.2 SGR: a Kenyan initiative

The Kenyan SGR initially emerged as an East African Community (EAC) initiative. The SGR was conceived in 2004 following an EAC summit, which issued a directive to prepare the EAC Railway Masterplan to rejuvenate the existing regional rail system which was on the brink of collapse (EAC, n.d.). The Masterplan study was completed in January 2009 (ibid).[10] China did not play any role in the EAC's SGR initiative; rather a Canadian company, CPCS Transcom, was contracted to conduct the Masterplan study. Kenya became the first among EAC member states to complete the SGR.

Table 2. SGR timeline

[10] The Masterplan emphasized public-private partnership: The short-term goal of the Masterplan was, "through public-private-partnership, [to] pull the railway back from the abyss by restoring reliable service on the track lines," including the meter-gauge railway from Mombasa to Kampala (CPCS, 2009).



Source: *The author's composition based on CRBC Social Responsibility Report 2015 and 2017/2018 on Mombasa Nairobi SGR Project and media reports*.

The SGR was initiated and contracted by the Grand Coalition government (2008-2012), and partnership with China was not the initial choice. In 2008, the Kenyan Railway Corporation was commissioned to undertake an independent SGR feasibility study, and invited global firms to express their interest.[11] Procurement was hampered by firms undercutting each other.[12] Atanas Maina, the former CEO of KRC revealed how CRBC was eventually selected:

> This feasibility study [procurement process] has dragged for over three years, and we spent KES1.2 billion, but not even a feasibility was done. In 2009, CRBC knew the government was struggling, and proposed to do a feasibility study for us without charge, with the condition that we cannot grant contract

[11] This study was funded by the Kenyan government; interview with Atanas Maina (Nairobi, 7 August 2019), confirmed by other interviews in the KRC, including the former Chief Engineer Ouna Solomon (Nairobi, 12 July 2017) and a member of the KRC's Board of Directors (Nairobi, 19 August 2019).

[12] Interview with Atanas Maina (Nairobi, 7 August 2019). Atanas Maina elaborate on this "politics" of procurement: "We selected an Italian company, but the procurement board challenged our decision and we had to cancel with the firm. We repeated the process again, the procurement review board then said the process was ok and we could proceed to award, but another party came out and appeal in court again. There were too much politics going on."

> to another company, and the government can freely use the study to inform their decisions.[13]

The CRBC's participation in the SGR was initially facilitated by Jimmy Wanjigi, a Kenyan billionaire with political clout. In 2008, Wangjigi approached Du Fei, manager of CRBC Kenya, with a plan to deliver a modern railway for Kenya through public-private partnership (PPP) (Daily Nation, 2017).[14] Du's successor, Li Qiang approached Wanjigi in 2011, hoping through him to obtain government agreement, indicating the Chinese government was interested in supporting the US$3 billion project.[15] Wanjigi commented: "I could not see how government can afford $3 billion. During Kibaki's ten years, he borrowed less than US$1 billion from Chinese government. I was here for a PPP, not a government project."[16] Later in 2011, CRBC wrote to the then Transport Minister and Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, regarding the construction of a railway in Kenya (Public Investment Committee, 2014). Wanjigi was side-lined, and the SGR became a Kenyan government project; PPP was no longer discussed and a potential loan from EximBank would be the source of finance (Daily Nation, 2017).[17]

Uhuru Kenyatta visited China, a country he described as a "sincere friend", during his first state visits outside of Africa after claiming presidency in 2013 (Ng, 2013). This was a demonstration of Kenyatta's "Look East" policy in response to the Western attempt to prosecute him at the International Criminal Court for organizing 2007 post-election violence

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[13] Interview with Atanas Maina in Nairobi, 7 August 2019

[14] Their plan was more in line with the EAC Masterplan: renovation of the railway through public-private partnership at a reasonable cost of KES50 billion (approx. US$575 million). Confirmed by Interview in Nairobi, Jimi Wanjigi, 26 July 2019.

[15] Interview in Nairobi, Jimi Wanjigi, 26 July 2019

[16] Interview in Nairobi, Jimi Wanjigi, 26 July 2019. The story of the SGR initiation was widely covered in Kenyan media before the 2017 election. I wanted to triangulate this story with Wanjigi, but he is known for barely receiving interviewers. To my surprise, he accepted my interview request, I think because since the 2017 elections he had become a public enemy of Uhuru Kenyatta, who raided Wanjigi's house in October 2017 after Wanjigi exposed Kenyatta's electoral fraud. The media depicts Wanjigi as the initiator of the SGR, and believes that he received a good commission from it. But he maintained that he did not make a cent from the project. When he accepted my interview in July 2019, he was actively working with Raila Odinga and other opposition leaders preparing for the 2022 election against the Jubilee Alliance. As the opposition has grievances to articulate, interviews with Wanjigi and other opposition leaders raise questions of data validity. These grievances motivated them to talk to me, an independent researcher based in a Western academic institution, to share their story, which could be different from the official account, to the Western audience. Is the evidentiary value of their story blemished by their grievances? I triangulated these interviews with newspaper reports, policy documents such as the Jubilee Coalition Manifesto, and non-opposition interviews. Regarding the interview quotes collected in this paper, I assess the risk of the opposition interviewees of distorting the truth as low.

[17] Confirmed by interview in Nairobi, Jimi Wanjigi, 26 July 2019

(Shilaho, 2016; Ng, 2013; Raghavan, 2013). Notably, when asked about the US position on the 2013 Kenyan elections, Johnnie Carson, then assistant secretary of state warned "Choices have consequences" (Gettleman, 2013). In China, Kenyatta was greeted by Xi Jinping and returned home with a basket of projects financed by China EximBank, of which SGR was the most expensive. The 485-kilometre Nairobi-Mombasa SGR Phase 1 cost US$3.8 billion, with China EximBank financing roughly 85% through a combination of commercial and concessional loans. Kenya took another US$1.5 billion of commercial loans from EximBank for Phase 2A. Kenyatta seemed to worry less about soaring debt and Kenya's liability to pay back the loans in two decades than about maximizing immediate revenues and political capitals.

4.3 Deepening Kenya's dependence

Building a new Standard Gauge Railway was neither a sound decision economically nor financially. In August 2013 the World Bank's Africa Transport Unit carried out a cost-benefit analysis of four alternatives[18] and compared estimated investment costs per kilometer and expected benefits in terms of freight volume and estimated revenue (World Bank, 2014). The study concluded that refurbishing the meter gauge network would have been the most appropriate option in economic and financial terms.[19] But the Kenyan government justified its decision by predicting (without providing details), that Kenya's annual GDP would grow by an extra 1.5% upon completion of the new railway (Daily Nation, 28 March 2016).[20] The SGR was predicated on commercial viability: being able to pay off its debt and interest without generating tax burdens to the Kenyan public. But the revenue generated from the SGR alone had not covered operational costs and loan payments when the loan's five year grace period

[18] The four plans were: (1) rehabilitate the existing meter-gauge network; (2) upgrade the existing network to a higher standard using the same gauge; (3) upgrade the existing network to a standard gauge system on the same network; and (4) construct a SGR on a new line.

[19] Taylor (2020) also questioned the economic viability of the SGR, given the Kenyan government picked the most expensive option (constructing a brand new SGR) of all those recommended by the Canadian consulting company CPCS Transcom.

[20] World Development Report (2004) also calculated that a 1% increase in infrastructure stock is associated with 1% increase in GDP (World Bank, 2004), also cited in (Wethal, 2019).

came to an end (Taylor, 2020). In May 2019, the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics released data showing that during 2018, its first full year of operation, the SGR generated sales of US$57 million, far below the annual operating cost of US$120 million (Otieno, 2019). According to one source, rail only makes commercial sense beyond 900 km,[21] which means that before freight reaches Uganda, road is more economical than the SGR. And transporting a 20-foot container via the SGR is still over $200 more expensive than by truck.[22] The SGR has struggled to attract adequate cargo volumes, with investors balking at the tariffs to transport goods from Mombasa port to the Inland Container Depot in Nairobi, despite the Uhuru administration's directives to force usage of the SGR instead of road.

The SGR announced inclusion of 40% local content during implementation, which could potentially have catalyzed local capitalist development. However, during Phase 1 this was not strictly implemented, and significant Chinese imports accompanying construction further slimmed the chances for local capitalist development.[23] During his visit to Kenya in May 2014, China's Premier Li Keqiang and President Uhuru Kenyatta witnessed the signing of the US$3.8 billion SGR financing agreement (Railway Technology, 2016). After this meeting, Kenyatta trumpeted 40% local content in this deal as a major success for Kenya, particularly because EximBank usually required its overseas projects to have at least 70% Chinese content (Li, 2001). This 40% local content could have been a step towards reducing trade imbalance and benefiting local economies. However, in SGR-1 it was not strictly implemented and remained an empty promise. The situation improved in Phase 2A when strict monitoring procedures were established. In the Nairobi-Naivasha SGR Phase 2A contract,

[21] Interview with a logistics insider, East African Online Logistics, Nairobi, 25 July 2019.

[22] Ibid.

[23] In terms of generating local employment and skill development, according to CRBC, SGR Phase 1 created 26 706 jobs and Phase 2A created 20 878 jobs (including subcontractors) for local people, including various training sessions on corporate culture, technical and management skills, and opportunities to study in China (CRBC, 2018).

KRC and CRBC agreed on 40% local input and implemented a monitoring mechanism to keep receipts of local materials and services to check whether the sum reached 40%.[24]

The operation of the SGR has not significantly changed Kenya's import-export structure. The trade categories in Table 1 indicate that in 2019, Kenya imported manufactured products from and exported agricultural and mineral products to China. It is too soon to make macroeconomic judgements about the SGR as its freight operation only started in December 2017. However, this imbalanced bilateral trade structure and deficit had not changed in the two-year figures. The SGR is also only minimally integrated with export and industrial zones in Kenya, and it will take some years to achieve the initial aim of connecting rail to domestic industrial and export zones to assist industrialization.

Although the SGR made little commercial sense, the project continued. From its very initiation there were extensive debates within government about the project, but President Kenyatta pressed ahead and developed strong ownership of it. Why? The political value of the railway overshadowed its economic potential, which remained more a pretext than a response to Kenya's real railway development needs.

4.4 Domestic incentives for SGR instrumentalization

Kenya became a *de jure* multiparty state in 1991, but the legacy of personalism has persisted. Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, established a *de facto* one-party state characterized by an all-powerful presidency and state patronage system, and preferred a highly personalized way of governing, to the detriment of both parliament and the cabinet.[25] His successor Moi further strengthened this exclusionary system of government and relied increasingly on coercion after the threatened *coup d'état* in 1982. When Mwai Kibaki superseded Moi in 2002, despite his declared intentions, no substantial reform was undertaken. Today, Kenya has yet to

[24] Interview with anonymous interviewee, Kenyan Railway Corporation, Nairobi, 18 July 2017. For the implementation of the 40% local input in Phase 1, refer to (Wang & Wissenbach, 2019)

[25] This was particularly the case after his health deteriorated in the early 1970s. See Branch (2011).

see a new generation of political leaders; the country is still largely governed by individuals who learned their political craft in the pre-democratic period (Branch, 2011).[26] In the SGR case, Uhuru Kenyatta's personalistic approach, championing and intervening in the SGR to ensure project success, was reminiscent of the leadership style of Moi and Jomo Kenyatta.

The SGR was instrumentalized by Kenyatta as campaign capital for the 2017 election. Before the 8 August 2017 Kenyan elections, there was fierce competition between the incumbent Jubilee Alliance under Uhuru Kenyatta, and the National Super Alliance (NASA), led by Raila Odinga. According to the contract, the SGR was scheduled for completion in 2019, but president Kenyatta halved the construction timeline, requesting that CRBC complete the SGR by June 2017, two months before the elections. Passenger service started the day after the inauguration, and with government-subsidized promotional ticket prices, the railway became highly popular among Nairobi residents. By unveiling at the peak of his campaign the largest (and most expensive) project Kenya had undertaken since independence, Kenyatta openly used the SGR as campaign capital.[27] During the 2017 campaign, the railway project was presented as an example of Jubilee's stewardship and delivery capacity (Wang, 2022).

With Kenyatta's acquiescence, multiple bureaucrats received kickbacks from the SGR project, generating corruption charges. Beneficiaries included the Minister and permanent secretary of Transport, Michael Kamau and Nduva Muli. Recent news indicates that two Kenyan politicians heavily involved in the SGR, Atanas Maina, head of KRC, and Muhammad Swazuri, head of the National Land Commission, have been taken to court on corruption charges related to land compensation (Achuka, 2018). For many observers, the cost of the SGR exceeded its value, suggesting that national elites may have benefited illicitly from the

[26] Significantly, Raila Odinga, Uhuru Kenyatta, and William Ruto were handpicked by Moi as potential candidates to succeed him after his retirement in 2002. The three later joined Mwai Kibaki in dominating the political stage up to the present.

[27] Interview with anonymous interviewee, CRBC, Nairobi, July 09, 2017. This interpretation was shared by other CRBC interviewees when I revisited Kenya in 2019, and various managers of Kenyan Railway Corporation also corroborated this testimony.

contracting process. The SGR's tendering process has been widely challenged within the Kenyan government, in court, and in the media since 2014. In June 2020, Kenya's Court of Appeal ruled that it had been unlawful.[28] President Kenyatta turned a blind eye to subordinates plundering the SGR to focus instead on completion of the project ahead of the 2017 elections.[29]

The SGR was further instrumentalized by the president to weaken the financial base of the coastal opposition stronghold centered on Mombasa. Mombasa has historically been an opposition county, and Governor Joho of Mombasa opposed the SGR from its initiation. The governor was even banned from attending the SGR inauguration ceremony in 2017. Mombasa's economy relies heavily on logistics, in which Joho's family has multiple investments. Since the introduction of the SGR, those businesses have suffered tremendously (Government of Mombasa, 2019). The economy of Mombasa, has also suffered – with losses estimated at over Kshs 33.3 billion and 8 111 jobs – as a consequence of the national government's decision to promote the SGR (ibid). Governor Joho complained that the government's initiative to construct a large inland dry port and Special Economic Zone at Naivasha in the Rift Valley and to increase use of the Nairobi Inland Container Depot constitute attempts to "kill Mombasa" (Lamarque, 2019). The introduction of the SGR shifted logistics from road to rail, and the presidential directive to clear goods in Nairobi instead of Mombasa also relocated the Kenya Port Authority (KPA), the governmental revenue generator, from the Coast to the upcountry. As a KPA interviewee expressed: "It is a war between the upcountry and the coast. Coastal people think the KPA is theirs."[30]

In sum, despite Kenya's structural inferiority in dealing with the second-largest economy in the world, President Kenyatta used this relationship to his own domestic political

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[28] Okiya Omtatah Okoiti & 2 others v Attorney General & 4 others [2020] eKLR, 2020

[29] Corruption is also deeply imbedded in the ethnicity-based neopatrimonial system in Kenya, a point discussed in existing work such as Anassi (2004); Wrong (2010); Kwaka et al (2011); Kivuha et al (2016); and Gowon-Adelabu et al. (2018).

[30] Interview with anonymous interviewee, Kenya Port Authority, Nairobi, 10 August 2019. This comment is also reflected in Lamarque (2019).

ends. First, the Kenyan SGR was an EAC initiative, and China welcomed Kenyatta when he was in conflict with the West due to the ICC inditement. Second, the significant debt and the bilateral trade implications associated with the railway arguably deepened Kenyan dependency, with China in particular. Kenyatta was well aware of Kenya's economic inferiority, but instead of disengaging (with China or other global powers), he engaged with the external world to realize his own political calculations. Third, the highly visible and expensive SGR and attendant Chinese loans gave Kenyatta means to demonstrate performance legitimacy and sustain his patronage network: Kenyatta instrumentalized the SGR as electoral campaign capital in 2017, and with his acquiescence, subordinates received kickbacks, generating multiple corruption charges. The president also used the project to transfer the cash-cow KPA from the opposition's stronghold to the capital.

5. Dos Santos' extraversion through the Kilamba project

This section presents evidence from the Kilamba Kiaxi social housing project in Angola. Subsection 5.1 illustrates the Sino-Angolan structural asymmetry through bilateral trade and loans data. 5.2 shows that the Kilamba project was a key component of the country's ambitious post-war reconstruction program and how, similarly to the Kenyan case, Angola sought Chinese support for mega-infrastructure financing and construction. 5.3. discusses how Chinese-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects deepened Angola's dependence. 5.4 presents how president Dos Santos instrumentalized the Kilamba project for domestic political survival, particularly through demonstrating performance legitimacy and nourishing his patronage network.

5.1 Sino-Angolan structural asymmetry

Similar to Kenya, Sino-Angolan structural asymmetry is illustrated in bilateral trade and loans structures. Angola is endowed with rich reserves and its exports are more than 95% oil.

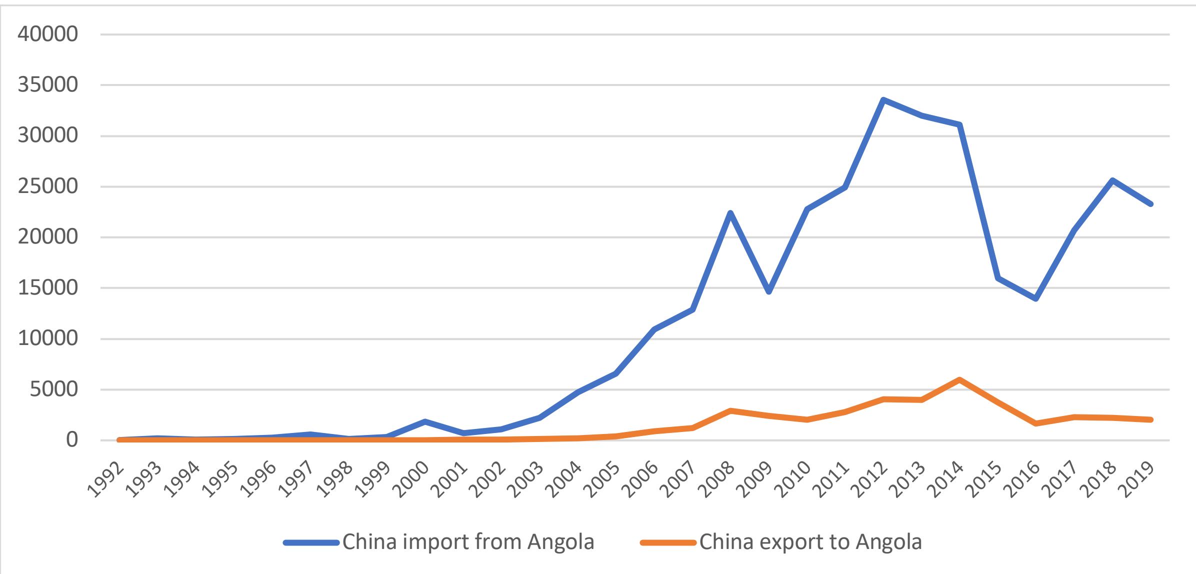
Angolan imports from China were US$2 billion during 2018, and exports to China, predominantly hydrocarbons and minerals, US$26 billion in the same year. Table 3 shows the top five exported and imported goods between Angola and China in 2007 and 2018. Comparing 2007, (before the initiation of the Kilamba project) and 2018, Angola-China trade characteristics remained largely the same, with Angola exporting oil and other mineral and primary products while China exported manufactured goods: the classical situation for dependency theory.

Table 3. Angola's top five trading goods with China

Angola exports to China (2007)		Angola imports from China (2007)	
Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products	$13bn	Electrical machinery and equipment and parts thereof; sound recorders	$166mn
Natural or cultured pearls, precious or semi-precious stones	$60mn	Machinery and mechanical appliances; parts thereof	$107mn
		Vehicles other than railway or tramway rolling stock	$101mn
		Articles of iron or steel	$60mn
		Iron and steel	$49mn
Angola exports to China (2018)		**Angola imports from China (2018)**	
Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products	$24bn	Electrical, electronic equipment	$439mn
Wood and articles of wood, wood charcoal	$14mn	Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers	$406mn
Salt, sulphur, earth, stone, plaster, lime and cement	$8mn	Articles of iron or steel	$157mn
Fish, crustaceans, mollusks, aquatics invertebrates	$5mn	Iron and steel	$147mn
Ore slag and ash	$2mn	Vehicles other than railway, tramway	$99mn

Source: UN COMTRADE

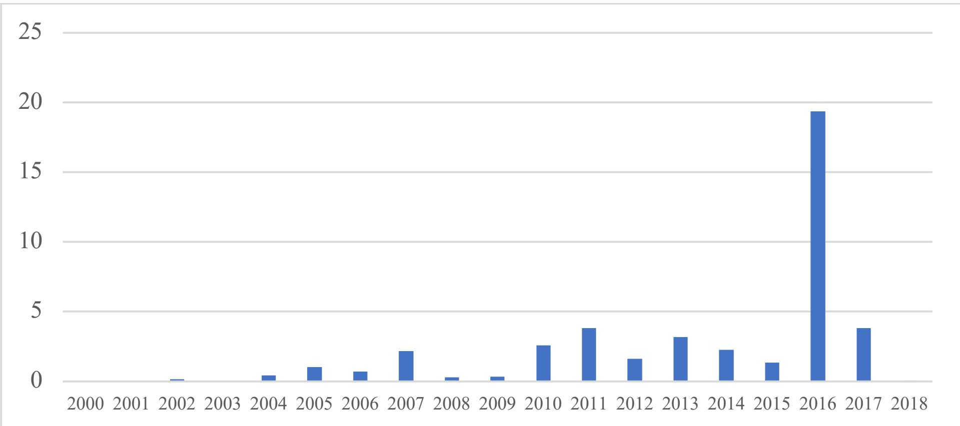
Figure 3 Angola-China bilateral trade (US$mn)



Source: UN COMTRADE

The expensive Chinese-sponsored infrastructure projects and associated loans have raised serious questions regarding Angola's debt sustainability. Yet rather than seeking to reduce debt from China and other donors, Angola sought Chinese funding for the costly Kilamba housing and other infrastructure projects. Data shows that between 2000 and 2018, the Chinese government extended US$148 billion worth of loans to Africa, with Angola the biggest African borrower from China in terms of total loans issued since 2000 (Brautigam, Hwang, Link, & Acker, 2019). Chinese loans to Angola are mostly oil-backed and totaled US$43 billion in 2018 (Brautigam, Hwang, Link, & Acker, 2019). It can be argued that President Dos Santos was well aware of Angola's dependency on China prior to the Kilamba and other infrastructure projects, but instead of seeking to reduce it, initiated these expensive projects and sought to engage further with China.

Figure 4. China's loans to Angola (US$bn)



Source: (Brautigam, Hwang, Link, & Acker, 2019)

5.2 National reconstruction program: Angolan initiatives

Following the an anti-colonial war from 1961 that led to independence in 1975 after five centuries of Portuguese colonial rule, Angola soon entered a 27-year civil war. Basic infrastructure such as electricity systems, bridges and railway lines, was destroyed or severely damaged, and roads were mined, disrupting communications and raising production costs. There was a steep decline and subsequent stagnation of production in the non-oil sectors of the economy, accompanied by chronic macroeconomic instability. By the end of the war in 2002, two-thirds of Luanda's more than three million inhabitants were living in overcrowded slums (Croese, 2016).

After securing peace, president Dos Santos' next project was national reconstruction, primarily through rebuilding infrastructure.[31] To ensure that certain strategic goods and investments were delivered effectively given the regular state bureaucracy's low capacity, and to expand his already considerable discretionary power, Dos Santos created several new special agencies. In October 2004 he created the Office of the National Reconstruction (GRN), tasked with "systemically and permanently managing the most fundamental national reconstruction projects" (Diário da República, 2004). It was established in parallel to traditional ministries, based on the assumption that the latter would not have the organizational and technical capacity to manage large inflows of money to the national reconstruction program.[32] Dos Santos entrusted the Chief of the Presidential Guard, general Hélder Vieira Dias "Kopelipa", to head the GRN. This office, and Kopelipa more specifically, monitored the reconstruction program, including construction of the Kilamba Kiaxi housing project and other satellite towns, the rehabilitation of the three railway lines, reconstruction of the Port of Luanda, construction or reconstruction of 25 airports nationwide, and new roads (CR20, 2020). The GRN was an instrument of Dos Santos, reporting directly to him and carrying out these projects independently of the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Public Works. It also became the office that managed funds from China.[33]

To fund the ambitious reconstruction program, Dos Santos started mobilizing international financing from the eve of the peace. He wrote to the IMF in June 2001 requesting

[31] Apart from infrastructure, the reconstruction program also included other aspects such as the privatization of national companies and diversification of non-oil sectors. See (Soares de Oliveira, 2015) for a detailed description of all other aspects of the reconstruction program.

[32] According to (Corkin, 2016), the GRN started as a monitoring entity over the Eximbank loan, leading to allegations that Angolan officials were skimming off massive commissions from the fund via questionable economic entities. The main culprit identified, António Van Dunem, Secretary of the Council of Ministers and the direct link between the President and the Cabinet, was sacked shortly after his exposure.

[33] Before the cabinet reshuffle on 8 February 2010 when Dos Santos voted no-confidence in Kopelipa, the GRN had managed US$6.5 billion Chinese loans, from CIF and EximBank (Africa Confidential, 2010).

additional assistance following its Staff Monitoring Program and in early 2002 called for a donor's conference to mobilize resources for the reconstruction project. The IMF raised concerns regarding the oil sector and requested greater transparency (IMF, 2003). Western donors adopted a cautious approach to Angola's long-term development program, due to the humanitarian crisis, security constraints, and the perceived weakness of the commitment of the government and its incapacity to pursue poverty alleviation policies (UNSA, 2002). The political conditions attached to the loans were unacceptable to Dos Santos and the donor's conference never materialized.[34] China emerged as Angola's preferred reconstruction partner. Chinese loans were large, quick, cheap, and came with none of the political conditions. Chinese partnership allowed the expansion, diversification, and further internationalization of the parallel state (Soares de Oliveira, 2015).

The Kilamba Kiaxi city on the outskirts of Luanda began as a reconstruction project initially under the management of the GRN and contracted to the China International Fund. It figured on the GRN's initial list of reconstruction projects along with the rehabilitation of three railways and dozens of other infrastructure projects. The CIF subcontracted the project to China International Trust Investment Corporation (CITIC), a Chinese state-owned enterprise (SOE). After the dissolution of the GRN in 2010, the Kilamba Kiaxi project was transferred to Sonangol Imobiliária e Propriedades (SONIP), a subsidiary of the state oil company.[35]

One of president Dos Santos' many promises during the 2008 legislative election campaign was to deliver a million houses in four years. The slogan was "My Dream, My Home" (*Mew Sonho, Minha Casa*), and this plan was adopted in 2009 as the National Urbanism and

[34] As described in Corkin (2016, p. 75-6), the IMF agreed to provide finance to Angola on two conditions: first, increased transparency and a macroeconomic stabilization policy, aimed at reducing inflation by cutting public expenditure and reducing borrowing; second, any large-scale infrastructure reconstruction program would have to wait until Angola had achieved a healthier fiscal situation.

[35] In August 2014, the president further transferred the responsibilities of SONIP to Imogestin, see (RedeAngola, 2014). The Kilamba project was later included in the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China financial scheme.

Housing Program (Diário da República, 2009; Croese, 2016).[36] In 2006, the formal housing deficit was officially estimated at 878 068 units, equivalent to 60 percent of existing stock, while figures from a national survey conducted in 2008–9 indicated that 90.9 percent of the urban population lived in inadequate conditions (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2010; Croese, 2016). The Kilamba Kiaxi social housing project became the symbol of a promise of much-needed social housing in Luanda. The project initially involved the construction of 20 000 apartments and supporting infrastructure, at a value of US$3.5 billion. Construction started in April 2008 at the height of Dos Santos' electoral campaign, and was completed in October 2012 (人民网, 2018), just weeks after the 31 August elections. Phase two of the project included an additional 5 000 units that were completed in 2015. A third phase of the project foresees the construction of a total of 70 000 apartments. The Kilamba Kiaxi housing project, despite previously being described as a "ghost town" (Redvers, Angola's Chinese-built ghost town, 2012), is now fully occupied (CARI, 2018).

5.3 Deepening Angola's dependence

The Angolan-initiated, China-sponsored housing and other infrastructure projects arguably deepened the host country's dependent position within the global economy. As mentioned before, China's private and state engagement with Angola, providing oil-backed loans for infrastructure construction has been called the "Angola model" (Corkin, 2011, 2016; Mohan & Lampert, 2013; Campos & Vines, 2008). President Dos Santos summarized in November 2007: "China needs natural resources and Angola wants development" (Campos & Vines, 2008). Indeed, this resource-for-infrastructure arrangement invigorated Angola's GDP growth, the country even outpacing China as the world's fastest growing economy from 2004 to 2008 during the oil boom (World Bank, n.d.a). But Angola conforms to the "resource curse" hypothesis that an abundance of natural resources crowds out other tradable products and

[36] This target was not met by 2012, and the government announced a five-year extension of the program up to 2017.

hampers export diversification. UN-COMTRADE data shows that before the 2014 collapse in commodity prices, oil export was constant at 99% of all Angolan exports and in 2018 remained as high as 93%. Angola reached upper-middle income status by 2005 according to the World Bank, which defines upper middle-income economies as those with a GNI per capita between US$4 046 and US$12 535. Angolan GNI per capita (PPP) was US$4 310 in 2005, and rose to US$7 680 by 2014 under the oil boom. Yet over half of Angola's population still lived below the US$1.90 poverty line in 2018.

Large imports accompanying Chinese-sponsored infrastructure projects did not leave much room for African capitalist development.[37] The import of Chinese machinery and equipment was a key component of the Chinese-sponsored housing and other reconstruction projects in Angola. Although Angola was well aware of the trade dependence implied by these infrastructure deals, they continued with the projects. The Angolan requirement of 30% local content was weakly implemented. In 2015, the Angolan National Assembly passed legislation requiring foreign-sponsored projects to have 30% Angolan content[38]. I did not obtain data on the Kilamba housing project, but both Angolan and Chinese interviewees on the Benguela railway project indicated that the railway sourced over 95% materials, from cement and steel to rice and wheat, from China. This was both because post-war Angola could not provide the materials for CFB construction at the required quantity, standard, and speed, and because administratively there was no person in charge of overseeing the implementation of the 30% rule.[39]

[37] The exact figure of local employment in the Kilamba project is unobtainable. A manager from CITIC suggested that the project hired 6 000 Chinese and 20 000 locals at the peak of construction (data from text message interview with CITIC and difficult to verify), but Corkin (2012) and Gu (2009) show that Chinese companies' local employment and local value addition in the construction sector in Angola's post-war reconstruction were extremely weak. Political pressure to deliver housing to meet Dos Santos' 2008 electoral promise was often used as an excuse for contracting Chinese and other foreign construction firms rather than investing in domestic capacity to produce building materials and employing national companies to hire and train local workers (Cain, 2017; Corkin, 2012).

[38] LEI 14/15 de 11 de Agosto de 2015 DR I Serie nº 115

[39] Interview with anonymous interviewee, Angola Ministry of Transport, Luanda, 14 March 2019. Confirmed by interviews with Chinese SOE managers.

5.4 Domestic incentives

Starting under president Agostinho Neto and continuing under José Eduardo Dos Santos, power was centralized in the presidency. Upon taking power in 1979, the external threats from UNITA and its South African ally provided an opportunity for Dos Santos to introduce institutional changes that greatly strengthened the presidency at the expense of the party leadership bodies. Constitutional changes in 1991-92 introduced multiparty elections while also confirming this concentration of power in the presidency. Dos Santos chaired the meetings of the Council of Ministers and acted as the effective head of the government. Due to the high degree of presidential intervention in the day-to-day management of state affairs, and presidential advisors often having greater influence than ministers, ministers were unable to assert their authority (Hodges, 2004).

President Dos Santos created a highly centralized patronage network fueled by oil revenues. *Futungo de Belas*, the president's seaside complex on the outskirts of Luanda, was the locus of national power. The eponymous *Futungo group* was the decision-making center that had run parallel to the Cabinet and the MPLA since the 1980s. The group consisted of twenty or so unelected officials, businessmen, and former generals and centered on the president (Hodges, 2004; Soares de Oliveira, 2007). Sonangol, the national oil company, was at the center of the parallel system and generated continuous revenues for the *Futungo group*. The nation's oil bonanza, harvested through Sonangol, provided the finances necessary to implement *Futungo*'s decisions and maintained wider patronage in exchange for loyalty. Since its establishment in 1976, Sonangol had been a loyal instrument of the president (Soares de Oliveira, 2007), and thus largely escaped governmental and party scrutiny (Chabal, 2007). The *Futungo*-Sonangol nexus formed a 'parallel state' that marginalized formal institutions in Angola (Soares de Oliveira, 2007). Political decision-making within this parallel state became increasingly de-institutionalized and concentrated among a handful of individuals.

The IMF and Western countries questioned the opacity of the resource revenues and conditioned their loans on transparency and governance reform, which would threaten Dos Santos' power base. The availability of Chinese credit allowed the president to strengthen his hold on power and ignore these requests for transparency and democracy. These loans from China which came without political conditions (besides recognizing Chinese sovereignty in Taiwan) inevitably became enmeshed in the corruption that reached directly to Dos Santos' family. Public service provision became an opportunity for Dos Santos to give privileges to elites (Corkin, 2016), and to reward loyalists at election time, as in the Kilamba case. Although some reconstruction projects benefited citizens, loans and infrastructure projects mostly benefited elites who extracted rents from domestic natural resources and maintained a clientelistic relationship with the outside world instead of serving the population (Clapham, 1982, p. 183).

Originally managed under the GRN, on 27 September 2010 following a presidential decree, the Kilamba project was transferred to Sonangol Imobiliária e Propriedades, a subsidiary of the state oil company Sonangol. The SONIP then subcontracted the management to Delta Imobiliária, whose partners are "the triumvirate that dominates Angola's political economy" (Marques de Morais, 2012): Manuel Vincente, the CEO of Sonangol from 1999-2012, Kopelipa, and Dino, the president's head of telecommunications. Although the presidential decree officially changed ownership of the Kilamba project from the GRN to SONIP, in reality it remained in the hands of the same "triumvirate" of president Dos Santos' most trusted men. Selling the apartments generated monetary commissions and, more importantly, granted the power to decide who would enjoy the bright new residences and who would stay in the slums.[40]

[40] Interview with anonymous interviewee, Angolan journalist, Luanda, 15 December 2018. Similar comments also shared in (Pitcher, 2017); (Soreide, 2011).

The CITIC delivered the first batch of 115 buildings, corresponding to 3 118 apartments, on 11 July 2011, at an inauguration ceremony chaired by Dos Santos. In his speech, Dos Santos considered it "the largest housing project ever built in Angola, [constituting] a profound example of the social policy carried out in the country to solve the housing deficit" (Marques de Morais, 2011). Delta Imobiliária announced unit prices between US$120 000 and US$300 000. In a country where over half the population lives on under two dollars per day, this was so out-of-reach for most Angolans that by mid-2012, of the initial offering of 3 118 units, only about 300 had been sold. Faced with the September 2012 elections, the government decided to "save this prestigious project" (Cain, 2014) The government assigned 43 apartments to every ministry and others to party loyalists to be distributed to senior civil servants on acquisition terms unavailable to other Angolans (Soares de Oliveira, 2015, p. 67). Later SONIP introduced a heavily subsidized rent-to-buy scheme which offered a three percent interest rate on twenty-year mortgages and the cost of the cheapest units was cut from US$120 000 to US$84 200, which brought apartment ownership within the reach of mid-level civil servants (Cain, 2014). Two weeks after introducing this scheme, SONIP announced that it had sold 72 percent of stock and created a waiting list (Angonotícias, 2013; Buire, 2017). To get on the list, one had to be an MPLA loyalist. There was also evidence of preferential access to Kilamba housing for MPLA supporters following the 2012 elections (Croese, 2016), and many of the loyalists who moved in were too poor to afford the properties themselves.[41] In February 2016, Joaquim Israel, administrator of Kilamba City, announced that the city had 95 000 inhabitants (O País, 2016).[42]

[41] Interview with anonymous Angolan journalist, Luanda, 15 December 2018. See also the preferential access to Kilamba housing described in Croese (2016).

[42] Admittedly, it is difficult to claim the Kilamba project as a success because of the frequent complaints from Kilamba residents concerning construction quality and basic property service. Additionally, it failed in its purpose as social housing, instead largely benefitting bureaucrats and the politically connected middle-class. Yet given very few post-war Angolan reconstruction projects can claim absolute success, Kilamba's transformation from a "ghost town" to nearly fully occupied compares favourably with some other reconstruction projects.

The Kilamba Kiaxi project, apart from allowing him to reward supporters, was also a prominent case for Dos Santos to demonstrate his reconstruction success internationally. The Kilamba city became a popular site for distinguished international figures to visit. These included Liberia's president Ellen-Johnson Sirleaf, Mozambique's president Armando Guebuza, King Mswati II of Swaziland, the President of East Timor Ramos Horta, and Xi Jinping, who inspected the project on 20 November 2010, three years before he claimed China's chairmanship (Marques de Morais, 2011).

Dos Santos was much more committed to the Kilamba housing project than to other projects in the reconstruction program, and it was his commitment that rescued the project from failure. The president announced the building of one million houses as a 2008 campaign promise, and the timing of the Kilamba project cohered with Dos Santos' campaign schedule: the project was launched at the peak of the president's 2008 campaign and Phase 1 completed in July 2012, just in time for the 31 August 2012 elections, followed by the state-subsidized housing purchase scheme and the allocation of apartments to bureaucrats and MPLA supporters. The president touted the project frequently to distinguished international visitors from Africa, Asia, and the West as an example of state-led housing development nationally and even internationally. He kept this project close to himself, in the hands of his most trusted men. The housing price reductions and the state-subsidized rent-to-buy scheme were not announced officially by Dos Santos, but came from SONIP/Delta. However, because the three people in charge of the company (Kopelipa, Dino, and Vincent) were so close to the president, and because the Kilamba project was so high-profile, we can assume that these strategies were discussed with Dos Santos and obtained his consent.

6. Discussion: presidential extraversion via Chinese-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects

Both the SGR in Kenya and the Kilamba Kiaxi housing project in Angola were African initiatives, and prior to China, Kenya and Angola had approached companies and financiers globally. China proved the preferred option in both cases due to its ability to provide rapidly dispensable, cheap, and condition-free loans and cheap and capable services. The SGR was an EAC initiative, and the CRBC was selected as it offered to conduct a feasibility study for free. The availability of Chinese loans came at the right time, as Kenyatta was seeking to "Look East". The Kilamba project was part of the post-war reconstruction program, and in seeking international partnerships for reconstruction, Dos Santos first reached out to Western donors but, unsatisfied with the political conditions attached to Western credit lines, partnered instead with China.

When seeking China's help for mega-infrastructure finance and construction, Kenya and Angola were well aware of their structural asymmetry with China and that the debt and trade implications could further deepen their dependence. Yet the leaders still sought multi-billion dollar loans from China for the construction projects. The opportunities to use these projects to promote domestic growth and create local employment and skill upgrading were not seized. Kenyatta and Dos Santos both sought to protect domestic capitalists by requiring quotas for local content, but lacking effective monitoring and implementation mechanisms, these achieved very mixed success.

Chinese-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects coincided with African leaders' political survival strategies, and the projects were effectively instrumentalized by the presidents. As visible and expensive expressions of state power, tangible commitments to economic development, and images of political stewardship, mega-infrastructure projects became ready tools for the rulers to demonstrate their performance legitimacy and sustain the patronage networks crucial to their power. In the blatant association between project completion timelines and elections, the rulers instrumentalized these projects as demonstrations of the administration's delivery effectiveness, stewardship, and performance legitimacy.

Mega-infrastructure projects were occasions to nourish the patronage networks that connected the presidency to wider society. Kenyatta's subordinates received kickbacks from the SGR project, generating multiple corruption charges, while the president also used the project to transfer the Kenyan Port Authority, the cash cow, from the opposition stronghold to the capital. In Angola, the condition-free Chinese credit-lines allowed Dos Santos to strengthen his power without meeting Western donors' requests for increased transparency and democracy. The Kilamba Kiaxi social housing project also rewarded bureaucrats and MPLA loyalists for their support in the elections.

Chinese-sponsored mega-projects are exhibitions of African *presidential* rather than *elite* extraversion for two reasons. First, political institutions in both Kenya and Angola were characterized by highly personalized styles of rule and concentration of power in the presidency, with Kenyatta's personalism inherited from his father, and Dos Santos' personal rule established over three decades and operated via the *Funtungo-Sonangol* nexus. Second, both Kenyatta and Dos Santos played prominent roles in materializing the projects, and it was thanks to presidential commitment that the projects achieved relative success (or avoided total failure). Despite starkly different political systems and modes of cooperation with China, the presidents of Kenya and Angola shared the strategy of presidential extraversion through China-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects.

7. Conclusion

Despite their structural inferiority in dealing with the second-largest economy in the world, Kenya and Angola actively instrumentalized this dependent relationship for their own political survival. This strategy of presidential extraversion through China-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects has the following three elements. Firstly, the Kenyan and Angolan infrastructure projects were African initiatives rather than impositions from China. The weighty involvement of Chinese actors in these projects does not change the fact that the ownerships of these projects is African and not Chinese. In both cases, the emergence of China, with readily available finance and capable service, provided African leaders an alternative choice to politically-conditioned Western finance. Second, the debt and bilateral trade implications that came with the infrastructure deals arguably further deepened the African countries' dependence within the global economic system, and with China in particular. African presidents were well aware of their inferiority in the global economic systems vis-à-vis China, yet instead of disengaging with China (or other global powers), they actively engaged with the external world to realize their own political calculations. Third, the highly visible and expensive Chinese-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects and associated Chinese loans granted African leaders resources for their domestic political survival via demonstrating performance legitimacy and/or sustaining their patronage networks.

In the context of the current infrastructure boom featuring a diverse range of international interests, infrastructure is once again associated with the image of progress and modernity, as in modernization theory (Rostow, 1960; Howe, Lockrem, Appel, Hackett, & Boyer, 2016; Mawdsley, 2015; Harvey & Knox, 2015). Starting from the turn of the millennium, traditional and emerging financiers such as the World Bank, Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, India, and USA, in addition to China, are financing mega-infrastructure projects in developing countries. There is therefore a pressing need for investigation of the rationale behind African leaders' infrastructure enthusiasm and whether and how Africa could shape foreign-sponsored infrastructure projects to its own benefit, a research agenda this paper sets out to contribute to. This paper adopts Chinese-financed and -constructed Kenyan railway and Angolan housing projects as case studies, but the presidential extraversion argument applies to foreign-sponsored mega-infrastructure projects in developing countries with relatively weak institutions,[43] that make the role of the president prominent, regardless the specific financier, project types, and host countries.

In addition to this timely policy contribution, this paper seeks to make the following three theoretical and empirical contributions. First, the presidential extraversion argument in this article challenges dependency theory and advances upon Bayart's classical extraversion theory. I show that African leaders actively maneuvered within Sino-African asymmetry to achieve domestic political ambitions. I show that it, in the cases from Kenya and Angola, it was not loosely defined 'elites' but chief decision-makers (presidents) who exercised the strategy of extraversion to achieve political survival via interactions with China. Second, the text contributes to the African agency debate in Sino-African relations literature by showing, with rich empirical evidence from Kenya and Angola, that Africa has agency, and where and how this agency operates. Finally, this paper relies on extensive fieldwork in Africa and China and in-depth interviews with stakeholders from both sides of the Sino-African infrastructure cooperation, triangulated with multi-lingual secondary sources. The empirical evidence presented in this paper sheds light on the black-box of Sino-African infrastructure deals and their implementation.

[43] Other examples include the Chinese-sponsored Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway in Ethiopia, which also features a prominent role for prime minister Meles Zenawi at the beginning of the project. The prime minister initiated the project, approached China for financial and technical support, and used it as a tangible demonstration of his developmental discourse (Terrefe, 2018; Wang, 2021). The India-sponsored Nyabarongo dam in Rwanda was instrumentalized to demonstrate a modernist developmental ideology (Dye, 2016), Chinese-sponsored dam projects in Sudan were tools of elite consolidation and nation-building (Mohamud & Verhoeven, 2016).

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