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Discursive Shifts:

US Self-Image in Framing Sino-African Relations

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Abstract

It is well acknowledged, both in academia and media, that the United States is highly pessimistic of China's increased presence in international affairs. Often, this Sino-pessimism is expressed through US political discourse on Sino-African relations. However, upon closer examination, the US, starting in the second Bush-era, began from a point of reserved optimism in regard to Sino-African relations. This reveals that the notion that the US has remained static in its negative portrayal of Sino-African relations is inaccurate. This study will examine how the US political discourse surrounding Sino-African relations has evolved through the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations, and more importantly why this evolution has occurred. Using critical discourse analysis, this study examines US elite political discourse to reveal themes and unquestioned assumptions prevalent in the US portrayal of Sino-African relations. This study finds that the discourse used by each of these administrations reveals more about the US than it does about the Sino-African relationship. The Bush administration showed excessive optimism that manifested through coercive liberalism and believed that the Chinese would model their engagement with Africa on US engagement and become an ally in liberalising Africa. The Obama administration attempted to rehabilitate the international image of the US through grand rhetoric and international liberalism, while positioning China as the illiberal 'other' that was a threat to African freedom and dignity. The Trump administration represents a shift to realism, spouting Sinophobia in Africa while spouting anti-Africa rhetoric in the United States, with a stated aim of upsetting the liberal order to unclear ends. By tracking change over time, the US discourse reveals more about how the US was attempting to project its self-image at the time than it does about Sino-African relations.

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations

AFC	Asian Financial Crisis
BUILD	Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CIDCA	China International Development Cooperation Agency
DOS	Department of State for the United States of America
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
IFF	Illicit Financial Flows
IMF	International Monetary Fund
US	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

"America's responsibility in the 21st century is to remain the shining city upon the hill, the force of whose ideas inspire greater chapters in man's development."

- Nana Akufo-Addo

To study the three most recent US presidents is to witness a 'hyperpower hegemon' in slow decline, and not a graceful one. As Joseph Nye phrased it, "all three twenty-first century presidents – Bush, Obama, Trump – resisted the metaphor of American decline while reacting to the rise of Asian powers such as China" (2019: 358). However, when analysing the foreign policy of these three presidents, cracks begin to appear as they strain to ignore their declining power.

One area where these fissures have become more apparent is in the elite political discourse surrounding Sino-African relations. Sino-African relations have experienced an inverse curve, rising exponentially as US hegemony has continued its slow decline. Thus, when the US began to criticize Sino-African relations, this was dismissed as an attempt by the US to maintain its hegemonic standing in Africa and largely escaped study.

While US pessimism surrounding Sino-African relations is often shown as a proportional reaction to increasing Chinese engagement with Africa, beginning with President Bush and culminating dramatically with the Trump administration, this ignores continuities and discontinuities exhibited by the three twenty-first century presidents. Upon closer examination, the US political discourse on Sino-African relations can illuminate how the US was attempting to project itself in the world at the time, and what role Africa, and indeed China, were expected to play in that attempt.

Much literature has dismissed US political discourse on Sino-African relations because it propagates many myths which have been widely discredited (see Brautigam, 2019b for myth-busting of US discourse on Sino-African relations). What has thus far remained understudied is why the US continues to propagate these myths, and to what purpose. To fill this gap in the literature, this thesis will answer the question: *how has the US representation of Sino-African*

relations changed over time? Further, why has the US discourse surrounding Sino-African relations changed?

Through the use of critical discourse analysis, this thesis will examine US political discourse on Sino-African relations from the twenty-first century US presidents. Rather than focusing on the 'truthfulness' of how the US has framed the Sino-African relationship, this study will use US political discourse to show the evolving self-image of the US-led liberal order, and how this has shaped how each administration has engaged with the issue of China in Africa. In turn, each of the three presidents studied here have reacted to this relationship in unique ways. While this reaction has long been painted as entirely pessimistic, the US trend of Sino-pessimism only began in earnest as the US began to lose confidence in the liberal world order.

This thesis uses a post-structuralist framework, examining how those with discursive power manipulate discourse to their benefit. Despite the shift from uni-polarity to multi-polarity currently taking place, the US still holds a significant amount of discursive power. Thus, a post-structuralist approach to US political discourse on Sino-African relations can reveal a deeper understanding of the existent power structures between the US and Africa and how they are evolving. This is a perspective which is oft ignored in the literature on Sino-African relations, which often paints US discourse on Sino-African relations as static.

The following section will be a review of pertinent academic literature on Sino-African relations. This review of academic literature is important because many of the themes studied in academic literature are also apparent in the political discourse reviewed later. This section has been divided into three threads of literature: Sino-optimism, Sino-pessimism, and Sino-pragmatism. These categories provide a definition and an overview of the main arguments used by each of the actors who fall into these various categories, which will be used throughout the thesis. These three threads of scholarship will then be contextualized within the wider debate surrounding Sino-African relations.

Literature Review

Analysing North-South relations has a rich history in academia. Due to the power disparities between North and South, it is also a field which is too often dominated by Northern representations of the South (see Amitav Acharya, 2013). The North has long sought to 'know' the South, and thereby create representations of those in the South. These representations are "imbued with unquestioned presumptions regarding the freedom, democracy, and self-determination as well as the identities of the subjects who are entitled to enjoy these things" (Doty, 1996: 3). Within a post-structuralist framework, those doing the studying (the global North) are also revealing how they define themselves. Thus, these representations must be examined and critically assessed for what they can tell us not only about the subject being studied, but those who are performing the study. Given the hegemonic status of the US, analysis of US discourse unveils prevailing power structures and 'regimes of truth' created by those with discursive power. This study will first define the term 'Sino-Africa' as it will be used throughout this thesis, before reviewing the current literature on Sino-African relations to identify key debates taking place, and finally focusing in on the importance of US discourse on Sino-African relations.

When discussing the field of Sino-African relations, the problem of overgeneralization is made clear even within the titling of the discipline. When using the term 'Sino-Africa', the actors indicated by this term are unclear. For the purposes of this study, the 'Sino' half of this term will be used in the same manor it is used by US politicians, to indicate both public and private Chinese actors engaging with Africa. Thus, when US politicians criticise the Chinese, they are criticising both the limited amount of aid China extends to Africa, as well as the much more significant private sector investment. The 'Africa' half of this term will refer to Sub-Saharan Africa. While Africa is a vast and diverse continent, within US political discourse it is often homogenized. A further opportunity for study could be analysing US discourse on China's relationship with individual African nations, though unfortunately that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

In attempting to review the vast amount of scholarship conducted on Sino-African relations, three divergent schools of literature emerge. Using Adem's (2010, 2013, 2016) categorization, these three research trends will be referred to as Sino-pessimism, Sino-

optimism, and Sino-pragmatism. Turning first to Sino-pessimism, this is the rhetoric that is largely attributed to the US, and to a lesser extent the global North as a whole. Sino-pessimism has also been heavily represented in US news sources. Sino-pessimists have accused China of a whole rash of ill effects in Africa: undermining good governance and propping up authoritarian leaders (Naim, 2007), intentionally hindering industrialization (Power, 2008), bankrolling genocide, plundering natural resources, exploitation (both of labour and the environment) (Navarro, 2007), disregard for human rights (Breslin & Taylor, 2008), and neocolonialism (Langan, 2018), among others. Large (2008) similarly analyses Chinese non-intervention in human rights abuses in African nations, rhetoric which is still being used by US politicians to criticize Sino-African relations. A key aspect of Sino-pessimism which the US increasingly draws from in political discourse is the idea of 'debt trap diplomacy', the idea that China is intentionally over-indebting African nations with the goal of being repaid with political favours in the case of default. The idea of debt-trap diplomacy emerged shortly after a Chinese company bought a controlling share of the Hambantota port from a heavily indebted Sri Lanka in 2017, which an Indian think tank dubbed as debt-book diplomacy and portrayed it as a security threat in the region (Brautigam, 2019a). Soon after this narrative emerged in early 2017, US political elites co-opted this language and continue to use it to this day. This is a view of Sino-African relations which is often examined through a lens of realist theory. The Sino-pessimistic academic literature often portrays trade with Africa as a zero-sum game between China and the US, in which China is grabbing an increasing portion of trade through nefarious business practices. Further, framing Sino-African relations as a threat to US security is also in keeping with the realist tradition, and a trend which has been prevalent within US political discourse since the Cold War (Kirshner, 2009; Yang, 2017). Sino-pessimists point to the tendency of Chinese firms to invest in energy and resource extraction as a threat to US interests in African resources (Kiggundu, 2008). Adem (2013) expands upon this, arguing that Sino-pessimists believe that Chinese resource extraction is intentionally cementing African nations position at the lowest rung of the global economic ladder as passive suppliers of natural resources, therefore opening them to Chinese coercion in the case of loan default or distress.

Sino-optimism arose as a critique of the negative discourse on Sino-African relations. In the early days of Sino-African research, coloured largely by the global financial crisis of 2008 (from which China managed to emerge largely unaffected) academic studies on Chinese engagement in Africa focused on how the US or the West was affected by increased Sino-African cooperation (Peng, 2018; Hirono & Suzuki, 2014). Prah (2007) discusses the hypocrisy of Western states criticizing Chinese engagement in Africa, given their long history of African

exploitation. Sino-optimists largely take issue with the portrayal of naïve, primitive African nations being exploited by cruel, immoral Chinese actors (Mawdsley, 2008; Jackson, 2012). In an attempt to counter this view, Mohan & Lampert (2013) find that African nations have a considerable amount of agency in their negotiations with China, and that this agency is often overlooked by Sino-pessimists. Sino-optimists compare and contrast how the US and China engage with Africa, citing the rhetoric of mutual benefit as well as respect evidenced by the latter as a motivator in choosing to engage with China (Friedman, 2009; Mohan & Power, 2008; Haslam, Wang, & Deng, 2015). An AfroBarometer survey published in 2016 also shows that China has a largely popular perception in Africa. The recent, rapid economic development of China, alongside massive poverty reduction, gives African nations a role model for their own development and poverty reduction (Friedman, 2009). Sino-optimists point to the tangible impacts of Chinese engagement: advanced infrastructure and economic development, free from the political conditionalities typically imposed by Western lenders, as beneficial to African nations (Sautman & Hairong, 2007). It should also be noted that, despite its prevalence within the Sino-pessimism discourse, there is a lack of evidence that China is intentionally overburdening nations with debt, and in fact the Chinese are taking steps to mitigate the effects of over-indebtedness, as well as becoming more cautious in their lending practices (Malm, 2016). Additionally, in response to international criticism, China has been adjusting its practices to fall more in line with international standards. When announcing the formation of the Chinese International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), which would formally separate developmental aid from other forms of capital flow, Beijing stressed CIDCA's importance for their perceived legitimacy internationally (Rudyak, 2019). Sino-optimists point to the case of Venezuela, a country that has been defaulting on their Chinese resource-backed loans for over four years, much to the detriment of Chinese economic and strategic interests, as proof that the debt-trap narrative does not hold weight (Kratz, Feng, & Wright, 2019). Today, many African leaders and political elites espouse Sino-optimist views (Adem, 2016). These views align with a liberal economic perspective, citing that even if China is gaining more from the relationship than African states, increased economic activity is beneficial to both parties (Adem, 2010).

Situated between Sino-pessimism and Sino-optimism, we have Sino-pragmatism. Sino-pragmatists believe that Sino-African relations can be both beneficial and negative, owing to the overwhelming amount of Chinese economic activity on the African continent. Deborah Brautigam concludes her myth-busting book on Sino-African relations with "China's rise in Africa is cause for some concern, but […] many of the fears about Chinese aid and engagement

are misinformed, the alarm out of proportion" (2009: 307). While Sino-pragmatists acknowledge that African leaders have agency, they would also argue that few nations are able to exercise it in a beneficial manner (Carmody & Kragelund, 2016). Sino-pragmatists accept Chinese rhetoric of respect and mutual benefit, though they would argue that their actions rarely live up to their rhetoric (Alden & Alves, 2008; Alden, Large, & Soares de Oliveira, 2008). Sino-pragmatists argue that China is engaging with Africa to further their own economic interests (which is a sentiment often expressed by the Chinese themselves) (Drogendijk & Blomkvist, 2013). While the Chinese may be supplying infrastructure and the physical means for economic development, many African actors lack the efficient institutions required to be able to use these to their benefit (Sindzingre, 2011; Lampert & Mohan, 2014). On the issue of debt management, the IMF (2019) recommends the implementation of more cautious sovereign debt management schemes in emerging economies to avoid over-indebtedness. In a 2019 paper, Kratz, Feng & Wright examine 40 cases of Chinese debt renegotiation and found that the most common outcome of these negotiations is debt-forgiveness, followed by deferment. The only case of asset seizure (a loose term in this context, given that it took place in the private sector) they found was the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, though following the international backlash from the acquisition of that port, it seems unlikely that China would choose to go that route again given their history of course correcting in the face of international criticism. Indeed, as mentioned previously, the Sino-Venezuelan case disproves this debt-trap narrative, as China has not seized any assets as a means of recovering overdue payments. In this way, Sino-pragmatists cover a wide range of theoretical traditions. The overarching theme within Sino-pragmatism remains that China is supplying capital and infrastructure, but it is up to individual African nations and the institutions within them to craft policies or develop institutions that ensure they benefit from engagement with China (Oyejide et al., 2009).

Few academics now will write from a purely optimistic or pessimistic view on Sino-African relations. Many acknowledge the position of Sino-pragmatism, with many believing that it is too soon to know the outcome of Chinese engagement with Africa. Due to the sheer amount of Chinese economic activity within Africa, as well as the variety of ways China engages with Africa, claiming that Chinese engagement is entirely negative or positive would be near impossible. Despite this, political discourse remains largely bipolar on the issue. There is a common sentiment that US political leaders and statesmen are largely Sino-pessimistic, while African leaders are largely Sino-optimistic. However, as Sino-African relations have evolved, so too have the positions of both African and American politicians.

When researching Sino-African relations, there is also a temporal dimension. Almost all of the literature supporting Sino-pessimism is from the mid-aughts. As research has advanced and China's influence becomes more apparent, Sino-pragmatism and, to a lesser extent, Sino-optimism becomes more prevalent. This temporal dimension is also represented in the political discourse. During the height of academic Sino-pessimism (the early aughts) the Bush administration was pursuing active engagement with China in Africa, more accurately classified as Sino-optimism. Conversely, the Trump administration employs a colourful form of Sino-pessimism, at a time when academia is beginning to carve out a more nuanced view of Sino-African relations.

In the Sino-African context, US discourse takes on an even more important role. The discourse on Sino-African relations is heavily influenced by rumour and mischaracterizations which spread widely and quickly. These rumours have been spread by international as well as national actors and are quickly taken up by local media. Hairong and Sautman (2012) studied the pervasive rumour that Chinese labour in African infrastructure projects was largely performed by imported Chinese prisoners. They found that the rumour was first given credibility in 1991 when Roberta Cohen, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, stated that 75% of labour for an infrastructure project in Benin was performed by Chinese prison labour. Although the rumour that Chinese labourers in Africa are prisoners has since been de-bunked, it still remains prevalent to this day.

Additionally, there are frequent rumours that the Chinese will be repossessing various projects such as the state-run electricity company in Zambia (another rumour further propagated by a high-ranking US politician), or a port in Mombasa, due to loan default (Lusaka Times, 2018; Niba, 2019). In the case of the Mombasa port, the alleged leaked contract (later proven to have been falsified) included the clause "neither the borrower nor any of its assets is entitled to any right of immunity based on the *grounds of sovereignty*" (Niba, 2019), echoing the common US narrative of loss of sovereignty due to failure to repay Chinese loans. In this way, US political discourse is shaping the perception and reporting of Chinese actions within the Africa continent. To this day US politicians continue to espouse myths about Sino-African relations which have long been debunked, only to be given new life in African media.

An easy explanation for why US discourse is Sino-pessimistic would be that Chinese economic interests in Africa are in direct competition with US economic interests, however this is rarely the case. Within the realm of aid the US typically invests in health, education, and security whereas China typically invests in economic or infrastructure projects (OECD Stats, 2019; Dreher et al., 2019). In October of 2018, the US announced the Better Utilization of

Investment Leading to Development (BUILD) act, which would allocate US$ 60 billion of funding for development projects in developing countries (OPIC, 2018). The timing of this was viewed with suspicion, coming a mere month after China had announced US$ 60 billion of funding for projects in Africa (Pilling, 2018). However, even these two sources of funding vary widely in which projects would be eligible for financing. While the Chinese funding would cover large scale infrastructure, the BUILD act would cover business and private enterprise. Therefore, even when the US and China engage in economic development within Africa their approaches are complementary, given that the lack of infrastructure is a serious hinderance to attracting international investment. Swedlund (2017) finds in a large-scale survey of developmental actors on the ground that China and the US rarely come into direct competition with one another. Given their divergent interests within the African continent the ways in which China and the US engage could be seen as complementary, with the US engaging with social concerns and China engaging with economic concerns.

Thus, while academic research can be categorized into Sino-optimism, -pessimism, and -pragmatism, political discourse is more difficult to neatly categorize. Furthermore, political discourse is often contradictory. The political aspect of political discourse must also be acknowledged, given that diplomats often uses discourse to mask the true intentions of a state (van Dijk, 1998). Given the complementary approach to aid and investment practiced by China and the US in Africa, the question of why US political discourse continues to attempt to undermine China on the continent must be addressed. Although the US criticisms regarding Sino-African relations have been debunked, US politicians continue to propagate the same myths. Despite years of criticism, Africa has continued to engage with China at an increasing pace. Therefore, this research paper will examine why the US has continued to employ the same rhetoric when framing Sino-African relations, along with why changes have occurred. Post-structuralist critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be utilized to track the evolution of US discourse on Sino-African relations, which will be outlined in the following section.

Methodology

Post-structuralism begins with the basic tenet that the social world is constructed through discourse, and that those in power manipulate discourse to their benefit. Therefore, the more powerful the voice the more influence an actor may have in shaping global narratives or representations. In this framework, power is productive and has the ability to shape the representation of actors, which in turn dictate what behaviour is appropriate or inappropriate for actors (McMorrow, 2018). The creation of dominant representations is a show of hegemonic power which is a two-way process, as how we define the other is a representation of how we define ourselves and our social relations (Fairclough, 2012). In this study a Foucauldian definition of discourse will be employed, with discourse being defined as communicative acts and how these communicative acts relate to, and make possible, non-discursive action (Anaïs, 2013).

The methodology used for this study will be a CDA, drawing on concepts from Foucault's genealogy. Due the limited size of this study, a full genealogy is beyond the scope of this study. Further, Foucault imagined his methods as a 'toolbox', for a researcher to pick or discard as they found useful which makes genealogy a useful tool for mixed-methodology studies (Dreyfus & Rainbow, 1983).

CDA will largely be employed as method, whereas genealogy will be used as methodology. While CDA attempts to uncover how knowledge and relations are shaped by discourse, genealogy goes a step further by including power or hegemony in the analysis of knowledge production and the formation of representations (Fairclough, 2012; Anaïs, 2013). Genealogy is a useful tool because it stresses the study of both discourse and what actions it legitimizes, rather than studying text or practice in isolation (Anaïs, 2013). CDA (emphasis on the C) will be used rather than discourse analysis because of the expository nature of criticism. As Foucault argued, "a critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are […it] is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed" (1988: 154-155). As a starting point, genealogy problematizes a practice and attempts to find ruptures, or singular disruptions in acceptable practice or discourse, at which point a regime of truth begins to destabilize. Regimes of truth can be understood as the dominant discursive framing of a topic, the strength, or weakness, of which

is illustrated by its ability to shut out conflicting frames (McMorrow, 2018). This study seeks to understand how the Sino-pessimism espoused by US politicians has become destabilized, how it is no longer as self-evident as once believed.

The method used for this study will consist of three steps, inspired by Anaïs' writings on combining genealogy and CDA (2013). Step one will be assembling an archive of discourse to be analysed. A genealogical archive would strive to be all encompassing, however in CDA it is common practice to place limitations on the scope of the archive. In this case, the first limitation will be that the discourse studied will come from high-level US government officials in the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations discussing Sino-African relations, paying particular attention to economic relations and policy announcements. This discourse will be read through once, accepting the discourse at face value.

The second step will be a second reading of the discourse, this time striving to identify emergent themes and trends. It will also allow for the analysis of the social structures, as well as non-discursive action, present behind the discourse. Largely this study will focus on themes and trends in the content of the political discourse analysed. This second reading will aim to destabilize accepted truths (McMorrow, 2018) and will attempt to find contradictions, either between discourse or between discourse and action, as well as what these contradictions can tell us of how the US has attempted to construct their international framing.

Although this second step shares several similarities with a contrapuntal analysis as theorized by Chowdhry (2007), a choice was made not to utilize a post-colonial methodology. Acknowledging the privilege of the author of this thesis as a white student in the Global North, and an American at that, the subaltern voice is one perhaps more appropriately explored by a member of the subaltern. This said, a contrapuntal analysis of the use of US political rhetoric on the ground in Africa would be a fascinating project, though unfortunately one beyond the scope of this thesis.

The third step taken will be 'reading for silence' (Anaïs, 2013). This attempts to uncover what goes unsaid in the discourse. This includes binary opposition, such as good versus evil, or us versus them dichotomies. These binaries create representations of both the subject and the object of discourse and must be thoroughly interrogated to reveal *why* they have been constructed in this way (Doty, 1996). This questions the assumption that these representations are natural, or independent of discursive practice and power.

Discourse can serve as a window to observe the power structures of representation present between states. The aim of analysing political discourse on Sino-African relations is to go further than the materialist reading of the US attempting to counter Chinese hegemonic

advances. Through the use of CDA, the underlying representations present in the discourse, along with the actions they legitimize, are laid bare.

The focus of this study will be the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. Although the Sino-African relationship stretches back centuries and has inspired several articles (see Brautigam, 2009 & Chan, 2013), this is a subject beyond the scope of this study. This study seeks to understand how this relationship has been discursively framed by US political actors. Further, the choice to focus on the twenty-first century presidents was made because only within the past two decades has China replaced Western powers as the largest influence (economically) on the continent. Thus, these are the three presidents who have engaged with the construction of the modern framing of the Sino-Africa relationship within US political discourse. Due to the size of this study, the main focus will be on elite political actors from the US. Given more time or space, including more African actors, political and from civil society, would illuminate a more complete understanding of how the US discourse has shaped relations.

This methodology will be applied in the following section. The analysis section will begin first by establishing continuities between the framing of Sino-African relations by the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. This will illuminate the discursive framing of how the US sees itself as an actor in Africa. The analysis will then move onto the discontinuities within the US framing of Sino-African relations, as well as explaining why these discursive changes have taken place.

Analysis

Continuities

Moral Superiority & Paternalism

The Africa inherited by President Bush from President Clinton was one entirely defined by what James Ferguson dubbed 'Africa talk', "it is never just Africa, but always the crisis in Africa, the problems of Africa, the failure of Africa, the moral challenge of Africa to 'the international community'" (2006: 2). A 2000 edition of The Economist portrayed Africa as 'The Hopeless Continent', a place defined by poverty, disease, corruption, and war. Even President Clinton, who was popularly perceived in Africa, was plagued by a legacy of missteps in Africa. President Clinton oversaw the bombing of a 'chemical weapons' factory in the Sudan, which was in fact a pharmaceutical manufacturer. Further, President Clinton was criticized for both his disastrous intervention in Somalia, and his failure to intervene in the Rwandan genocide (Tukur, Hyson, & Bennett 2000). When Colin Powell, Secretary of State for George W. Bush, remarked in 2001 that "I don't think we can ever say that the West will get tired of Africa. We're not going to be given that luxury. The problem is so great that it will be a problem for the world and a problem for the West for a long time to come" (DOS, 2001), he is referring to an Africa defined by problems. Problems that, despite the best intentions of the US, are destined to remain a moral challenge to the West. Consequently, when China entered the scene in Africa, it may have been met with a sense of relief, a sense that China was finally helping to shoulder the 'problem of Africa'.

Contrary to how it was portrayed in popular media, and in much academic literature as well, the US was not immediately wary of Chinese engagement in Africa. The Bush administration demonstrated a fair amount of Sino-optimism. This was owed largely to a belief that the US would be able to shape Chinese engagement with Africa to match Western, liberal engagement. This was made evident when Jendayi Frazer, Bush's Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of African Affairs, held a sub-dialogue with Beijing to discuss China's plans for Africa (Raine, 2009). Frazer would later remark "I think there's a coming together, a consensus approach on how to deal with Africa's development" (C-SPAN, 2006). It is pertinent to note that at the sub-dialogue referenced, there is no evidence of an African presence (Raine, 2009).

Thus, the paternalism practiced by the Bush administration extended to shaping China as a responsible stakeholder in Africa, thus legitimizing the Chinese presence on the continent. Assistant Secretary Frazer's phrasing that China and the US have come together to 'deal with' Africa is also telling and reveals the limited role the Bush administration envisions for Africans in solving the 'problem' of Africa. Rather than framing African development as solely an American project, as previous administrations had done, it was now a joint venture between China and the US.

Despite this framing of Africa's development as a partnership between the US and China, the US still maintained a sense of moral superiority in the relationship. This was made clear when James Swan, President Bush's Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of African Affairs, remarked "we engage at multiple levels to influence Chinese actions on issues such as good governance, human rights, and transparency – issues that we believe should play as prominent a role in Chinese Africa policy as in ours" (DOS, 2008a). Thus, while the Bush administration welcomed China's engagement with Africa, the US also reasserted their role as the 'gatekeeper' of Africa, fulfilling their self-imposed role as the final authority on the appropriate way to engage with Africa.

The Bush administration's claim to moral superiority was grounded on the use of conditionality-based aid, typically tying aid to liberal reform. As Deputy Assistant Secretary Swan remarked, "observers have warned that China's assistance efforts in Africa, which emphasize 'no strings' and are not predicated on the same kinds of conditionality as other countries' aid programs, could endanger progress in promoting good governance and market reform in Africa" (DOS, 2008a). However, the use of conditionalities has long been seen as ineffective (see Easterly, 2006). In fact, the liberal conditionalities employed by the IMF and World Bank in the 1970s saw the decimation of many African economies (Singer, 1989). These conditionalities coerce nations into adopting liberalizing policy prescriptions, often times against their own best interests (Morrisey, 2004; Montinola, 2010). They also allow for further expressions of paternalism, as the US is able to leverage the provision of aid to bend African states to their will.

Like the Bush administration, the Obama administration would engage with Africa using discourse laden with paternalism and moral superiority. Johnnie Carson, Obama's Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of African Affairs, warned in 2010 that "it is up to African governments to manage carefully their relationship with the Chinese […] we ask both sides to be responsible partners in the process" (DOS, 2010a). This reinforces the same narrative of the US as the gatekeepers of Africa – although this time the US is positioning itself

to guarantee that both African and Chinese actors are behaving appropriately. This also illustrated the Obama administration's shift towards Sino-pessimism, as the US begun to frame China as an untrustworthy actor that Africa should be wary of. This narrative was further enforced in 2014 when Ben Rhodes, Obama's Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications, remarked "we welcome other nations being invested in Africa, and, frankly, China can play a constructive role in areas like developing infrastructure" (White House, 2014). The discourse used by Advisor Rhodes attempts to 'welcome' China into Africa, after more than six decades of formal Sino-African diplomatic relations, while demarcating areas the US finds appropriate for Chinese involvement, further enforcing the position of the Obama administration as the director of Africa's development.

While the Bush administration's claim to moral superiority rested on conditionalities, the Obama administration's claim to moral superiority relied on the rhetoric of positioning the US as a superior actor to China. In a leaked diplomatic telegram from 2010, Assistant Secretary Carson warned a Nigerian trade delegation that "China is a very aggressive and pernicious competitor with no morals. China is not in Africa for altruistic reasons. China is in Africa for China primarily" (Blair, 2010). Reading this in the negative gives the impression that the US is in Africa for purely altruistic reasons, an image that the Obama administration was quick to project. It should be noted that Assistant Secretary Carson was in Nigeria negotiating an oil deal and remarked how oil made Nigeria the "most important country in Africa for the United States" (Blair, 2010), a seemingly less than altruistic mission.

The Obama administration consistently framed falling US imports of African oil as a moral virtue. Advisor Rhodes remarked in 2014 that the US is "less focused on resources from Africa and more focused on deepening trade and investment relations" (White House, 2014). However, the Obama administration oversaw a steep decline in trade with Africa. From a high in 2008, when the US imported over US$ 113 billion in goods from Africa, to the time of Advisor Rhode's remark in 2014, US imports from Africa had fallen to US$ 34 billion, a volume of trade last seen in 2002 (US Census, 2020). Further, the rhetoric of focusing more on trade is a continuity from the Bush administration, as illustrated when President Bush remarked in 2002 that "trade is the engine of development. And by promoting it, we will help meet the needs of the world's poor" (White House, 2002).

This rhetoric of the moral superiority of free trade and globalisation has long been the justification for the US liberalising mission. With the introduction of China into Africa, and falling African oil imports to the US, this rhetoric began to shift slightly. The Obama administration would stress, in contrast to China, how "Africa needs partnership, not patronage

[…] a model of sustainable partnership that adds value rather than extracts it" as Secretary Clinton, President Obama's Secretary of State, remarked (DOS, 2012b). President Obama similarly remarked that "economic relationships can't simply be about building countries' infrastructure with foreign labour or extracting Africa's natural resources. Real economic partnerships have to be a good deal for Africa" (White House, 2015). By using this rhetoric, the Obama administration reasserted its claims of adjudicating the legitimacy of actors within Africa, determining what is or is not a 'real economic partnership'.

The Trump administration continued espousing the rhetoric of the moral superiority of free trade and private enterprise. As Mark Green, Administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) under President Trump, remarked "private enterprise is the single most powerful force on Earth, lifting lives and building communities" (USAID, 2019). Interestingly, the man chosen to spread this message of corporate morality was Rex Tillerson, former chief executive of Exxon, and brief Secretary of State to President Trump. In March of 2018 Secretary Tillerson embarked on a multi-day tour of Africa. During his trip, Secretary Tillerson took the opportunity to repeatedly lecture African dignitaries about the dangers of doing business with China, "which encourages dependency using opaque contracts, predatory loan practices, and corrupt deals that mire nations in debt and undercut their sovereignty" (DOS, 2018a). Perhaps Secretary Tillerson was speaking from personal experience, having been implicated in dealings designed to skirt anti-corruption measures in Liberia during his time at Exxon (Paterson, Olson, & Grimaldi, 2018).

If one were to judge US involvement in the African oil sector based on political discourse, one might conclude that the US has completely divested from oil extraction in Africa. Tibor Nagy, President Trump's Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of African Affairs, expounded the virtues of US investors as socially and environmentally responsible (DOS, 2019a). President Trump's second Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, during a visit to Ethiopia in February of 2020 remarked that "our track record of being a force for good when we invest economically is unchallenged" (DOS, 2020b). A day later Secretary Pompeo would stress "The United States stands for […] environmental responsibility […] We stand for true partnership, true economic liberation" (DOS, 2020c). These statements were made on the 18th and 19th of February, respectively. On the 17th of February, Secretary Pompeo announced a US$ 2 billion US investment package for offshore natural gas extraction in Angola (DOS, 2020a), a decidedly 'unclean' area of investment.

American Exceptionalism

The current running through all of this rhetoric of the moral superiority and paternalism towards Africa is a deep sense of American exceptionalism. The sense that, left to its own devices, Africa is unable to stand on its own two feet. Africa without America would be doomed to remain the 'dark continent', a place without a decent life of "democracy, good governance and transparency" (DOS, 2007a) that only America is able to provide. When it became apparent that the US would not be able to dictate China's Africa policy, China became the newest 'problem' of Africa, the latest in a long line of problems the US would have to solve for Africa. When discussing emerging powers, Secretary Clinton remarked "the simple fact is that no significant global challenge can be met without us" (DOS, 2010b). John Kerry, President Obama's second Secretary of State, remarked "what we bring to the table is frankly a lot more attractive than what other countries bring to the table" (C-SPAN, 2013). Assistant Secretary Nagy remarked "we are reminding Africans that no one can match America's contributions" (Bureau of African Affairs, 2020). All of these lend into a narrative that the US feels that, despite all the 'help' the US has given to Africa over the years, Africa is acting as a petulant child, quick to forget who their real ally has been.

Nayak & Malone (2009) define American exceptionalism as an unshakeable belief that the US is unique, ordained with a mission to reshape the world in its own image. This sense of exceptionalism explains why the US discourse on Sino-African relations is so contradictory. The US, as a singular hegemon, has long seen itself as the supplier of criticism rather than the subject of it. Therefore, when the Trump administration sends a corrupt oil executive to lecture African leaders of the dangers of corrupt Chinese investors, the specific messenger is of less import than the fact that it is an *American* messenger. Thus, when the Obama administration is cutting oil deals in Nigeria, this is not extractive in the same sense as Chinese oil deals, due to the US confirming that it is a 'real economic partnership'. And finally, when the Bush administration attempts to nudge China into promoting democracy, human rights, and transparency in Africa, the fact that the US promotion of these ideals has had little impact is of less importance than the American belief in these ideals.

This exceptionalism has also justified the US in criticising the Sino-African relationship. During all three twenty-first century administrations there was an overarching narrative that, with this president, Africa was finally being listened to. President Bush remarked "America is on a mission of mercy. We're treating African leaders as equal partners" (White

House, 2008). President Obama remarked "I've worked to transform America's relationship with Africa – so that we're truly listening to our African friends and working together as equal partners" (White House, 2015). Michael Pompeo, President Trump's second Secretary of State, contrasted this approach with that of China when he remarked "not every nation doing business in Africa from outside the continent adopts the American model of partnership" (DOS, 2020c).

Despite this rhetoric of partnership and equality, the paternalism and moral superiority exhibited by all three administrations makes it clear that this is not a partnership of equals, that Africa is not being listened to but lectured. This demonstrates the discursive power these three administrations believed that they held and were trying to maintain. By using this rhetoric of finally achieving equal partnership, the US would be able to operate on the same basis of moral superiority and paternalism it has long employed when engaging with Africa, while the partnership has exhibited few fundamental changes. Now, having highlighted the discursive basis upon which the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations have built the US-Africa relationship, this paper will move onto the discontinuities in the discourse, and why these have taken place.

Discontinuities

Bush-era Sino-Optimism

Of the three presidents analysed by this study, none have shown a more zealous belief in the expansion of the liberal order than President Bush. The 1990s had brought two significant events which cemented the supremacy of the US-led liberal order: the end of the Cold War, marking the 'end of history' and the 'final universalization' of Western liberal democracy as theorized by Francis Fukuyama in 1992. Secondly, the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) proved that Western capitalism was the superior economic model, a sentiment perhaps best captured by Mortimer Zuckerman's *A Second American Century* in a 1998 edition of Foreign Affairs. Consequently, when President Bush took office, the hegemonic standing of liberalism seemed assured.

However, after 9/11 the liberal order, and the peace it promised to bring, was under threat. The Bush administration was made acutely aware that poverty could create discontent strong enough to make itself known in the global North. Post 9/11 the Bush administration pursued the expansion of the liberal order with a religious zeal, using force where necessary.

As the 9/11 Commission Report phrased it, "the American homeland is the planet" (2004). In Africa this resulted in several programs to bring liberal development to Africa. For an account of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, President Bush's most ambitious foray into economic development policy, and the extent to which it brought liberal reform rather than development see Soederberg, 2004.

The preoccupation of the Bush administration with the War on Terror also explains why the Bush administration only began engaging with the issue of China in Africa in 2005. As previously stated, the Bush administration initially met China in Africa with a surprising amount of optimism. This can be attributed to the Bush administrations increased focus on international security and stability post 9/11, when China was reframed as a 'strategic partner' rather than a 'strategic competitor' (Sutter, 2003). Therefore, the Bush administration believed that it would be able to "continue efforts to nudge China toward becoming a responsible international stakeholder" in Africa, as framed by Claudia Anyaso, President Bush's Director of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs for the Bureau of African Affairs (DOS, 2007a). This revealed the confidence that the Bush administration held in the liberal order, a confidence that China would inevitably adopt liberal norms and become, in the judgement of the US, a legitimate actor in Africa. This optimism was perhaps best expressed when Deputy Assistant Secretary Swan remarked "China has even modelled many of its engagement programs after very successful US exchanges on the continent" (DOS, 2008a). The self-image the Bush administration sought to exude was one of optimism in the liberal order, which extended to the Bush-era discourse on Sino-Africa relations.

Thus, when the Bush administration critiqued China for how it engaged with Africa, these were dismissed as the growing pains of a newly liberalized state. Director Anyaso expressed several areas of concern for the US regarding China in Africa: the lack of local job creation, lack of concern for environmental and labour standards, and their apparent disregard for spreading the liberal norms of human rights and good governance (DOS, 2008b). Despite this, Director Anyaso stressed that "China's presence in Africa is not a zero-sum game for the United States […] we are urging China to engage cooperatively with international donors for a rules-based approach to aid" (DOS, 2008b).

A Turn Toward Sino-Pessimism

A fascinating discontinuity happened between the Bush and Obama administration, when, using the criticisms about China in Africa utilized by the Bush administration, the Obama administration shifted dramatically towards pessimism regarding China in Africa. President Obama remarked in 2015 that "real economic partnerships have to be a good deal for Africa – they have to create jobs and capacity for Africans" (White House, 2015). Secretary Clinton, when asked about Chinese investment in Africa, stressed that "investments in Africa should be sustainable and for the benefit of the African people" later adding "we don't want them to undermine good governance" (DOS, 2011). As Assistant Secretary Carson framed it, "The Chinese are dealing with the Mugabe's and Bashir's of the world, which is a contrarian political model" (Blair, 2010). This illustrates the continuity within the discourse on China in Africa between the Bush and Obama administrations: lack of job creation, sustainability, and good governance. It also illustrates that during the Obama administration, the discourse shifted from what the US was doing in Africa, to what the US was doing better than China in Africa.

However, during an interview in Zambia, Secretary Clinton goes a step further than the Bush administration and espouses powerful Sino-pessimism. Secretary Clinton remarked "it is easy – and we saw that during colonial times – it is easy to come in, take out natural resources, pay off leaders, and leave. And when you leave, you don't leave much behind for the people who are there […] We don't want to see a *new colonialism* in Africa [emphasis added]" (DOS, 2011). Equating Chinese engagement with Africa to European colonialism is offensive and dismissive of the shear brutality experienced by the African continent during that period. President Obama, who narrated his ancestor's treatment at the hands of colonial officers when addressing the African Union in 2015, should be particularly aware of the insensitivity of this comment. Moreover, this ignores the discursive aspect of colonialism: a belief in an ideological superiority (Nkrumah, 1965), such as the moral superiority or paternalism the US has long practiced in their engagement with Africa. The very fact that Secretary Clinton would warn of a new colonialism in Africa reflects the overarching narrative that Africa cannot take care of itself and must be guided by the US, particularly when dealing with a 'pernicious actor' such as China.

While the Bush administration exhibited optimism in attempting to shape China into a responsible stakeholder in Africa, accusing China of 'a new colonialism' marks a shift away from the rhetoric of welcoming China into Africa. This casual accusation of colonialism

exposes a lack of confidence on behalf of the Obama administration. Name calling is rarely the first resort of a confident actor. When President Bush entered office, the eventual universality of the liberal order seemed all but inevitable. However, when President Obama entered office the liberal order was facing two of its most difficult trials to date, the first being the global financial crisis of 2008 (GFC). While the AFC reinforced the supremacy of Western capitalism, the GFC exposed the weaknesses of the US-led liberal economic order. Further, China emerged from the GFC relatively unscathed, suggesting that an alternative economic model to Western capitalism could be found in China, one less prone to global crisis. Indeed, as previously mentioned, US imports from Africa fell by more than half between 2008 to 2009 (US Census, 2020). This fall in African imports made 2009 the first year China surpassed the US as Africa's largest trading partner (Dews, 2016).

Moreover, the Obama administration was facing a second, concurrent crisis of legitimacy. Burdened with the widely criticised War on Terror initiated by the Bush administration, the US was losing popularity through the continuance of what was increasingly viewed as an illegal war, as declared by Kofi Annan in 2004, (MacAskill & Borger, 2004). The Bush administration exhibited their own hubris through unilateral actions post-9/11, of pre-emptively imposing liberalism as a 'stabilising force'. As was evident by the time President Obama took office, the stabilising force of liberalism had not gone to plan, with international perception shifting against the US as the War on Terror seemed intractable. Thus, the liberal order inherited by the Obama administration faced challenges on two fronts: the GFC had proven the weakness of the liberal economic order, while the backlash from the War on Terror showed that the Bush administration's attempt at spreading liberalism was flawed, as well as proving that the US was not immune to international criticism.

Interestingly, this negative perception of the US did not extend to Africa. In a 2009 AfroBarometer survey of 20 African nations 76% of correspondents saw the US as helping somewhat or a lot in their countries. This can be partly attributed to the success of the Bush administration's Africa policies, which had made the Bush administration popular in Africa (Dlamini, 2018). This can also be partly attributed to President Obama's African heritage. President Obama was quick to position himself as a 'son of Africa' (DOS, 2012b). The election of the first president of colour in the US led to a wave of Obamamania in Africa which, paired with the positive African legacy of the Bush administration, meant that the Obama administration could pay minimal attention to Africa while retaining their positive perception on the continent. This was made evident when Assistant Secretary Carson noted "The United States' reputation is stable, and its popularity is the highest in Africa compared to anywhere

else in the world. Obama has helped increase that influence" (Blair, 2010). Consequently, the Obama administration was free to continue the same paternalism practiced during the Bush-era, paradoxically repackaged as the sage advice of a 'son of Africa', paired with a continuation of Bush-era African policies, while 'increasing the influence' of the US on the continent.

At the intersection of all these influences, we see the Obama administration's shift to Sino-pessimism emerge. Interestingly, President Obama was committed to shifting US policy away from the Middle East towards Asia and expressed interest in developing significant cooperation with China (Nye, 2019). Despite this increased interest in Sino-US cooperation, we see the Obama administration consistently attempting to delegitimize Chinese engagement with Africa. The Obama administration, in attempting to leave behind the image of Bush-era unilateralism, moved towards a more cosmopolitan version of liberalism, what one White House official referred to as "leading from behind" (Nye, 2019: 369). The Sino-pessimism of China in Africa demonstrated by the Obama administration would seem at odds with this goal of greater international cooperation, of the cosmopolitan self-image the Obama administration sought to project. This hints at the diminished confidence the Obama administration had in the liberal order. Through criticism and attempts at delegitimization, the Obama administration acknowledged that their discursive power in Africa was not as self-evident as it was during the Bush administration. Thus, rather than China being an ally in liberalising Africa, China was painted as not only a threat to the liberalisation of Africa, but a threat to Africa's very freedom, as Secretary Clinton implied by accusing China of neo-colonialism.

These accusations of neo-colonialism did not dissipate with the end of the Obama administration: it was picked up with even more enthusiasm by the Trump administration. While the Trump administration moved away from the term colonialism, the 'debt trap' narrative discussed during the literature review was, and is, frequently referenced by members of the Trump administration. As explained by Secretary Tillerson, Chinese "financing models are structured in a way that the country, when it gets into trouble financially, loses control of its own infrastructure or its own resources through default" (DOS, 2018b). Alternatively, Manisha Singh, President Trumps Assistant Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs, perhaps most accurately described this American narrative when she remarked "every time we see a deal where the Chinese Government goes in to help – and I put "help" in quotes […] we always advise them, look, you might want to think about what you're giving up here. The – I always say the choice is not between America and China, the choice is between China and your own sovereignty" (DOS, 2019b). This form of criticism seems to come from a shallow understanding of the colonial legacy in Africa. By portraying China as a threat to sovereignty,

it attempts to trigger colonial resentment against China. However, by consistently criticising Africa's relationship with China, particularly through the use of debunked myths, the Trump administration is failing to acknowledge the superiority they are exhibiting. Further, this framing ignored the role of African agency in determining their own affairs, as well as ignoring the importance agency holds for post-colonial African states. Whereas the Obama administration course corrected following the criticism of Secretary Clinton's neo-colonialism allegation, the Trump administration has shown no intention of course correcting in the face of African criticisms of this narrative.

While the Obama administration made vague references to China's threat in Africa, often without explicitly referencing China by name, the Trump administration chose to replace their Africa policy with a China-bashing policy. In December 2018 John R. Bolton, President Trump's National Security Advisor, announced the Trump administration's new Africa policy, Prosper Africa. During the course of a roughly 20-minute speech, Advisor Bolton mentioned China 14 times by name (White House, 2018). Advisor Bolton remarked that "great power competitors, namely China […] are deliberately and aggressively targeting their investments in the region to gain a competitive advantage over the United States" (ibid.). Advisor Bolton further warned that the Chinese were "taking advantage of African states to increase their own power and influence" (ibid.). This frames Africa as a 'blank space', home only to Sino-US competition. The accusation that the Chinese are 'taking advantage' of Africa further reveals the lack of agency the Trump administration credits African states with, infantilising the entire continent.

Lending into the debt trap narrative pervasive throughout the Trump-era discourse on Sino-African relations, Advisor Bolton accused the Chinese of "the strategic use of debt to hold Africa captive to Beijing's demands and wishes" before, paradoxically, announcing the Trump administrations intention to do just that (ibid.). While insisting that the US was not among the "powers that pursue dollars for dependency", Advisor Bolton warned African nations that they would reduce "generous American aid [to] countries that repeatedly vote against the United States in international forums" (ibid.). These types of blatant contradictions, evident within a single speech, are largely unique to the Trump administration. They reveal a larger pattern of disrespect that the Trump administration has exhibited towards Africa as a whole.

Another debunked narrative that the Trump administration continues to espouse in Africa is that Chinese investment does not bring job creation. As Ambassador Nagy phrased it, "anyone beyond the skill level of turning over a shovel comes from China instead of being hired locally" (US Mission to the AU, 2018). This is a point that Secretary Pompeo repeated at

every stop on his African tour in February 2020, warning repeatedly that authoritarian regimes "don't hire local people, they don't train, they don't lead" (DOS, 2020c). However, the job creation brought by Chinese investment would be near impossible to miss in Africa. As of 2017 an estimated 10,000 Chinese-owned firms operated across the African continent, employing millions of Africans (Jayaram, Sun & Kassiri, 2017). To assume that African leaders are unaware of Chinese job creation on the continent is to underestimate the intelligence of an entire continent.

This level of disrespect evidenced by the Trump administration is perhaps best exemplified in one of President Trump's most notorious comments: referring to African nations as "shithole countries". The racism evidenced by this comment needs no explanation. However, this comment should not be viewed as out of character for President Trump. President Trump has long been plagued by accusations of racism, sexism, and ableism, thoroughly reviewed in *An Oral History of Trump's Bigotry* (Graham et al., 2019).

This association with '-isms' is, however, one contributing factor to how President Trump came to be president. President Trump was elected because he rallied the discontent with globalization that the liberal order had brought (Stiglitz, 2017). Despite being shaped largely by the US, and much to the advantage of US interests (though unfortunately business interests rather than the interests of labour), economic liberalism has resulted in rampant inequality and a hollowing out of the middle class (Harvey, 2005). By the time President Trump began his campaign, this discontent with liberalism was boiling over into discontent with the status quo of Washington, DC. Thus, when President Trump began to portray the US as a weak, naïve actor, long taken advantage of by the international community, his message resonated with a certain demographic: white nationalists and populists. President Trump has curated a political base that shows little regard for people of colour, which has legitimized his disrespect of the African continent.

Perhaps more telling than President Trump's comment is how the administration sought to soothe the backlash it created. Secretary Tillerson was dispatched on a tour of Africa to demonstrate that the US "commitment to Africa is quite clear in terms of the importance we place on the relationship" (DOS, 2018b). In a joint press conference between Secretary Tillerson and African Union Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, when asked about President Trumps 'shithole' comment, Chairperson Moussa Faki remarked "I believe this incident is of the past […] the evidence of the relations between Africa and the United States is personified through [Secretary Tillerson's] visit. I believe reasonably that this partnership has produced

results" (DOS, 2018b). These results were undoubtedly undermined when Secretary Tillerson had to cut his Africa trip short after he was abruptly fired during his trip.

In a further demonstration of the 'tone deaf' nature of the Trump administration's engagement with Africa, during Secretary Tillerson's mission to repair the US-African relationship, the secretary made it clear that his true intention was to contest the Chinese influence on the continent. In another telling exchange between Secretary Tillerson and Chairperson Moussa Faki, Secretary Tillerson remarked "we think it's important that Africans countries carefully consider the terms of [Chinese] investments, and we witness the model that the Chinese follow […] So our message is for countries to consider carefully what the terms of those agreements and, and not forfeit any elements of your sovereignty as you enter into such arrangements with China" (DOS, 2018b). Picking up on the patronising tone used by Secretary Tillerson, Chairperson Moussa Faki responded, "I think the Africans are mature enough to engage in partnerships of their own volition […] So there is no monopoly […] We know our interests, and it is our full awareness, I think, that is most important" (DOS, 2018b).

Chairperson Moussa Faki's 'there is no monopoly' comment lends into a larger narrative of the Trump administration's framing of the Sino-African relationship, that Africa is the site of a zero-sum game between the US and China. The Trump administration seems to be edging increasingly towards a policy of either/or engagement reminiscent of Cold War era alignment policies. This reflects the larger turn of the Trump administration towards realism. While the Bush and Obama administrations attempted to institute their own forms of liberalism, the Trump administration is founded on an opposition to the liberal order, while neglecting to advance a clear alternative. While the Bush and Obama administrations gained a clear objective and purpose in Africa, provided by the liberal order, the Trump administration is lacking a clear purpose. Consequently, instead of advancing liberal norms such as democracy and human rights, the Trump policy towards Africa turned towards China bashing as a way of elevating themselves. Thus, the Trump administration is unique in that it does not attempt to project a self-image in Africa, rather it relies on projecting a negative image of China, a project which has largely been unsuccessful. Referring back to Advisor Bolton's Prosper Africa announcement, throughout the 20-minute speech, US Africa policy standards such as the promotion of human rights and good governance are absent, in a clear break with previous administrations.

While distancing themselves from the humanitarian ideals of Bush- and Obama-era engagement with Africa, the Trump administration has attempted to reframe the US-Africa relationship into one of pure capitalism. While addressing African leaders in 2017, President

Trump congratulated them on being the victims of Western exploitation. In an off the cuff remark, President Trump stated "I have so many friends going to your countries, trying to get rich. I congratulate you. They're spending a lot of money" (White House, 2017). Despite pausing, apparently for applause, President Trump's comment was met with silence. And this is the power of liberal capitalism: it allows for unbridled exploitation, for people in the global North to plunder the global South in an attempt to 'get rich'. By incorporating Africa into the liberal order of free trade and private enterprise, the inequality inherent to capitalism is propagated on a global scale (Harvey, 2005), allowing American corporations to continue extracting wealth from Africa.

While the expansion of capitalism in Africa is not a goal unique to the Trump administration, the lack of a humanitarian pretence certainly is. This can also be explained through the Trump administration's shift from liberalism to realism. As described in his 2004 book, *The Art of the Deal*, President Trump believes that if you are not winning, someone is taking advantage of you. Watts (2017), when describing the president's ideology, stated that President Trump "peddles directives that ignore what [other business writers] perceived as their obligation to shape good people and a good society. Instead, Trump's injunctions look inward to promote a relentless self-aggrandizement, and outward to manipulate a world of facile images". President Trump reflects this philosophy frequently in his administration's framing of Sino-African relations. The Trump administration's frequent use of misinformation and debunked myths in regard to Sino-African relations shows this attempt to manipulate the simplistic image the Trump administration has of Africa, as well as a self-aggrandized role as Africa's source of knowledge and truth. Rather than making the US a more attractive trading partner, the Trump administration turned to China bashing, believing that the Africans would readily abandon the Chinese. However, in portraying Africa as a zero-sum game of exploitation to be won by either the US or China, it is clear that the Trump administration is leaving no space for Africa to 'win'.

This rhetoric of exploitation, however, did not begin during the Trump administration. In 2012 Secretary Clinton gave a speech in Washington D.C. explaining Obama's US Strategy to Sub-Saharan Africa. Secretary Clinton remarked "economic growth in Africa [will] fuel growth and prosperity worldwide" because "Africa presents the highest return on foreign direct investment of any developing region in the world" (DOS, 2012a). Here Africa is presented as an opportunity for exploitation by Western business. Several days later, when rolling out the same strategy in Senegal, Secretary Clinton would take a jab at the Chinese when she remarked "Africa needs partnership, not patronage […] a model of sustainable

partnership that adds value rather than extracts it" (DOS, 2012b). This shift in tone is easy to explain. When addressing an American audience, Secretary Clinton is quick to point out the opportunities for American businesses to extract wealth from Africa. When addressing an African audience, she points out how the Chinese are extracting wealth, whereas the Americans are adding it. This form of double-speak reveals that the Obama administration, rather than engaging with Africa for the sole sake of liberal ideology, is keenly aware of the economic importance of Africa. Therefore, China's presence is a threat, not only to the liberalising mission of the US, but also to the capital accumulation possible for the US in Africa. The underlying message for Africa is that it is better to be exploited by America, the moral power, than China, the 'pernicious economic competitor with no morals'. It is an argument that relies on the 'otherness' of China, of a China that, as the Obama and Trump administrations have framed it, cannot be trusted.

This is a framing that continued into the Trump administration. While warning Africa about the dangers of Chinese exploitation, the Trump administration was busy attempting to carve out more liberty for American companies to freely exploit Africa. As President Trump's own Secretary of State Rex Tillerson proved, corruption is rampant within private sector engagement with Africa. A report published by Honest Accounts estimates that while US$ 161 billion flows into Africa annually, US$ 202 billion flows out of Africa annually (Curtis & Jones, 2017). The bulk of this outflow is illicit financial flows (IFF), with trade misinvoicing alone accounting for US$ 40 billion in IFF from Africa, and multinational company profits accounting for a further US$ 32 billion (ibid.). Assistant Secretary Singh contrasted this to China's approach when she remarked "our private sector is coming in to do business on commercial terms, and so we think that this is a better alternative for you to look at" (DOS, 2019b). However, given that China's approach to Africa is also largely though private sector engagement, it is unclear how this represents an 'alternative'. What is clear is that through increased private sector engagement with Africa, the true 'winner' will be the private corporations, both Chinese and American, extracting the wealth of Africa.

Co-opting the 'China-Africa Model'

This marks another discontinuity between the Bush-era and the Obama- and Trump-eras, that as these administrations shifted towards Sino-pessimism, they also began to adopt Chinese practices in how they engaged with Africa. Beginning in the Obama administration, US

discourse towards Africa began to co-opt the same language the Chinese use in their engagement with Africa. China has long framed their engagement with Africa using terms such as 'win-win', 'mutually beneficial', and 'brotherhood'. Thus, when President Obama frames himself as a 'son of Africa', he is invoking the same familial bonds frequently utilised by the Chinese. The Obama administration made use of discourse espousing "mutual interest and respect" in US-Africa relations (White House, 2009; DOS, 2012b), phrases often used by the Chinese. Advisor Bolton described that the US was "shaping relations with Africa to the mutual advantage" of both Africa and the US, and how this was "a very different view than […] some of our competitors hold" (Bolton, 2018), paradoxically co-opting Chinese rhetoric to espouse American exceptionalism.

As shown above, this was not merely a discursive shift. While the US discourse towards Africa began to echo that of China in the Obama and Trump administrations, their practices also began mirroring their own *criticisms* of the Chinese in Africa, as illustrated by the Trump administration's aim to begin engaging in 'dollars for diplomacy'. While warning Africa of Chinese exploitation, the Obama and Trump administrations began implementing policy shifts that would enable American private interests to more freely exploit Africa. While warning Africa that the Chinese would 'undercut their sovereignty', these administrations continued to use conditionalities, limiting African policy space and self-determination. While Africa has freely chosen to engage with China, these administrations have continued to undermine their agency by offering paternalistic advice against engagement with China.

What separates the Obama administration from the Trump administration, despite all of these similarities, is the latter's simmering sense of resentment that Africa would continue to engage with China despite the US expressing criticism of these relations. Assistant Secretary Nagy blamed this choice on the lack of American presence when he remarked "when someone knocked on the door to come and do business in Africa, and the African governments opened the door and the Chinese were the only ones standing there, I cannot blame the African governments for doing business deals with China" (AU, 2018). What Assistant Secretary Nagy does blame the Africans for, however, is not creating "the correct environment to attract investment of the types of investors that deal honestly, openly, transparently" (AU, 2018). This framing reveals that the Trump administration believes that both China and Africa have acted illegitimately through engaging with one another.

Despite this line of rhetoric, the Trump administration has done little to remedy their lack of presence in Africa. Throughout the first year of the Trump presidency, nearly half of the ambassadorships in Africa remained unfilled, and nearly a third went unfilled in 2018. In

fact, President Trump declined to fill the position of Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of African Affairs until May 2018. This is a fact at odds with an administration that has committed itself to a growing business presence in Africa. Ambassadors generally serve as a first port of call for large investments or trade deals in foreign countries. By leaving these posts unfilled, the Trump administration made clear the lack of importance they place on their relationship with Africa. By abandoning the ideology of 'making Africa better' that the Bush and Obama administrations utilised, the Trump administration has fundamentally altered the exceptionalism, the perceived morality of their engagement, that US international engagement has long relied on, making it just another economic competitor among many.

Conclusion

While the field of Sino-African relations has been widely studied, the discursive framing of Sino-African relations utilized by the US has been oft ignored. This paper, rather than proving that the US discourse on Sino-African relations is flawed, sought to show why this flawed discourse is still being utilized. With this in mind, this paper analysed how the framing of Sino-African relations reflected the representation of itself the US was attempting to project at the time.

The Bush-era was brimming with a near religious zeal regarding the liberal system. The attacks on 9/11 proved to the Bush administration that the world needed liberalism now, more than ever. The Bush-era sought to project an image of the US as a benevolent power, seeking to bring the stabilising power of liberalism to the entire world. Thus, when China began to engage with Africa, the Bush administration believed it had found a project for both the US and China to tackle jointly. Though the Chinese failed to attempt to institute liberal reforms in Africa, these were dismissed as the growing pains of a soon-to-be liberal China.

Conversely, the liberal order inherited by President Obama was one facing a crisis of legitimacy. The Bush legacy required a more cosmopolitan touch to correct. Distracted by a mission to repair the standing of the US in international eyes, and thus the liberal global order, the Obama administration decided that China's engagement in Africa, with its disregard for liberal ideology, was untenable. Once again, the US was charged with 'saving Africa', this time from the illiberal Chinese influence on the continent.

The Trump administration voiced an intent to tear down the liberal order, without advancing a clear alternative. Thus, the liberalizing mission that the Bush and Obama administrations drew purpose from was lost to the Trump administration. The US-Africa relationship as envisioned by the Trump administration was one where the US had sole access to the economic exploitation of Africa. Through the use of racist discourse, and erratic policy decisions, the Trump administration projected a self-image of an unstable US with little to no regard for the continent of Africa.

What has become clear during the course of this research is that, despite the increasing criticism of China in Africa, the US interest in Africa has waned. While the Bush administration worked to make Africa a priority in US policy, the same cannot be said about the Obama administration. To mask the lack of priority given to Africa under the Obama administration,

the administration began to espouse Sino-pessimism and grand, empty rhetoric of transformation and familial bonds. More troublingly, the Trump administration has showed a general disregard for people of colour, not only internationally but also at home. This has legitimized his disinterest in Africa, paired with a general simmering resentment and disrespectful tone that has made his disdain for the continent clear.

The US has long treated Africa as the 'other' to illustrate its own exceptionalism. As described by Mbembe "Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West's desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world" (2001: 2). When the US talks about Africa, it is discussing an imagined Africa, a 'dark continent' which serves as the shadow to the gleaming American 'city upon the hill'.

When Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo declared that "America's responsibility in the 21st century is to remain the shining city upon the hill, the force of whose ideas inspire greater chapters in man's development" (C-SPAN, 2018), it came a mere month after President Trump called African nations 'shithole countries'. This image of the gleaming city on a hill reinforces the image of the US as exceptional, as an example to strive after, but fundamentally out of reach. However, this city upon the hill has been tarnished by the Trump administration. In moving away from the often problematic, but no less lofty, idealism that the Bush and Obama administration's espoused, the Trump administration has lost much of what was framed as exceptional about the US. Despite missteps and ignorant discourse from previous administrations, the Trump administration stands alone in espousing clear disdain for Africa.

With the current unrest in the United States surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement, is it not time that the world moves away from the idea of 'a gleaming city upon a hill', particularly one as tarnished as the US? This moment in history should mark a shift towards analysing the discursive power structures of the world, interrogating assumed truths to reveal an alternative reading of what is thought to be self-evident. For, despite its inaccuracy, the negative perception of China in Africa persists, and is made more readily acceptable due to how both China and Africa have been framed in the US consciousness.

In researching this thesis, a wider gap in the literature was made apparent. While the discursive power of the US is widely acknowledged, US political discourse regarding Africa remains a severely understudied field. This perhaps reflects the larger narrative that, within international relations, Africa is generally recognised as 'the forgotten continent'. An interesting, though much larger project, could be to study the historic representations of Africa

by US administrations, and how this has made the current US framing of Sino-African relations possible.

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