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## **A Friendship Higher Than Mountains: An analysis of China-Rwanda relations**

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### **Citation**

Werker, B. (2022). *A Friendship Higher Than Mountains: An analysis of China-Rwanda relations*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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# A Friendship Higher Than Mountains

*An analysis of China-Rwanda relations*



# Universiteit Leiden

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S1402765

Masterthesis

MA African Studies

Leiden University

24-07-2022

Supervisor: Prof. dr. C.U. Uche

Words: 19702



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## **Introduction**

After driving two hours east from the southern Rwandan city of Butare, my view changed. Farmlands, villages, and a variety of cyclists, rusty cars, and many pedestrians, were replaced by a green haven, the Nyungwe National Forest. Those who thought the paved road would stop here at the park's beginning are wrong. Straight through this ancient rainforest in southwestern Rwanda unfolds a road everyone should have driven at some point in their lives. This strip of asphalt glides like a snake through the high green hills where the trees show themselves to the driver like green waves. After I had been driving on this road for half an hour, the chimpanzees and colourful birds had delighted me, but the agonisingly slow-moving trucks had exhausted me. Finally, a Rwandan woman pointed out the red flag on a stone by the side of the road, and I had to stop. Rwandans wearing construction helmets tried to repair the right half of the road, which had partially collapsed into the ravine. On the left half, a line of heavily loaded trucks passed the violence of drills and heavy machinery. Behind one of these machines, I noticed the rising smoke of cigarettes. Smoking seemed to be a rare phenomenon in Rwanda, and I got the feeling that the gentlemen hidden from me behind the machine could not, therefore, be Rwandans. When the woman gave me the green flag, and I was allowed to proceed, I glanced at the drily smoking gentlemen. They were Chinese.

While studying sinology, I had to read a lot about Chinese investments in Africa. So, I chose to do a master's in Africa Studies at Leiden University to investigate China and its growing presence in Africa. Rwanda was my country of choice for my final research. After the dramatic genocide in 1994, Rwanda has built itself up economically. Gross domestic product (GDP) increased from \$752 million in 1994 to \$9.5 billion in 2018, and per capita GDP grew from \$125.5 to \$787 over the same period (Government of Rwanda, 2022).

In part, they owe this economic growth to Chinese investments. But what does China have to gain there? What is the reason for their friendship with Rwanda? My eye contact with the Chinese gentlemen on the road through Nyungwe National Forest was the beginning of my research in Rwanda, and the first time I could witness the Chinese presence in Africa with my own eyes. I will inform you that it did not stop at this one eye contact.

### *Problem statement & relevance*

According to The State Council of the People's Republic of China, their 'core interests' (hexin liyi) in China's (foreign) policy are state sovereignty, national security, territorial

integrity, national reunification, social stability, and safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development (2011). To what extent the core interests of China as a significant global power will interfere or clash with the interests of the other Western dominant global powers has been a subject of academic research for many years (Zeng et al., 2015). This issue is especially acute in Africa, where the old colonial power, Europe, and the dominant world power of recent decades, the United States (US), are rapidly being supplanted by China as the leading trading partner or source of foreign capital (Harcaoui et al., 2020). As a result, Western politicians, policymakers, and researchers viewed the presence of China in Africa with suspicion. However, there seems to be an agreement in the West that two main interests drive China's presence in Africa: raw materials and substantial new markets for Chinese products (Alden & Large, 2018; Brautigam, 2009; Tesfaye, 2020).

However, this agreement does raise questions about why China is also present in African countries without a vast internal market or massive amounts of natural resources. For example, Rwanda does not have many natural resources or a vast internal market, yet China's presence in Rwanda is evident.

How and if individual African states play their role in China's larger Africa strategy is still not fully understood (Alden & Large, 2018). Therefore, the main goal of this thesis is to get a fuller understanding of China's Africa strategy by analysing their presence in Rwanda, a seemingly atypical destination in Africa for Chinese investment. As China increasingly seems to be the centre of the world, a deeper understanding of its foreign policy and Africa strategy is highly needed.

### *Research question*

To understand China's engagement in Rwanda, I will focus on the following research question: **How does China's presence in Rwanda relate to China's Africa strategy?** To answer my main question, the following sub questions are two folded: What is China's Africa strategy and what is China's interest in Rwanda? The relationship between these answers forms the answer to my main question.

### *Thesis outline*

This thesis consists of four chapters. In chapter one, I will briefly introduce Rwanda and provide my theoretical framework, literature review and research design. This chapter will

give the necessary background information for the following two chapters. In chapter two, I will examine the China-Africa strategy and answer my first sub-question. The third chapter is on my second sub-question and will focus on China's interests in Rwanda. Finally, the thesis concludes in chapter four, which answers the main research question, addresses limitations, and provides ideas for further research.



## Chapter 1 – Research Background

This chapter briefly introduces Rwanda, followed by my theoretical framework, which focuses on Realism and Economic Nationalism. Next, I'll review the literature on China-Africa and China-Rwanda relations. Lastly, I present my research design.

### 1.1 Rwanda

Twenty-eight years ago, the world witnessed one of the most horrific scenes in modern history, the Rwandan genocide. In less than one hundred days, an estimated million Tutsis and moderate Hutus have lost their lives (Reyntjens, 2010). However, scholars dispute the exact number of victims. According to Rwanda's constitution, more than 1 million people died during the genocide. Still, recent research has shown that the actual number of deaths is considerably lower, with estimates ranging from 500,000 to 662,000 fatalities (Meierhenrich, 2020; Reyndams, 2020; McDoom, 2020).

While visiting several genocide memorial sites in Rwanda, I encountered gruesome stories. Innocent people were slaughtered with machetes, sticks, and rakes by their neighbours, supposed friends or strangers. Hutu militias raped women while their children watched, waiting for their death, and churches became mass graves in minutes. Because Hutus and Tutsis lived side by side for generations and families knew each other, especially in rural areas, it was easy for the Hutus to identify their neighbours as Tutsis and put them to death (Prunier, 1999). According to Nowrojee, sexual violence indeed occurred on a large scale during the genocide. Survivors confirmed to Nowrojee that " *thousands of women were individually raped, gang-raped, raped with objects such as sharpened sticks or gun barrels, held in sexual slavery or sexually mutilated*" (1996).

After these enormous cruelties, Rwanda changed dramatically. This small country in Central Africa borders Burundi, the DRC, Tanzania, and Uganda and is almost landlocked, besides its western border of Lake Kivu. After the genocide, Rwanda became a 'donor darling' (Reyntjens, 2010). The fact that Rwanda is seen as a "donor darling" also has a lot to do with certain things that are well-liked in the West. An excellent example is that Rwanda has the highest percentage of women in parliament in the world, 61%, which is admired in the West ((Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2022). According to Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, autocrats like Kagame use gender equality to distract their critics and put the spotlight on "*an area that is*

widely seen as linked or bundled with democracy while drawing the focus away from their authoritarian abuses" (2022).

Development aid and Kagame's strong leadership resulted in a rapidly growing population and GDP over the last two decades.

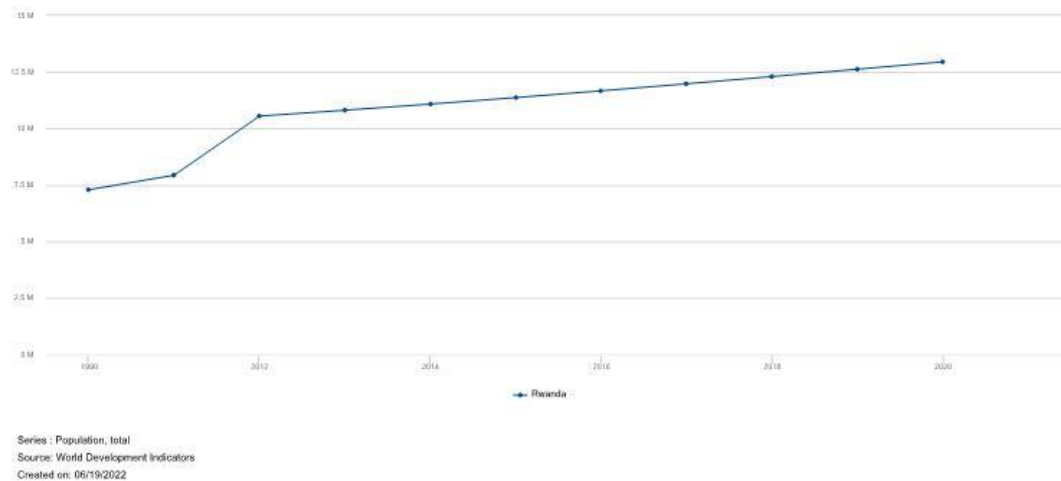


Figure 1: Rwanda Population Growth - Source: Worldbank Group, 2022.

But Kagame's presidency of this former Belgian colony also has a downside. Although it is internationally known that the Rwandan regime is responsible for war crimes and has little respect for human rights, President Kagame is given red carpet treatment on his international visits. Not only by other dictatorial regimes but also by Western countries. For example, President Clinton called Kagame "*one of the greatest leaders of our time*" (Smith, 2020). However, Kagame has also been fiercely criticised. Reyntjes, one of the most renowned scholars on Rwanda, has, in numerous of his works, accused the Rwandan regime of violating human rights and called in the documentary, *Rwanda: The Untold Story*, Kagame "*probably the worst war criminal in office today*" (Conroy, 2014). The Canadian journalist, Judi Rever, agrees and describes in her book, *In Praise of Blood*, that Kagame is responsible for a second genocide, this time of Hutus, in the aftermath of the genocide (Rever, 2020). According to Des Forges, the armed forces led by Kagame, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), killed around 30.000 Hutus during the genocide and its aftermath (1999). Some scholars, such as Rever, see these actions of the RPF as counter-genocide. Still, Strauss, an expert on the Rwandan genocide, believes that the RPF's violence against the Hutus is more a case of war crimes and not genocide (2008).

Nevertheless, Rwanda can still count on the support of the West because of the genocide credit and the rigid denial of all allegations (Reyntjens, 2015). Tony Blair is a perfect example of this; he repeatedly called Kagame a visionary leader and ruled on criticism of Kagame's regime: *"I'm a believer in and a supporter of Paul Kagame. I don't ignore all those criticisms, having said that. But I do think you've got to recognise that Rwanda is an immensely special case because of the genocide. Secondly, you can't argue with the fact that Rwanda has gone on a remarkable path of development. Every time I visit Kigali and the surrounding areas, you can just see the changes being made in the country"* (McGreal, 2017). Now we see with the asylum seekers deal between the UK and Rwanda that the friendship between these two countries is not over yet (Soy, 2022).

Chinese leaders have never openly criticised Kagame and the current leader, Xi Jinping, speaks highly of his Rwandan counterpart (2018). In chapter three of this thesis, I will elaborate on the Chinese view of Kagame leadership.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

The study of China's engagement in Africa touches on International Relations (IR) and Global Political Economy (GPE). Therefore, I based my theoretical framework on theories found in both disciplines. Simply put, the study of IR focuses on the interactions between sovereign states, and GPE, which falls under the broader study of IR, seeks to understand the social and political foundations of the global economy (Tight, 2005).

In IR, the main theories are Marxism, Liberalism and Realism. In GPE, Critical Theory, Liberalism and Economic Nationalism are most common. These theories provide a framework for analysing the behaviour of states in the international system. To answer my research questions, I consider Realism the most appropriate among the dominant theories in IR. Of the prominent theories in the GPE, I choose Economic Nationalism as part of my framework.

### *IR: Realism*

First, I will indicate why I do not think Marxism and Liberalism are suitable as part of my framework before elaborating on Realism.

Marxism sees the international capitalist system as exploitive and examines how inequalities are created or justified by production systems and value chains. According to Marxists, global imbalances result from capitalist mechanisms and the exploitative nature of

markets and trade relations (O'Brien & Williams, 2020). The relationship between China and Africa is in many ways unequal and exploitative. However, Marxist ideas about inequality resulting from the international division of labour and capital are rooted in the exploitative historical system of colonialism and imperialism and, therefore, in my opinion, do not apply to China's current engagement in Africa. China's economic development is not a product of the international division of labour and capital and, in this way, differs from the colonial powers exploiting African states (Haslam et al., 2017).

Liberalism in IR is not focused on power and security but recognises the value of cooperation (Oneal & Russett, 1999). Suppose the domestic development of a state depends on economic growth and trade. In that case, it is more likely that a state will seek international cooperation than invade its trading partners (Ikenberry, 2000). On security issues, liberals argue that states cooperate to settle disputes peacefully with the help of international organisations like the UN. This seeking for collective security is necessary to control the struggle for power (Viotti & Kauppi, 1998). According to liberals, wars and conflicts result from poorly functioning international organisations and cooperation (Kegley & Blanton, 2008). It does not mean that multilateral agencies are neutral entities in security issues. UN peacekeeping, for example, is based on impartiality, not neutrality (Fullana, 2014). UN diplomat Fegan-Wyles argues that the impartiality of peacekeepers within a conflict is crucial to maintaining good relations and firmly believes that UN peacekeeping operations are never neutral (Fullana, 2014). Multilateral agencies based on liberal principles are accepted in the West. The question is, however, whether these liberal principles are also accepted by non-Western states, such as China (Barnett, 1997). China and Liberalism are not often mentioned in the same sentence, and with good reason. China's behaviour on the international stage is not in line with some critical elements of Liberalism. First, state influence on China's political economy is incompatible with Liberalism (Dickson, 2007). Next, China uses multilateral institutions, like the UN, not primarily for international cooperation but for their benefit (Okano-Heijmans et al., 2018). China, however, is not unique in this. European countries and the US also use the UN to promote Western values and shape the global agenda in their interests (Traynor, 2008). Lastly, morality in international relations, for example, transparency and government accountability, seem less crucial for China than for liberal democracies (Haslam et al., 2017).

The realism theory in the field of IR assumes that states like China always pursue their interest in achieving more power than other states. Hans Morgenthau, one of the founders of Realism, defined this pursuit of the national interest of states in terms of power, and the reason for this quest for power lies in human nature (1948). Morgenthau defines this as follows:

"Political power is a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those whom it is exercised" (1948). His theory is seen as classical state-centric Realism. Kenneth Waltz clashed with the ideas of Morgenthau in the late 70s and came up with a new form of Realism, neo-realism or structural Realism, that was different from classical Realism. Waltz believes that human nature is not the reason states pursue power but security concerns because states exist in an anarchic system<sup>1</sup> (1979). Another difference between Morgenthau and Waltz was that Morgenthau believed that domestic factors influenced the state's foreign policy. At the same time, Waltz disagreed and firmly stated that the actions of states at the international level were not a product of domestic affairs (Williams, 2007). Although there is discussion among realist scholars, Realism's fundamental idea is that one country's gain is equivalent to another country's loss (Donnelly, 2000). According to Donnelly, "*realists understand, and correctly emphasise, the fact that power has been, and will long remain, a central part of international relations*" (2000).

I will use Realism in this thesis as a framework for China-Africa relations and China-Rwanda relations because China's engagement in Africa is driven by national interest and power. Based on 558 interviews with Chinese leaders, innumerable documents and case studies, David Lampton argues that "*what has remained relatively unchanged is the Chinese foreign policy of realist thinking*" (2019). Realists say that the primary motivating factor for China's engagement in Africa is the quest for natural resources needed for economic growth and energy security (Otele, 2020). Realist scholars in the discipline of China-Africa relations widely argue that China's foreign policy is strongly focused on maintaining its power and serving its interest. In the field of China-Africa relations.

Realism as a framework for China-Africa relations also receives criticism from many scholars. The main argument is that military power in Africa is not a priority in China's foreign policy toward Africa (Lee, 2018). I disagree and think China's military presence in Africa is already there and will increase in the future. The Chinese military base in Djibouti is a perfect example of this (Barton, 2018). Furthermore, Noguchi argues that the Chinese take a more serious role in the security issues on the African continent. So that, just like in their region, the Asian-Pacific, the military part of China in Africa will increase (2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Anarchic system in the field of IR is not the same as the concept of Anarchy. Anarchic system is the idea that there is no higher authority above states.

In my view, Realism is essential to understand China's political, security, and economic interests in Africa because I believe those four interests are driven by China's national interest and ambition to become and remain a significant global power.

#### *GPE: Economic Nationalism*

In the field of GPE, Critical Theory, Liberalism, and Economic Nationalism are prominent. Critical Theory sees the world economy through the lens of Marxism and focuses on the structure of production (McGowan et al., 1999). Liberalism in IR and GPE are very similar (O'Brien & Williams, 2020). Therefore, the similarity of these theories within the two disciplines needs no further explanation on my side why I will not base my framework on these theories. Economic Nationalism and Realism are also very similar, and some scholars argue that Economic Nationalism is the economic part of political Realism (Helleiner, 2002; O'Brien & Williams, 2020). Therefore, I prefer to use both theories in this study.

Nakano argues that the similarity between Realism and Economic Nationalism lies in the concept of national power. If a state maximises its economic power, its political power will also maximise (2004). According to Economic Nationalists, wealth and power are connected, and wealth accumulation will increase power (Nikas, 2020). Although Economic Nationalism is often associated with Mercantilism, some Economic Nationalists refuted this. In their eyes, autarky, the goal of Mercantilism, is not the purpose of Economic Nationalism, which focuses on autonomy, nation power, and unity. Where Mercantilists favour protectionism, Economic Nationalists will advocate free trade if it maximises national power (Nakano, 2004; Helleiner, 2002).

The Chinese economic foreign policy follows the characteristics of Economic Nationalism (Helleiner & Wang, 2018). At the beginning of China's economic development, approximately thirty years ago, the Chinese leaders showed a strong sense of Economic Nationalism. To protect their market from foreign products, services and direct investments, the Chinese designed an economic policy to restrict foreign business activity in their homeland, aiming to achieve world-class domestic industries that can compete globally. In the last decades, this orthodox Economic Nationalism shifted towards a more modern form of Economic Nationalism (D'Costa, 2012). As Nikas argues, the integration of China's economy into the global institutionalised economy "*pushed China towards a more sophisticated form of Economic Nationalism*" (2020).

Nevertheless, there is still a form of protectionism in China's Economic Nationalism. First, for example, Chinese companies are protected by the state during their growth to give them an advantage over international companies (Oertel, 2020). Next, the state supports Chinese companies in buying shares of European companies while they are protecting Chinese companies from foreign takeovers (Rieke, 2020). In the context of China-Africa relations, an example of China's Economic Nationalism is the unproven scandal surrounding the Chinese telecom giant Huawei in Ethiopia. Huawei, a private Chinese company, is said to have installed several eavesdropping devices in the African Union (AU) headquarters in Addis Ababa (Modderkolk, 2021; Dahir, 2018). Although many Western media outlets have written about this, China and the AU vehemently deny this (BBC News, 2018). In the Netherlands, Huawei also became controversial and is no longer welcome in the core of Dutch telecom networks (NOS, 2021). Even though it has not been proven that Huawei facilitates wiretapping practices, it provides an example of how the Chinese state may use the economic power of international Chinese non-state companies for their political power.

### *Conclusion*

My research questions focus on China's interest in Africa, specifically Rwanda. I will look at political, security, and economic interests, and although those fields of interest are different, their goal is similar: maximising China's power in the international arena. In my view, Realism and Economic Nationalism are well suited to my theoretical framework as they provide the tools to answer my research questions and analyse China's quest for global power on the African continent.

### **1.3 Literature review**

The literature review is divided into three parts. Firstly, the literature on China's foreign policy is reviewed. Secondly, China's engagement in Africa is discussed, and finally, the literature on China-Rwanda relations is presented. In conclusion, I argue why my thesis addresses a gap in the literature and formulate a hypothesis that will be tested in this research.

## *China's foreign policy*

China's foreign policy has been addressed from multiple perspectives and contexts. For example, scholars tried to find answers to the influence of the Belt and Road Initiative (Frankopan, 2020; Zhang et al., 2018; Schneider et al., 2019) Or if China will challenge the dominant global order (Allison, 2017; Zhao, 2004; De Wijk, 2019). But for me, the most exciting development in studying China's foreign policy is the increase in studies from the Chinese perspective.

The core priorities of China's foreign policy are of most interest among many scholars (Lanteigne, 2019; Rudolph & Szonyi, 2018; Swaine, 2010). One of the most critical studies on the outcomes of China's foreign policy is done by Swaine. He argues that China's foreign policy consists of three main interests: The development of China's economy and society, national sovereignty and integrity and lastly national security (2010). According to Swaine, China's foreign policy focuses on achieving domestic interests (2010). I agree with Swaine that domestic interests play an important role in China's information policy, but I will explore whether foreign interests are also becoming increasingly important.

Rozman takes another approach in describing China's foreign policy and looks at "*the inner working of China's decision-making process*" on foreign policy. He tries to answer the question "*to what extent does China's foreign policy a calculated strategy set at the top*" (2013). One of his primary sources of information is Chinese think tanks. Using multiple Chinese sources, Rozman distinguishes himself from other western scholars who write about China's foreign policy. I see Xi Jinping as a more assertive Chinese leader than his recent predecessors, so in this thesis, I look at his influence on China's foreign policy. Xi is firmly distancing himself from the caution shown in China's international relations in the previous era. Under his leadership, the Chinese have become much more active in the diplomatic arena in pursuit of great power status (Chang Liao, 2018). In international organisations, Chinese diplomats have become more assertively in defending China's core interests. In addition, they are increasingly emphasising the designation of China as a great power (Mochtak & Turcsanyi, 2021). The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies also indicates that China has already become more militarily assertive in the first years of Xi's leadership than under his predecessors. (De Spiegeleire et al., 2016).

Scholars have made further remarks on China's overall foreign policy. Harris focused in his work on China's foreign policy, particularly on the extent to which China will co-operate with the West in the coming decades and if the Chinese will adhere to the existing international



system and global norms (2014). De Wijk argues that the Asian-Pacific is the Chinese's most crucial foreign policy region, and he expects a more assertive China in global affairs in the coming decades (2019).

### *China-Africa Relations*

In his book *China in Africa*, Alden asked the following question: “*Is China a partner, an economic competitor or a coloniser?*” (2007). This question identifies the three streams of thought in the existing literature on China-Africa relations. Adem calls these streams Sino-optimism, Sino-pragmatism and Sino-pessimism (2012).

According to Sino-optimists, Africa has much to win from a close relationship with China. The beneficial partnership between China and Africa, resulting from China-Africa “South-South” development, will be a win-win, according to Sino-optimist scholars (Wu & Cheng, 2010; Yin & Vaschetto, 2011). This perspective is, understandably, also popular among Chinese officials, state media outlets, and some African politicians.

The Sino-pragmatist argue that the Chinese are an economic competitor and are primarily interested in the abundance of natural resources on the African continent. They prioritise the economic gain above the well-being of the African states involved. Processes of democratisation, good governance and environmental issues are not the top priority for China in Africa. One of the most notable Sino-pragmatist scholars is Taylor, who did extensive work on the Chinese exploitation of Africa’s natural resources (2007). Sino-pessimists go one step further and believe political control and domination, like the former European colonial powers, drive China for their engagements with Africa. In their view, the Chinese willingly try to slow down Africa’s socio-economic development in their interest (Alden & Large, 2018; Edoho, 2011).

Scholars like to agree that there is a shift in China’s interest in Africa from a more ideological interest under Mao Zedong to an economic and political interest under Deng Xiaoping (Broich et al., 2017).

The main economic interests are access to natural resources and new markets. China is Africa’s largest importer of natural resources (Dahir, 2019). Those natural resources are raw materials, like cobalt, coltan, lithium, copper, and tin, used in producing electronics, car batteries, solar panels and other drivers for the current and future economy (Gulley et al., 2019, Shepard, 2021). These raw materials are needed for China’s domestic economy and will make other countries dependent on China, further strengthening its geopolitical position (Pitron, 2020). In addition,

Africa's vast growing population could provide China with a valuable new consumer market for their goods and a new labour market for some industries (Brioch et al., 2017).

China's political interest has been driven primarily by a desire for diplomatic support from African countries on issues of importance to China on the world stage. Scholars argue that economic partnerships between African countries and China result in these countries' support for China in multilateral organisations, such as the United Nations (UN) (Okana-Heijmans et al., 2018; Broich et al., 2017).

One interest that is often missing from the literature is China's security interest in Africa. In this thesis, I will address this and argue that China has economic, political, and security interests in Africa.

### *China-Rwanda Relations*

There is not much in-depth research done on specific China-Rwanda relations. As a result, China's presence in Rwanda is not yet fully understood (Kuo, 2016). Lisimba and Parasar focused their work on the economic relationship between China and Rwanda (2020). At the same time, Hartmann and Noesselt looked more at China's political impact on the Rwandan regime. Among the few scholars mentioned above on China-Rwanda relations, there seems to be an agreement that Rwanda is an atypical destination for Chinese investments. The reason for this agreement is foremost economic issues: Rwanda lacks natural resources and is considered a poor country in terms of income and development indicators with a small internal market (Lisimba and Parasar, 2020).

For me, this agreement is the main gap in the literature. More research is needed on other facets of China's interest in Rwanda and its economic interests. Perhaps geopolitical or security concerns make Rwanda a typical location for Chinese investment. Rwanda may also play a role in the commodity trade without a significant mining industry. For example, due to its location next to the resource-rich DRC. My research will contribute to finding answers to whether Rwanda is an atypical or typical location for Chinese investment. Therefore, I want to test the hypothesis in this thesis: Rwanda is a typical location for Chinese investment.

## **1.4 Research Design**

In this chapter, I give insight into the research design I used to conduct my research in Rwanda on China's presence there and China-Africa relations in general. First, the research

nature and methods are presented. Then I explain the interdisciplinarity of my research. This is followed by data collection and analysis, and finally, I go into the ethical considerations during my research.

### *Research nature & methods*

My research was exploratory and descriptive. The exploratory part was to investigate and clarify the presence of China in Rwanda and relate this presence to China's broader Africa strategy and China's foreign policy. The descriptive part was to describe China-Africa relations and China's activities in Rwanda in different fields of interest (political, security, and economic).

My research was primarily qualitative but entailed quantitative data on China's presence in Africa and Rwanda. Desk research was my primary research method. This part of the research took place in Rwanda, but mainly in the Netherlands. I used semi-structured interviews and field trips in Rwanda for the exploratory part of my research.

### *Interdisciplinarity*

Duggan wrote in his book, *Competition and Compromise among Chinese Actors in Africa* that the "Sino-African relationship, and therefore China's foreign policy towards Africa, is all-encompassing and deals in all areas of human exchange, such as economic cooperation, social and cultural exchange, and military interaction" (2019). The study of China-Africa relations is an excellent example of an interdisciplinary academic topic. Scholars from different backgrounds, like Development Studies, International Relations, Political Science, Economics or Anthropology, had different approaches to this relation. Still, more important, almost all relied on shared knowledge from multiple disciplines to study China-Africa relations (Otele, 2020). Therefore, I needed an interdisciplinary approach to fully understanding China's presence in Africa and Rwanda.

### *Data collection & analysis*

In Rwanda, I tried to interview many people about the Chinese presence. I chose a semi-structured interview format to ask open-ended questions and one-to-one conversations to ensure that people spoke more freely than in focus groups. In addition, I tried my best to

interview people with different backgrounds, occupations, and origins to ensure other strands of thought against China's presence in Rwanda. But unfortunately, many interviewees gave little helpful information for my research. In the end, I used three interviewees for my research:

- Interviewee 1: Western diplomat with much experience in Africa
- Interviewee 2: Rwandan journalist who has written a lot about the China-Rwanda relationship
- Interviewee 3: Belgian mineral trader

In addition, I made several field trips to the following locations:

- Field trip 1: Kigali, Kimihura district, Kigali (Government buildings constructed by the Chinese)
- Field trip 2: Kigali, Kinyaga district, Chinese-built Special Economic Zone
- Field trip 3: R6, Chinese constructed road through Nyunge forest
- Field trip 4: Goldmine, Nyabihu district, Western province
- Field trip 5: Gisenyi, Rubavu district, Western province (border town near DRC)

During these field trips, I made notes of what I saw and spoke briefly to several people present at these places for more information about the location of my field trip.

I used academic literature, semi-academic literature, policy papers, and media articles for my desk research on China-African relations and China-Rwanda relations. Next, I extensively used official documents from the Rwandan and Chinese governments, interviews, opinion pieces, and statements from the presidents and other government officials of both countries.

The information from my interviews and field visits often formed the starting point of my desk research. For example, my observations at the gold mine and interview with the Belgian mineral trader prompted me to dive deeper into reports, news articles, and government

information about the mining sector in Rwanda. Without these interviews and field visits, I would have left out many things in my research.

I first gathered information about China's Africa strategy during my desk research. Then, based on this, I defined three different interests of China in Africa, political, security and economic. Next, I categorised the information I gathered about Rwanda from literature, interviews, and field visits under the appropriate interest. This gave me a good overview of my research and allowed me to make connections between my data.

### *Research ethics and limitations*

During my research, especially my interviews, I needed not to bring my interviewees in danger. Rwanda is not a country where you can freely discuss sensitive topics, like China's engagement. Both China and Rwanda are authoritarian regimes without freedom of speech. For this reason, I chose not to record my interviews and to refer in this thesis purely to the profession of the interviewee and to leave them otherwise anonymous.

The main limitation during my research was that it was challenging to find people who had information about China's intentions in Rwanda. Chinese people wouldn't talk to me at all. Even though I speak Chinese, people remained very reluctant to talk about China. My questions were quickly dismissed with "*wo ting bu dong*" (I don't understand you), a trick I have often encountered in my previous conversations with Chinese people about sensitive topics.

## **Chapter 2 – China's Africa strategy**

In 2017, I studied at Xiamen University (Xiamen Daxue). Xiamen is a prosperous city in southern China that likely, now five years later, I will not recognise again. Construction was going on day and night, from futuristic skyscrapers to the most modern subway network. Amidst a small group of international students, I was introduced to the strict Chinese education system. Every morning at 8 o'clock sharp, the national anthem blared across the immense campus, and large groups of students made their way into the classrooms. One thing struck me: I saw tufts of African students everywhere. These African students from all over the continent were not part of the curriculum for international students but joined the full-time program in Mandarin. After all, the Africans were almost all fluent in Mandarin. Something I was very jealous of at the time.

In Rwanda, I stumbled upon a sign from the Rwanda-China Alumni Organization. This organisation was for Rwandans who had studied in China, and they aimed to be a bridge between Rwanda and the Chinese community in Rwanda. After talking to two of these alumni, I concluded that they had not only studied in China but had also learned to think like the Chinese. They viewed China's presence in Africa from a Chinese perspective, precisely what the Chinese must have intended in providing a scholarship to these Rwandans.

This chapter focus on the research question: what is China's Africa strategy? First, a brief outline of China's overall foreign policy under Xi Jinping is given. Next, the history of China-Africa relations is described, followed by an examination of China's current Africa strategy regarding the three interests (political, security, and economic). Finally, the conclusion answers the research question. The purpose of this chapter is to understand China's strategy in Africa. In the next chapter, China's presence in Rwanda will be compared to the Africa strategy outlined in this chapter

### **2.1 China's foreign policy**

China's 2012 change of power did not only bring changes in domestic politics. Under the new leader Xi Jinping, the foreign policy of the previous leader, Hu Jintao, underwent a major overhaul. Hu's extremely risk-averse foreign policy focused on maintaining domestic economic growth was transformed by Xi into a more optimistic foreign policy outlook with one main goal: China must regain its rightful place on the world stage (Ferdinand, 2016). Xi's ideas of China as a global power are part of his ideology, the 'Chinese Dream' (Zhongguo

Meng), which he explains as 'the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' that must be achieved by 2049 when the PRC celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Xi, 2012). However, there is debate among Western and Chinese scholars about how to interpret Xi's foreign policy.

Qingguo and Jun argue that China's foreign policy seeks win-win situations based on shared interests and joint efforts. Zero-sum games and conflicts should be a thing of the past (2015). According to the Chinese view on China's relation to the other global power, the US, China seeks cooperation instead of confrontation. Cooperation benefits their shared interests, while conflict hurts them both (Qingguo & Jun, 2015). Mochtak argues that the relationship between China and the US has deteriorated under Xi. He studied the US-China in the previous 20 years and concluded that after 2018 the Chinese sentiment toward the discourse involving the US is in the lowest and most negative spectrum (Mochtak, 2021). Neighbourhood diplomacy is another critical component of China's foreign policy. Xi argues that to boost China's influence and popularity in neighbouring countries, the Chinese should express kindness and friendliness (Qingguo & Jun, 2015).

Western scholars do not see much in this kindness. Instead, they see the emergence of conflicts in the South and East China Seas. As a result of China's growing ability, according to China, to claim its rightful place in the region (Khoo et al., 2022). Although Chinese leadership will argue that this will be achieved in harmony with other countries, Xi clarified that peaceful development is only an option if China's "*legitimate rights and interests*" are protected (Swaine, 2015). All who support the Chinese Dream will be answered with "peace, development, cooperation and win-win outcomes" (Xi, 2017). China's concept of win-win cooperation has been most criticised in the West. According to Weissman, China's foreign policy is not based on win-win cooperation but is always driven by China's domestic interests (2015).

Despite the criticism of China's foreign policy, I think we must admit that China will play a more active and involved role on the global level of diplomacy. By engaging deeply in the international arena, the Chinese will acquire more capabilities and increasingly make their mark on world diplomacy. Therefore, it is one of the biggest challenges in the coming era for the dominant Western global powers to 'deal' with China reclaiming its place in the world.

## **2.2 History of China-Africa relations**

During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the famous Chinese admiral Zheng He (1371-1435) was the first Chinese who set foot on African soil. In his fourth great expedition (1413-1415), Zheng He arrived in the eastern part of Africa, in the city of Brava, modern Somalia.

Eventually, he reached the coast of Mozambique, more than 80 years earlier than the first European, the Portuguese Vasco da Gama. In his next great expedition, the fifth (1417-1419), he would explore the whole Eastern coastline of the African continent (Suryadinata, 2015; Chan, 2020). According to the stories, Zheng He did not harm the African people and traded with the Africans without enslaving a single person (Alden & Alves, 2008). The current Chinese leaders always used the stories of Zheng He's expeditions to prove the historical bond between Africa and China and, most importantly, prove that even in history, China, instead of Western powers, had no exploitative intentions for the African continent (Alden, 2007). The CCP always emphasise that Africa and China share a history of domination and humiliation by Western colonial powers (Alden & Alves, 2008)

During the dictatorship of Mao Zedong (1898-1976), China's relationship with Africa was driven mainly by an anti-Western socialist ideology and support for independence for African states. Mao's China had a generous aid policy for Africa although China's poverty. The reason for China's aid to Africa was ideological and geopolitical. Mao's ideology was spread throughout Africa through his famous *red book* (Lavell, 2019). In this period, thousands of Chinese workers also constructed the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, China's first infrastructural project in Africa. This railway made Zambia trade-wise less dependent on neighbouring Mozambique, controlled by the Portuguese and the White ruled states of South Africa and Rhodesia (Brautigam, 2009). Another example of the growing relationship between China and Africa was the training programs and scholarships for African students, politicians, and soldiers set out by Mao's government to lecture Africans on Communism, Marxist economics and even warfare (Barnett, 2020). Mao's popularity and that of China soared on the African continent with China's greatest geopolitical success in 1971. During this period, China's main priority in Africa was to gain support from African countries for its one-China policy. The Republic of China (RoC), now Taiwan, had to be replaced at the United Nations by Mao's PRC. With great success, in 1971 with the help of votes from African nations, the displacement of the RoC from the UN was achieved (UN, 1974). Despite the popularity of China in Africa during Mao's period, the criticism was there. The in-China educated Ghanaian Emmanuel Hevi warned Africans about China's presence and argued in 1967 that China would take Europe's place as the imperial colonial power in Africa (1967). According to some scholars in the field of China-Africa relations, he made a correct prediction.

After Mao died in 1976, China drastically changed its Africa strategy. Under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, China's domestic issues became all-important. Mao's paranoid ideological foreign policy created multiple enemies in the diplomatic world and led Deng to



turn inward and focus on internal reforms (Broich et al., 2017). As a result, China's presence in Africa under Deng was not comparable to Mao's period (Barnett, 2020). Although ideological interest in Africa waned, economic interest emerged in a new light. Deng replaced Mao's ideological support and financial aid with a more economic relationship. As a result, trade between Africa and China increased by 70% from 1976-1989 (Oqubay & Lin, 2019).

From the 1990s to the present, China's relations with Africa have intensified dramatically (Alden, 2007). China's remarkable economic development was pushed by its 'opening up' strategy and the 'going out' policy of former president Jiang Zemin. As a result, the Chinese were forced to invest in overseas emerging markets, dominantly in Africa. African leaders welcomed Chinese investment as an alternative to Western donors' loans, pushing for economic and governmental reforms (Carter et al., 2019). As a result, Chinese loans to African countries increased by more than 2000% between 2000 and 2016, from \$129 million to \$29 billion. Trade between Africa and China grew significantly, and by 2009 China had surpassed the US as Africa's largest trading partner (Barnett, 2020).

It can be noted that China is currently experiencing its peak in the history of its relations with Africa, and therefore the current Africa strategy deserves every attention.

### **2.3 China's current Africa strategy**

Under the leadership of President Xi, the relationship between China and Africa has continued to intensify and has become increasingly complex. Drawing on China's three previously mentioned interests in Africa, this section examines China's current Africa strategy, aiming to outline that the current strategy is about more than just raw materials and markets for Chinese products.

#### *China's political interest in Africa*

Despite the emphasis on the economic aspect of China-Africa relations, Africa's economic value to China is relatively low. China's trade with Africa is only four per cent of China's global trade. This is almost negligible per African country, given that Africa consists of 54 countries. This does not mean that Africa has no economic value to China, but it does raise questions about whether economic interests are the primary driver of China's Africa strategy (Lüdtke, 2022). Pairault, a renowned sinologist, argues that "*the quintessence of Sino-African relations is not economic, but geopolitical*" (Olander, 2021). According to Pairault,

African countries are used to enable the rebirth of China as a global power. The economic support of the Chinese for African countries ensures their support for China on the international stage. (Olander, 2021). With success, under Xi's rule, the Chinese have become more active and visible in the global political arena, especially within the UN, where China is the head of four agencies. Simultaneously holding so many directorates did not occur before within the UN. (Clingendael, 2018). China's growing influence within the UN was perhaps most painfully evident during Michelle Bachelet's recent visit to Xinjiang. Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, visited the region for the Chinese state's alleged human rights violations against the Uyghur population, which ended in deception, and Bachelet seemed to condone rather than condemn (Rodgers, 2022). What the Chinese see as win-win cooperation between China and Africa appears to be an economic victory for Africa and a political victory for China. Africa profits from Chinese investment, and China benefits from African support on the international stage, a win-win.

Ideological interest is another part of China's political interest in Africa. China's ideological interest in Africa has changed significantly in recent decades. Xi's regime is not trying to convince African countries of Marxism or Maoism. Instead, China is exporting its development model to Africa, also known as the China model (Barnett, 2020). In short, this model is China's approach to economic freedom under the umbrella of a repressive authoritarian one-party state, where political stability is valued above all else (Bell, 2016). Communist China has established a free market economy, but this is partially true, as Bell argues that "*the state still retains ultimate control over strategic sectors of the economy and a large number of core industries*" (2016). African leaders are very sympathetic to this model, and understandably so. In the 1960s, most African countries had stronger economies than the Chinese. China's reforms lifted them out of poverty, and now China's GDP is ten times that of all sub-Saharan African countries combined. This causes African leaders to admire the Chinese model and believe that Africa can experience similar growth with the same model (Mohseni-Cheraghrou, 2021). The China model responds to the Western ideology of democracy that seems to be losing ground in Africa, while China is gaining ground as a mentor in illiberal governance (Barnett, 2020). A good example is the increasing export of Chinese surveillance technology to African countries to ensure social stability and prevent potential threats to the ruling regimes (Bell, 2016).

### *China's security interest in Africa*

In 2019, the European Parliament Research Service noted that China emerged as a security actor in Africa for two reasons: The protection of China's assets in Africa and China's new role on the international stage (Grieger, 2019). Chinese companies are constructing infrastructural projects throughout Africa, sometimes in areas affected by violent conflicts. China's growing military presence in Africa is partly due to the growing safety concerns for Chinese workers and the protection of these projects (Nantulya, 2021).

China's new role as a global power has also led to a shift in its attitude towards UN peacekeeping. In the past, these activities were condemned by China, but now they receive great support from the Chinese (Grieger, 2019). Concerning the other members of the Security Council, China contributes the most troops and is the second-largest financial donor for these missions. It is seen as a strategic move to boost their image in Africa since nearly 80 per cent of all UN peacekeepers serve in Africa, most of whom are African (Nantulya, 2021).

Another good example of China's growing military presence in Africa led to the construction in 2017 of its first overseas military base, the naval base in Djibouti. It was built just a few kilometres from Djibouti's brand-new multipurpose port constructed by the Chinese. This is a perfect example of China's security interest in Africa as the naval base helps Djibouti secure the coastline against pirates but also, more importantly, protect China's commercial interest in Djibouti. (Alden & Large, 2018). China's involvement in security issues and its military presence in Africa will increase as China restores itself as the major global power.

### *China's economic interest in Africa*

China's economic interest in Africa is best known and most studied. Generally, the two most common interests are assumed: natural resources and market access. Africa's wealth of raw materials is of great interest to China. The Chinese are the largest processors of raw materials in the world. Almost all the minerals and metals needed for wind turbines, electric car batteries and electronic devices are processed in China. Africa's vast reserves of these raw materials are therefore crucial to China. This sector is still underdeveloped in Africa, and the Chinese seem to be the perfect partner in their search for investment and the necessary infrastructure development (Roxburgh et al., 2022). China's other major economic interest is access to African markets for export, investment, employment, and experience. For Chinese companies, Africa can serve as a training ground to gain overseas experience and expand their

presence abroad. In addition, African markets are interesting for cheap Chinese products and the establishment of low-skilled industries (Thrall, 2015). These two main interests come together in the well-known Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The goal of this initiative is to connect China to the world through infrastructural projects and transform China from a regional power to global power (Yu, 2017). These infrastructural investments, often provided by the Chinese in the form of loans, are welcomed in Africa as an opportunity for rapid development. For China, better infrastructure in Africa offers more access to markets and better transportation options for strategic natural resources (Chan, 2018).

Western observers view this initiative with suspicion and accuse China of debt-trap diplomacy. They argue that this form of loan, often secured by mines and ports as collateral, is a deliberate attempt by the Chinese government to exploit heavily indebted African countries. According to them, when these countries cannot meet their debt commitments, the assets can sometimes be seized by the Chinese. Moreover, these loans make them highly dependent on China and unable to criticise the Chinese (Manasseh et al., 2022). The Chinese vigorously deny this and indicate that China is not after the strategic assets of the countries in question (Mboya, 2021). Finally, the image below, from Germany's Mercator Institute for Chinese Studies, shows that Africa does not play the most critical role in the overall Belt and Road initiative. Instead, the focus is on connecting Asia to Europe. However, for the upcoming chapters, it is interesting to note that BRI in Africa is most emphatically present in the East, including Rwanda (Ghiretti et al., 2022).

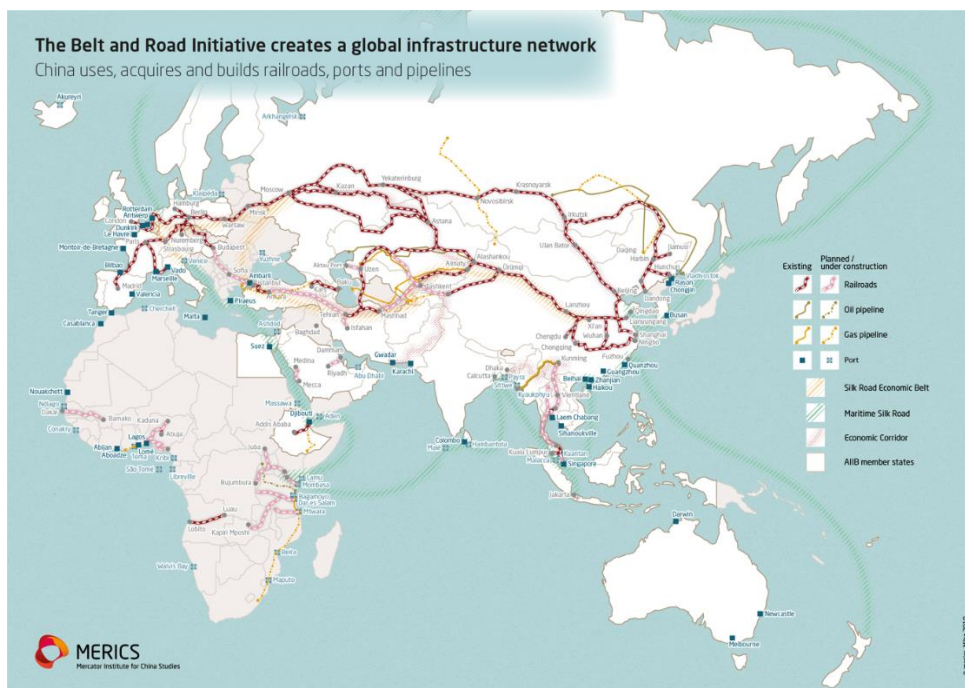


Figure 2: The Belt and Road Initiative - Source: Ghiretti et al., 2022.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The combination of these three interests together forms China's strategy for Africa. I do not see raw materials and access to markets as main priorities, but as part of the strategy that contributes to the overarching goal: the rejuvenation of the Chinese people. This propaganda language implies that China must become a superpower economically and geopolitically.

These three interests all contribute to this and reinforce each other. China's political interest is to win the support of African countries on the international stage, and ideologically, China's interest in Africa is to promote its model in response to the democratic model of the West. This also strengthens China's position on the world stage. China's security interest in Africa is to protect its interests, consolidate this support, and be an essential and reliable partner for Africa. Lastly, the economic interest also aims to strengthen China's geopolitical power. China's dominant position in the raw materials market makes Western countries highly dependent on China, for example, for products needed for the energy transition, such as solar panels and wind turbines. Next, the fast-growing consumer markets are of interest to the Chinese. Also, with investments in infrastructure, China builds a dependency on African countries, so they can hardly criticise China within the international community.

In conclusion, China's Africa strategy has a prominent place in China's overall foreign policy that aims to solidify China as a world power and restore its position on the world stage. The coming chapters will analyse whether the Chinese presence in Rwanda fits the definition of China's Africa strategy elaborated above.

### **Chapter 3 – China’s interest in Rwanda**

China's interest began in 1971 when the two countries established diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level. In 1976 the Chinese provided scholarships to Rwandan students, and in 1982, Chinese medical teams were sent to Rwanda. Steadily, China-Rwanda relations grew, becoming Rwanda's largest trading partner and project contractor in the decades that followed. Rwanda's ambassador to China, James Kimonyo, wrote an opinion piece in the *China Daily*, a state-owned English-language daily: ‘*Relations between China, the world's future economic leader, and Africa, the youngest and fastest-growing continent, as well as between China and Rwanda, will be at the center of the changes that will arise in the decades to come*’ (2021). The ambassador firmly believes that the relationship between China and Rwanda will become “*even stronger and more beneficial for our two peoples*” in the next 50 years (Kimonyo, 2021). But how does China view this relationship? And why are they interested in Rwanda?

This chapter focuses on the research question: what is China’s interest in Rwanda? First, I analyse China’s political interest in Rwanda, followed by their security and economic interest. The conclusion answers the research question by combining all three interests. The purpose of this chapter is to define China’s interest in Rwanda, so it can be compared with China’s Africa strategy in the conclusion of this thesis, where the main research question is answered.

#### **3.1 Political interest**

During my first few days in Kigali, I decided to explore this seemingly modern city. After walking through Kimihurura Park, I rested on a bench. Here I had a view of the Rwandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, and a large office complex that included the Prime Minister's office. These three colossal buildings had one thing in common: they were all funded by China. The fact that a Chinese construction company made this is not so special, but the fact that these buildings were given to Rwanda by China as a gift is remarkable (Paduano, 2019). There is no mystery about it. A large plaque leaves nothing to the imagination at all three of these buildings about who the generous giver was, as seen in the image below. The Rwandan government well-received this multi-million dollar project, and Prime Minister Edouard Ngirente saw his new workplace as “*yet another indicator of the increasingly strong relationship between China and Rwanda*” (Mbonyinshuti, 2019). Zheng Jianbang, the man who was handing over the gift on behalf of the Chinese government, also spoke highly of this

relationship: *"the completion of the complex is inspiring. But what inspires me even more is the rapid growth of relations between China and Rwanda"* (Tasamba, 2019). But why is China donating these buildings? Do these new Rwandan ministries also benefit China?



Figure 3: Chinese-funded offices in Kigali – Source: Canny Elevator Co. Ltd., 2019

### *Kagame's strength and influence*

A Western diplomat gave me a possible answer during a conversation in a coffeehouse near these ministries. He saw Kagame as one of the most influential leaders in Africa and stated that he was not only the big man in Rwanda but also within the region. This diplomat also argued that Kagame is quite positive about the Chinese and thinks that China does appreciate that too (Interviewee 1).

It is highly plausible that Kagame's strength and influence are the biggest reason for China's political interest in Rwanda. As the leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the ruling political party, he ended the Rwandan genocide in 1994. After serving as Minister of Defense and Vice President for a period, he became President of Rwanda in 2000 (Reyntjens, 2015). In 2017, he won the election with 98.8% of the vote and began his third term as president (Burke, 2017). A constitutional amendment in 2015 made it possible for Kagame to run for a third term. Previously it was two terms (BBC News, 2015). In recent decades, Kagame has gained complete power over Rwanda. Stephen Kinzer wrote the following in his bestseller "A Thousand Hills" about Kagame, which underscores this well: *"He so totally dominates Rwandan life, his choices will decisively shape the country's future"* (2008).

Under his leadership, Rwanda became an authoritarian state with Kagame as dictator. Despite his dictatorial rule, Kagame was often seen as a visionary leader, especially by Western countries and Rwanda as a guiding light for the rest of Africa<sup>2</sup>. I experienced this myself during my time in Rwanda. Western residents of Rwanda, whom I spoke to frequently, often praised Kagame and saw his dictatorship as the only option in a country with such a history of violence. The doubt still favours Kagame's regime despite suspicions of murdering political opponents and other crimes. For example, in 2021, three political opponents of Kagame's regime were murdered in Mozambique and South Africa alone. The perpetrators are still without a trace (Jallow, 2021).

### *Relationship between Kagame and China*

This criticism seems less of an issue for the Chinese, and I argue they see Kagame primarily as a key figure in the region. China is very active in Rwanda's neighbour, the DRC, and according to Reyntjens, Rwanda developed "*an extraordinary degree of military, political, and economic control over its huge (but weak) western neighbour*" (2015). The earlier mentioned diplomat, whom I spoke to concerning Rwanda, also frequently named Rwanda's regional political influence as one of the major factors for China's presence in Rwanda. He argued that China not only has relations with Rwanda but also builds relations with the region via Rwanda, which serves as China's gateway to East Africa (Interviewee 1). President Xi also mentioned Rwanda's power position in the region in a statement published in Rwanda's leading newspaper, the New Times, during his official state visit to Rwanda in 2018: "*Under the leadership of President Kagame, Rwanda has embarked on a path of development suited to its own realities, achieved long-term social stability and fast economic growth, and is enjoying increasing influence in the region and beyond*" (2018). Xi was the first Chinese head of state to visit Rwanda, and Rwanda was his first overseas trip since the election in 2017. Xi himself saw this as proof of his country's importance to the China-Rwanda relationship (2018).

Kagame often mentioned the good relationship between China and Rwanda. Already in 2009, he argued that Africa was better off with China than with the West: "*The European and the American commitment didn't help on Africa. Our resources were exploited and used by others. Western companies have polluted Africa, and it is still happening. The Chinese bring along what Africa needs: Investments*" (2009). In 2018, as president of the African Union, he

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1 - Rwanda



and Xi organized the Forum on China-African Cooperation (FOCAC) summit. Kagame said at the FOCAC, "*China has proven to be a win-win partner and a sincere friend. We look forward to building on this solid foundation to reach the shared future of openness, prosperity, and peace that our peoples want and must have*" (2018). During Xi's state visit to Rwanda, Kagame praised Xi for his personal commitment to the African continent and stated that China sees Africa as equal and that the relationship is based on mutual respect and mutual interests. Kagame argued that this is "*a revolutionary posture in world affairs, and it is more precious than money*" (Shaban, 2018). At the China-Africa Summit on Solidarity against COVID-19, Kagame poured attention again to the strength of the relationship between Africa and China and thanked the Chinese for their solidarity during difficult times. According to Kagame, China's assistance during the pandemic demonstrated the productivity of cooperation and highlighted the strength of the bond between China and Africa (Government of Rwanda, 2020).

The fact that Kagame praises the Chinese for their presence in Africa makes him, in my opinion, extremely interesting to China. Mainly because of what a Rwandan journalist told me about Kagame's vision for Africa's development. The conversation was about the concept of "oneness.". By this, he meant that according to Kagame, Africa should be seen as one entity and that despite the differences between countries, all African countries have a common goal and must work together in unity to achieve this goal of becoming a developed and prosperous continent (Interviewee 2). China seems to welcome this concept of "oneness", and Xi praised Kagame for his efforts to achieve this: "*President Kagame plays an important role in promoting African cooperation, supporting Africa's effort to seek strength through unity*" (2018).

Furthermore, the Chinese often specifically target cooperation with the whole continent. For example, by organizing the FOCAC summits. The construction of the AU headquarters in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa which, like the ministries in Rwanda, was gifted by China, captures the imagination even more. This cost China a whopping \$200 million (BBC News, 2012). It is difficult to make the case that Kagame's concept of 'oneness' contributes to this, but it is plausible that China feels supported by him in its deepening cooperation with Africa as a whole.

### *Diplomatic support*

In the previous chapter, African support for China on the international stage was mentioned as one of the key political interests of China in Africa. Rwanda also seems to be

fulfilling this interest. In his opinion piece published in all major Rwandan news outlets, the Chinese ambassador to Rwanda, Rao Hongwei, expressed this very clearly: " *We support each other in the international arena and speak with one voice on so many issues*" (2021). This was also confirmed by the earlier mentioned Western diplomat, who argued while pointing to the donated ministries that such gifts make it practically impossible for Rwanda to act against China in the UN or other multilateral organizations (Interviewee 1). The fact that the Chinese ambassador published in the new times is not surprising, given that he signed an "agreement of cooperation" with this newspaper in 2019 to " *promote the mutual understanding and friendship between the Chinese and the Rwandan people*" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Rwanda, 2019).

### *China's ideological interest in Rwanda*

Another part of China's political interest, according to the previous chapter, is exporting their ideology of the China Model. Kimonyo stated in his earlier mentioned opinion piece in the China Daily that Rwanda's development model is partly based on China and shares similarities (2021). Lisamba and Parashar argue that just like the Chinese, " *Rwanda has embraced central economic planning and has adopted developmental patrimonialism as the ruling ideology*" (2020). Paduano argues the same by stating that " *'like China, Rwanda has embraced central economic planning by empowering government-owned investment funds to guide the economy'*" (2019). Vision 2020, a framework for Rwanda's development into a middle-income economy, is another example of implementing steps towards domestic development with characteristics of China's development model (Wisniewska, 2019). Ambassador Rao stated that " *the Communist Party of China and the Rwanda Patriotic Front also shoulder the same mission of national development and rejuvenation*". He argues that the CPC and the RPF share the same idea of governance as the " *people-centred concept of the CPC and the citizen-centred concept of the RPF are highly compatible*" (2020). Rao firmly believes in the synergy of their development strategies (2020). The Rwandan government rejected liberal democracy by abolishing term limits for Kagame (Paduano, 2019). In a reaction to the Summit on Democracy, where both countries were not invited, Rao published an opinion piece on Rwanda's media, *A Reasonable Notion of Democracy Matters*. In this, he stated China and Rwanda's democracy are similar and that it is "an internal affair by nature, and don't accept unsolicited lecturing on democracy" (2021). He concluded by arguing that China and Rwanda can together do a lot to promote their model of democracy internationally (2021). It turns out

that Rwanda is an important partner for China in spreading its ideology and development model as a counter-response to the West.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, China's political interest in Rwanda seems to be based on the strength and influence of Kagame. This part of the chapter showed Kagame as a great supporter of China's engagement in Africa and a key political figure within the region and Africa as a whole. His ideas about Africa's development align perfectly with China's ideas and make Kagame the perfect marketer for deepening the relationship between Africa and China according to the China model. I saw Kagame myself once during my stay in Rwanda. After standing still for 10 minutes at an intersection under the watchful eye of eight heavily armed Rwandan soldiers, Kagame, seated in one of three enormous black Range Rovers, drove across the intersection at great speed. He is indeed the big man of Rwanda.

### **3.2 Security interest**

After the genocide, the military became a central and influential actor in Rwanda's society and a model for Rwandans (Kuehnel and Wilén, 2017). As a result, the Rwandan Defense Force (RDF), so-called after it renounced the civil war-laden name Rwanda Patriotic Army in 2002, is a much-respected institution in Rwanda. Most Rwandans have a close relationship with the RDF, and Kuehnel and Wilén even stated that Rwanda "*could arguably be termed as a country of soldiers*" (2017).

In Kigali, the military is frequently visible on the streets, mainly guarding government buildings. But the military presence stood out during a field trip to Gisenyi, bordering the DRC. Around and in this city, it seemed like a war was about to begin. Army trucks drove in and out of the city at high speed with many heavy-armed soldiers in the trunk. A similar military presence was evident in the border areas with Burundi and Uganda, where there were military posts every few kilometres along roads close to the border. When I asked Rwandans about the reason for this, they always got the same answer: rebel groups. Rwanda seems to have consistently bad relations with Burundi, Uganda and the DRC. In turn, they accuse each other of supporting certain rebel groups.

At first glance, the Chinese do not seem to influence the Rwandan military directly, but it is up to me to show in this section of the chapter that Chinese interest in the Rwandan army

does exist. First, I look at Rwanda's role in UN peacekeeping missions and their military diplomacy. Then I look at the military relationship between China and Rwanda and argue why China shows interest in the Rwandan military.

### *Rwanda's role in UN Peacekeeping missions*

After Pakistan and Ethiopia, Rwanda is the third-largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions. It is one of the few countries in the world where the constitution requires them to participate in peacekeeping missions worldwide (Ministry of Defence – Republic of Rwanda, 2022). According to Rwanda's Ministry of Defence, their contribution to UN peacekeeping missions is "mainly motivated by the need to take its international responsibility as an active member of the international community" (2022). As a result, the current peacekeeping missions of MINUSCA (Central African Republic), UNMISS (South Sudan) and UNISFA (Abei region) can rely on the support of more than 6000 Rwandan troops (Kagina, 2021; Gowan, 2022). According to Kuehnel and Wilén, contributing to these peacekeeping missions also serves a domestic purpose of strengthening the image of Rwandan soldiers as heroes and saviours. Furthermore, these contributions show that Rwanda has an army that other countries should take seriously (2017). Finally, Rwanda's contribution to UN peacekeeping missions has tempered criticism of Kagame's authoritarian regime (Donelli, 2021).

### *Rwanda's military diplomacy*

In 2020, Rwanda sent troops to Mozambique and the Central African Republic (CAR) under a bilateral agreement. Despite multilateral interventions in Mozambique and CAR, Rwanda independently decided to intervene in the conflicts in these countries. In the CAR, this is separate from their contribution to MINUSCA (Handy, 2021). According to Handy, "the CAR and Mozambique deployments should be seen as military diplomacy supporting economic ambitions that nurture the country's soft power" (2021). The military assistance in the CAR resulted in Rwanda's economic entry into this troubled state and multiple economic partnerships in mining and transport. (Donelli, 2021; Handy, 2021). In Mozambique, Rwanda's military help resulted in agreements for increased private sector activities and investments in Mozambique's energy sector (Donelli, 2021). In addition, Rwanda helped prevent Mozambique from falling into a further conflict that could destabilise neighbouring Tanzania. Tanzania's

destabilisation could significantly impact Rwanda's economy as many of its imports come from the international port of Dar es Salaam (Handy, 2021). The cases in the CAR and Mozambique illustrates Rwandan rising status as a reliable partner in security issues in Africa.

However, a politically motivated reason lies next to economic motivations for Rwanda's bilateral security cooperation. Building a reputation as a stable country able to provide help to other African countries facing conflicts boosts Kagame's image as one of Africa's most significant and influential leaders (Donelli, 2021). Donelli concludes his article by stating that "*the Rwandan army appears well suited to act as a proxy force for international interests in Sub-Saharan Africa, assuming those interests dovetail with those of Kagame and the RPF*" (2021).

These military interventions can also be of interest to foreign powers. In April 2021, the French energy multinational Total was forced to indefinitely halt its \$20 billion gas project in Mozambique because of the conflict. In May 2021, Kagame was visited by French President Macron. Shortly after, Kagame sent his army to Mozambique (Aidi, 2022). The conflict ended with Rwanda's help, and Total's gas project restarted in 2022 (Reuters, 2022). Rwanda has always denied that the military intervention in Mozambique was financed by France and Total (Lawal, 2021). Does this example make Rwanda's military also interesting for China to defend their interests in Africa?

### *China's interest in Rwanda's military*

As one of the CAR's and Mozambique's most prominent economic partners, both participants in the BRI, the Chinese were probably not dissatisfied with the Rwandan military aid to these countries (Opali, 2021; CGTN, 2022). But Rwanda's forceful action in these countries should not surprise China, as it has cooperated militarily with the Rwandans in recent years. For example, in 2018, the Rwandan military purchased Chinese heavy weaponry, most notably the PCL-09 howitzer system and the HJ-9A anti-tank missiles. PCL-09 can launch anti-tank missiles with a maximum range of 27 kilometres and equip with Beidou, a navigation system and data chain developed by the Chinese. For the HJ-9A missiles, steel up to a depth of 1.2 metres is no problem. The Rwandan military is the first foreign military known to use this Chinese weaponry (Zhen, 2018). Zhou Chenming, a Beijing-based military expert, said, "*some African countries wanted to buy some Chinese weapons just to show their close political relationships and military ties with China*" (Zhen, 2018).

Notably, Rwanda not only buys Chinese weapons but also, as one of the few countries in the world, receives military training from the Chinese (Zheng, 2019). The result of the Chinese training mission was visible during a military parade celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> Liberation Day of Rwanda. After being inspected by Kagame, the troops marched carefully under the commands of the Rwandan army officers, issued in Mandarin (Zhuo, 2019).

The military cooperation between the two countries is also visible in the official statements following a farewell visit of outgoing Chinese ambassador Rao to Rwanda's highest Rwandan general, Jean Bosco Kazura. The general thanked Chinese ambassador Rao for his outstanding efforts to promote the military relationship between China and Rwanda in recent years. When the ambassador bids farewell to the general, he states that "*military cooperation is an important part of the practical cooperation between the two countries*" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Rwanda, 2022). General Kazura ensured ambassador Rao that he "*remains committed to developing the relationship between the two militaries*" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Rwanda, 2022).

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, I note that Rwanda's military has developed into a mature army. Furthermore, through its contribution to multilateral and bilateral peace operations, Rwanda seeks to contribute to a more stable and secure Africa. Also, these contributions positively impact the image of Rwanda and its President Kagame and serve an economic purpose in the form of partnerships or protecting its economic interests in these regions.

Chinese arms exports to Rwanda and military training show that the two countries cooperate in the military field. I expect this to increase in the future and argue that Chinese interest in the Rwandan army stems from the status Rwanda is currently building as the policeman of Africa. Should African countries important to China be embroiled in conflict, I believe Rwanda is the ideal partner for China to ask for help to protect its interests without having to send military forces itself actively. Rwanda can strengthen its image as a reliable peacemaker in Africa and sustain itself through economic partnerships. Again, I see a win-win situation emerging.

### 3.3 Economic interest

The share of China-Rwanda trade in total China-Africa trade varied between 0.07% and 0.23% during 2000-2019 (China Africa Research Initiative, 2021). Although this is a tiny percentage, the economic interest of the Chinese in Rwanda is significant. As demonstrated in this thesis, China's economic interest in Africa often focuses on raw materials, a large internal market, and infrastructure investment. Therefore, at first glance, Rwanda does not seem like a typical location for economic interest, given its lack of these raw materials, large internal market, and geographic location (landlocked). However, in this chapter, I argue that these three factors still underlie China's economic interest in the case of Rwanda.

#### *Natural resources*

Mining in Rwanda began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the main focus was on cassiterite, coltan and wolfram. After processing, these minerals yield tin, tantalum and tungsten, the so-called 3T metals (National Institute of Statistics Rwanda, 2019). These minerals are critical raw materials for almost all electronic devices but are also used in other industries, like automotive, aviation, medical equipment and renewable energy. Because they are crucial for electronic devices, the 3Ts are called "tech-minerals" (Barume et al., 2016). Along with gold, also mined in Rwanda, the 3Ts are called conflict minerals. They owe this name to the fact that they are often mined in areas where rebel groups are active, especially in the DRC (European Commission, 2022).

In 2018, the Rwandan government introduced new legislation to modernise and professionalise their mining industry (Stevens, 2020). The country's mineral mining is mainly conducted within artisanal and small-scale mining without mechanisation (Machacek, 2020). China's ambassador Rao pledged that his government would contribute to the professionalisation of Rwanda's mining sector (2019). In 2019, China and Rwanda started a three-year cooperative project where Chinese experts used satellite remote sensing technology to identify Rwanda's full mineral potential. Xi signed the agreement on this project during his state visit to Rwanda (Stevens, 2019). In 2018, mineral export was after tourism, with 339 million the biggest export foreign exchange earner for Rwanda. By 2024, the government targets to increase the export revenue of minerals to 1,5 billion dollars annually (Stevens, 2019). Ambassador Rao said it's their pleasure "*if the Rwandan mining industry can benefit from what China has achieved*" (2019).

However, Rwanda's raw materials production constitutes only a tiny part of the country's mining sector. I encountered the other leg during a field trip to Rwanda's largest gold mine in the country's northwestern region. After I read that gold exports had increased by 754.6 per cent in 2019-2020, I expected to find a modern mine. Nothing turned out to be further from the truth. It was forbidden to enter the mine site, but from the adjacent tea plantation, you had a good view of the gold mine. There were few miners or professional machines; this mine looked nothing like an industrialised mine that could be responsible for the vast export increase of Rwandan gold. I doubted the origin of the increased Rwandan gold and was not alone. A UN Security Council report on Rwanda's gold exports in 2019 noted something remarkable. According to the UN Security Council, "*Rwanda declared gold exports of 2,163 kg, while the United Arab Emirates (UAE) officially imported 12,539 kg from Rwanda in the first nine months of 2018*" (2019). The Security Council stated that this gold originated from the DRC and was smuggled to Rwanda before entering the world market (2019). In 2020, Rwanda exported 91.6% of its gold to the UAE (OEC, 2022).

In Kigali, I met a Belgian mineral trader whom I asked about these smuggling activities. The trader couldn't or wouldn't tell me much about it but did point out that mineral trading offices are abundant in Kigali and that Rwanda plays a significant role in the mineral trade from the DRC, especially in the mineral coltan (Interviewee 3). Global Witness, a British NGO, published a comprehensive report in April 2022, concluding that only 10% of the minerals exported by Rwanda are of Rwandan origin (2022). The Rwandan government has always denied this without providing evidence against these accusations. Indeed, the problem is that Rwanda does not publish data on what they produce themselves (Global Witness, 2022). But Global Witness's conclusion seems to be based on the truth when looking at Rwandan exports of coltan. The image below shows that Rwanda's coltan production is deficient, yet Rwanda is the world's largest exporter of coltan (Schütte & Nawer, 2020).



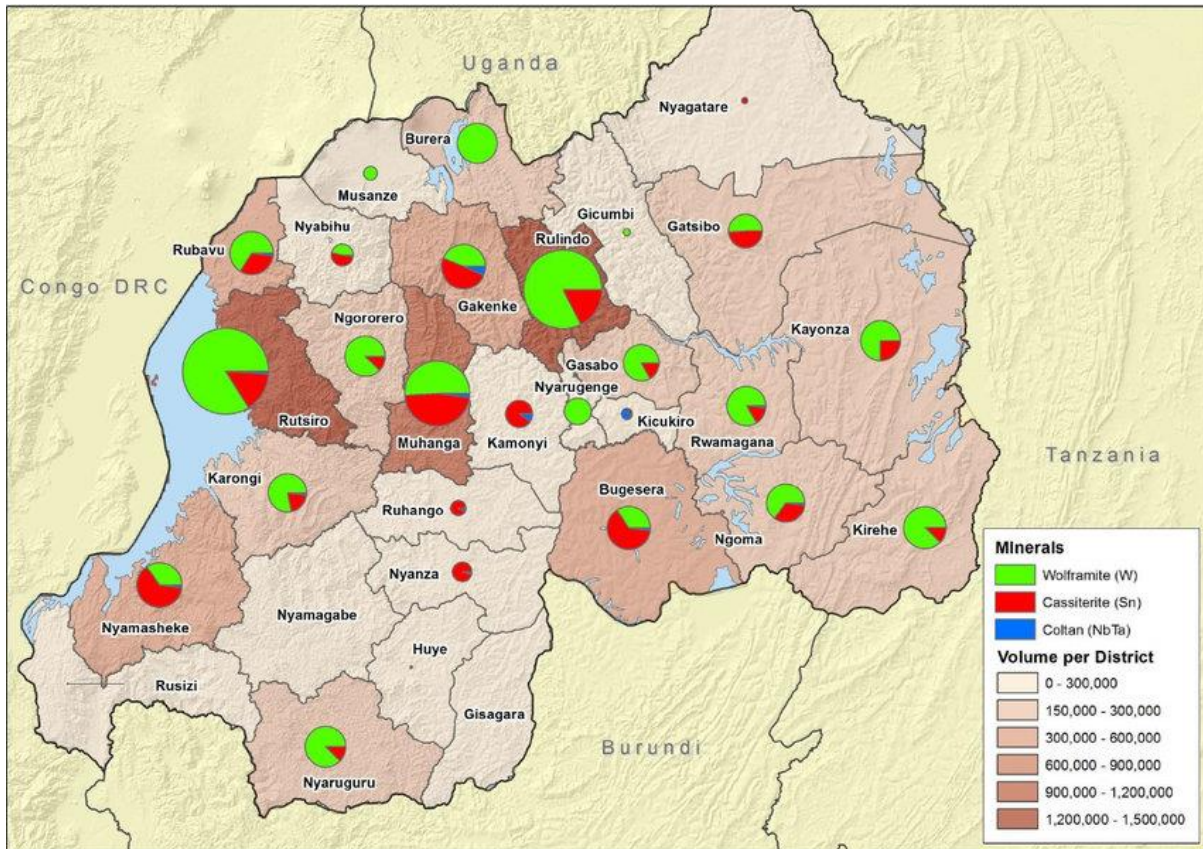


Figure 4: Mining sites Rwanda – Source: Baretto et al., 2018.

Global Witness also saw only a minimal number of coltan mines in Rwanda that were often inactive and concluded that "it was much cheaper to buy tags and minerals from DRC than to invest in legitimate mining in Rwanda" (2022). Next to the Global Witness report, Rwanda was accused of smuggling minerals from conflict areas in the DRC by multiple news outlets in the last few years. (York & Rever, 2021; Himbara, 2022; Ojewale, 2022).

But Global Witness' report clearly shows how this smuggling works. In 2009, the International Tin Supply Chain Initiative (ITSCI) was created. This initiative ensured that government agents from the DRC and Rwanda seal and tag bags of minerals that are not smuggled or linked to conflict mines before transport to the refineries. ITSCI aimed to establish a reliable supply chain of minerals from the DRC and Rwanda. In Rwanda, this was first successful, and in 2012, 97% of all 3Ts exports carried ITSCI tags. But the problem becomes that these tags appear to be tradable. Someone active in the mining sector in Rwanda tells Global Witness: "Tags are a commodity - you buy and sell. Everybody with a mining license gets tags and can sell them on. Sometimes tags are sold years after they were issued" (2022). In Kigali's suburbs are numerous trading posts where smuggled minerals from the DRC are tagged. With an ITSCI tag, the minerals are "washed clean" of their conflict area origin and

can enter the world market as conflict-free minerals. Through this ITSCS scheme, Rwanda has become a significant player in the coltan supply chain (Global Witness, 2022). In 2022, tensions between Rwanda and the DRC are rising again. Congolese President Tshisekedi has accused Rwanda of supporting rebel groups in his country "*to indirectly occupy our land, rich in gold, coltan and cobalt, for their exploitation and profit,*" saying, "*This is an economic war for the battle of resources*" (AP News, 2022).

Rwanda exports 70.2 per cent of the minerals tantalum, niobium, vanadium and zirconium to China. In 2005 this was only 33.5 per cent. Most of these exports consist of tantalum and niobium extracted from coltan (OEC, 2022). In addition, Rwanda exports almost half of its tungsten to China. As mentioned earlier, nearly all gold goes to the UAE. Of the other mineral extracted in Rwanda, Tin, 97.5 per cent is exported to Thailand. These statistics all refer to the year 2020 (OEC, 2022). Rwanda's mineral export data shows that China is the leading importer of coltan from Rwanda. The largest processor of coltan is the Chinese company Ninxia Non-ferrous Metals Smeltery (NNMS), a state-owned enterprise (Bleischwitz et al., 2012). Global Witness indicates that NNMS is one of Rwanda's largest smuggled minerals buyers (2022).

The EU conducted a study on thirty critical raw materials for strategic technologies and sectors and concluded that the Chinese dominate the supply chain on almost all of these raw materials, including coltan (Bobba et al., 2020). Pitron, an expert in the geopolitics of raw materials, argues that China's dominance in the supply chain strengthens its geopolitical power and increases Western dependence on China (2020). The picture below illustrates this well. In the production of wind turbines, which also require the mineral niobium (Ni), Western countries are hardly present in the supply chain of raw materials. Conversely, China is dominant throughout the supply chain (Bobba et al., 2020).

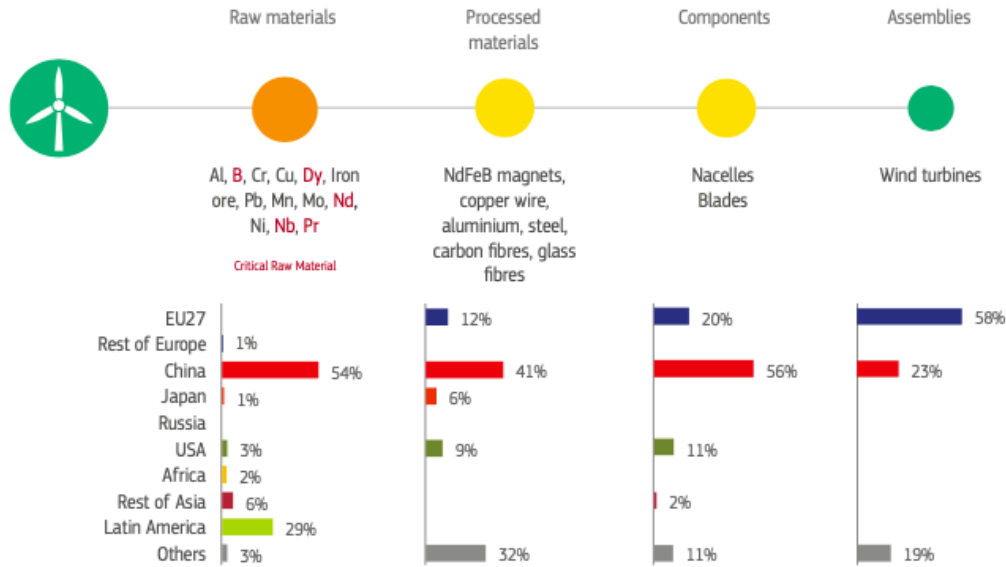


Figure 5: Supply chain wind turbines – Source: Bobba et al., 2020.

It is clear that Rwanda, without having few producing mines of its own, still plays a significant part in the mineral sector of the Great Lakes Region. China’s economic interest in Rwanda’s mining industry and mineral trade hub fits perfectly with China’s general interest in Africa’s raw materials reserves. Similar to their political and security interests, China’s increasing geopolitical power plays a prominent role in their presence in this sector of the Rwandan economy.

### Internal market

As mentioned earlier, Rwanda is considered an atypical destination for Chinese investments because of their small internal market (Lisimba & Parasar, 2020). Although it is true that with only 12 million inhabitants, roughly the number of an average Chinese provincial town, Rwanda is not a massive market by Chinese standards. But that does not mean that it cannot still be interesting for Chinese companies to establish themselves in Rwanda. In the past five years, more than 50 Chinese companies have settled in Rwanda with an investment value of 250 million dollars (RDB, 2019).

One of the Chinese companies present in Rwanda, China Star Construction, partially constructed the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Kigali (Paduano, 2019). During a field trip to this SEZ, which I was not allowed to enter, I noticed Chinese characters on many buildings

and fences, red lanterns and even Chinese flags. According to the Rwandan government, the overall goal of the SEZ is *"to increase foreign and private investment, growth and diversification of exports, development of industrial/non-agricultural sectors, and creation of employment and income outside of agriculture"* (MINICOM, 2010). As previously read in the section on political importance in this thesis, the SEZ in Kigali is another example of Rwanda's interpretation of "the China model" in which SEZ play an essential role in economic development (Steenbergen & Javorcik, 2017). The Rwandan Development Board, in a report on the SEZ, states that Rwanda has strategic access to a market size of over 500 million people in the East and Central African region. According to the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), much of this market is *"accessible by road, barely four hours from Kigali in all directions"* (RDB, 2016). According to Kuo, SEZ has enabled the Chinese to gain a strong economic hold on the Great Lakes Region and is an important incentive for China's presence in Rwanda (2016).

Although Rwanda's internal market is not massive, the favourable business climate, political stability, and strategic access to a market of over 500 million people make Rwanda, in my view, a typical destination for Chinese businesses. During Xi's state visit to Rwanda in 2018, both countries signed multiple agreements on economic cooperation (Wang, 2018). As a result, Chinese exports to Rwanda almost doubled in 2019 compared to 2018, as shown in the table below (Trading Economics, 2022). This shows that Rwanda's small internal market does not deter China from growing its exports.

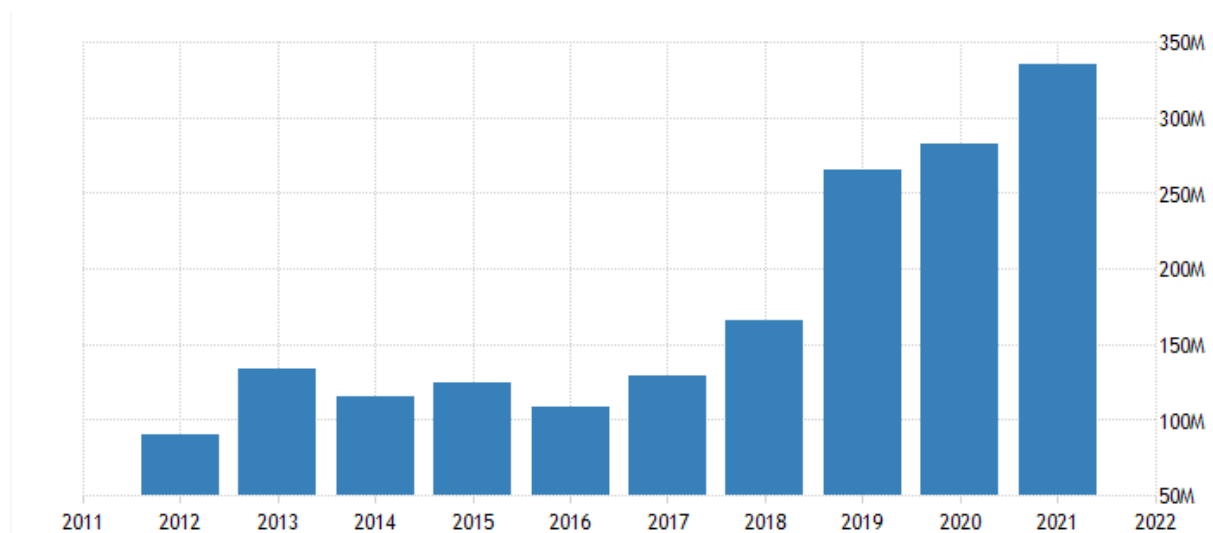


Figure 6: China's export to Rwanda 2011-2022 - Source: Trading Economics, 2022.



## Infrastructural investments

China's infrastructural investments in Rwanda are part of the BRI. As mentioned earlier, China constructed almost 80 per cent of the roads in Rwanda. Investments in infrastructure benefit the other economic interest as roads connect Rwanda to neighbouring countries, which increases trade (Byumvuhore, 2019). After my drive on the R6<sup>3</sup>, I asked my hotelier where all the trucks were going. He answered that they came from the DRC and would drive to the port of Dar es Salaam. It is plausible that China, connecting Rwanda to the international ports in Tanzania and Kenya, also connects the resource-rich eastern part of the DRC to these ports.

Chinese-funded railways are an excellent example of how China's infrastructural investments connect East-African countries. In 2014, the presidents of Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and South Sudan signed an agreement with China to build a multi-billion-dollar rail track (Moore, 2014). China is expanding its export market in East Africa by connecting landlocked countries to the sea and can also import from these countries more easily (Morlin-Yvron, 2017).

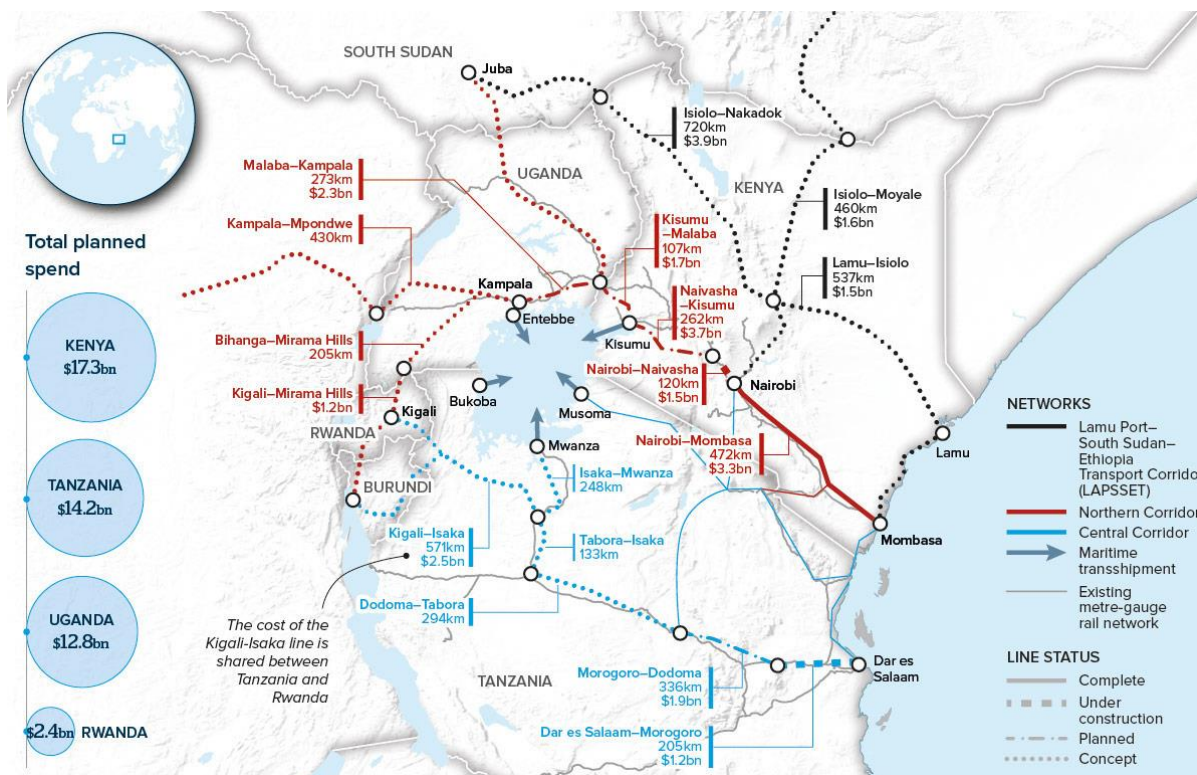


Figure 7: Chinese-funded rail track in East-Africa - Source: Oxford Analytica, 2019

<sup>3</sup> The road through Nyungwe forest mentioned in the introduction,

Therefore, the main goal of the infrastructure investments could be not to unlock landlocked Rwanda but to link all East-African states with the seas in the east. But Chinese infrastructural investments have one major downside, debts.

The World Bank reported that Rwanda has a debt-to-GDP ratio of 53 per cent (World Bank Group, 2019). According to Paduano, *“Rwanda will now spend more on making interest payments—and have less to spend on basic services for its people”* (2019). He argues that Rwanda is slowly falling into the grip of the “Chinese debt trap”. This trap means that when China grants its loans, the recipient countries provides collateral in return. As a result, if the debts pile up and the borrowing nations fail, China will take all the debtors can offer (Paduano, 2019). However, it is far from certain that the debt trap is part of China’s strategy. As Devermont, Africa director at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, argues, *“ If you look across all of their projects, some of them would look like fairly good commercial deals. Some of them would have clear political capital. Some of them may serve security or military interests. But I think it’s incredibly difficult to look at the debt and make a broad statement”* (Devermont, 2020).

Kagame sees the BRI as an excellent opportunity for Rwanda and Africa and wants to play a role in the BRI. He greatly thanked China for its infrastructural investments (Wang, 2018).

### *Conclusion*

China's economic interests in Rwanda are focused on natural resources and access to markets, although Rwanda has not got few natural resources or a large internal market. In the case of raw materials, China is helping Rwanda develop a modern mining sector. In addition, without having few producing mines of its own, Rwanda still plays a significant role in the region in the trade of minerals, especially coltan. The Chinese are the largest importer of coltan, making the raw materials trade in Rwanda interesting for China. Rwanda's internal market is not huge but gives access to a market with over 500 million potential consumers. The favourable business climate and political stability also attract Chinese companies to Rwanda. China's infrastructural investments in Rwanda are welcomed by Kagame, although some analysts warn of the debt trap. In my view, these investments are made to facilitate trade in the region which also benefits the Chinese. To conclude, I see Rwanda as a typical destination for Chinese investment and economic interests.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, I note that China has a strong interest in Rwanda, politically and in terms of security and economics. The political interest is mainly in Kagame's leadership and influence within the region and Africa. The good relations between Xi and Kagame endorse the importance China attaches to the power of the Rwandan president. In addition, especially the publications of Ambassador Rao show that Rwanda also seems to carry out the will of China on an ideological level and within international institutions.

Chinese arms export and military training prove China's interest in Rwanda's military. I believe that China's security interest is based on Rwanda's successful contribution to multilateral and bilateral peacekeeping missions and its status as an important security actor in Africa. Therefore, Rwanda is an ideal partner for the Chinese to cooperate to protect their interest in Africa.

China's economic interest in Rwanda focused on developing the Rwandan mining sector and on Rwanda as a trading hub for raw materials from the region. Next, Rwanda could serve Chinese companies as the gateway to a 500 million regional market. The infrastructure investments of the Chinese contribute to trade within this market.

Finally, the overarching goal of all three interests in Rwanda is to cement China's geopolitical power. I elaborate on this in the following chapter, the conclusion of my thesis.

## Chapter 4 – Conclusion

This thesis made significant contributions to the existing knowledge of China's Africa strategy by analysing the case of China's interest in Rwanda. I chose this country as a place to examine China's strategy in Africa for a reason. In academic literature and the media, Rwanda has been described as an atypical location for Chinese investment. This piqued my interest, given that China's engagement with this country is nonetheless significant.

First, I looked at China's general foreign policy and noted that this policy had undergone a significant turn under Xi Jinping. China has become far more assertive abroad than before. His ideas of the Chinese Dream and the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese people should bring about China's return to its place as a major world power. This has also had an impact on China's Africa strategy. I examined this strategy using the following interests: political, security, and economical.

China's political interest in Africa is to win the support of African countries on the international stage, and ideologically China's interest is to promote its development model in response to the West's democratic model. This also strengthens China's position on the world stage. China's security interest in Africa is to protect its interests, consolidate the support of African countries in multinational organisations, and be an essential and reliable partner for Africa. The economic interest is access to raw materials and new markets. China's dominant position in the value chain of natural resources makes Western countries highly dependent on China. New markets in Africa offer great business opportunities for Chinese companies. Infrastructure investments are being made to facilitate and strengthen trade between China and Africa.

These three interests reinforce each other with the overarching goal of increasing power on the international stage. China's purpose of its Africa strategy, in line with its foreign policy, is to become a geopolitical superpower. China's political, security, and economic interests in Africa all contribute to this goal.

To answer the main research question, I compare Chinese interest in Rwanda with the Africa strategy. At the political level, it has been shown that China's interest in Rwanda does not deviate from the overall Africa strategy. Rwanda supports China in multilateral organisations and prefers the Chinese development model to the Western democratic model. In addition, Kagame's strength and influence make Rwanda politically even more important to China than other countries in Africa.



The security interest of the Chinese in Rwanda is similar to the Africa strategy. The fact that Rwanda is a growing and strong security actor within Africa makes China's security interest in Rwanda perhaps even more substantial than in other African countries. This is well seen in the arms exports and military training that China provides to Rwanda.

Raw materials may play a lesser role in China's economic importance in Rwanda than in, say, the DRC. Nevertheless, Rwanda's position in the natural resource market in the Great Lakes region seems to be underestimated and, together with a potential regional market of 500 million people best reached through Rwanda, is the reason for China's economic interest in Rwanda. Thus, China's interest in Rwanda does not deviate from the Africa strategy in economic terms either.

The purpose of China's presence in Rwanda, as in the Africa strategy, is to strengthen their geopolitical power. So, to answer the main question of the thesis, China's interest in Rwanda fits perfectly into China's Africa strategy. In conclusion, I argue that Rwanda is not an atypical destination for China in Africa. On the contrary, I believe it is one of the most typical African destinations within China's Africa strategy.

### *Limitations*

Researching China in Rwanda turned out to be more difficult than expected. In the beginning, I had the idea that I was going to base my research mainly on interviews and field trips. But unfortunately, it turned out that the information I gathered was not sufficient. The biggest reason for this was that many people were unaware of China's prominent presence in Rwanda or did not want to discuss it. Moreover, in Rwanda itself, it turned out to be just about impossible to have a critical conversation about the Rwandan government.

Also, during the field trips, it was challenging to reach places where Chinese activities took place. Often, I encountered a large fence that would never open for a Dutch researcher. Nevertheless, these interviews and field trips greatly value my research and final thesis. They put me on the right track and often gave me the impetus to investigate certain matters more deeply than I would otherwise have left out. It has finally resulted that my research results are, for the most part, based on literal research. In conclusion, I am still delighted with the outcome of my research. My initial goal was to look for the motivations for China to invest in Rwanda. The fact that Rwanda was described in the media as an atypical location for Chinese presence triggered me from the first moment to see if this was true and to disprove it if necessary. My thesis has proven that Rwanda is not an atypical location within China's Africa strategy. In

doing so, my thesis contributes to the still minimal knowledge about the China-Rwanda relationship. I am proud of that.

The limitation of my research is that it was written primarily from my Western perspective. Therefore, it would have been interesting to have Rwandans and Chinese in my thesis shine their light on my research findings.

### *Further research*

Overall, I think more research on China-Rwanda relations should be done at the academic level. The influence that strong leaders in Africa, such as Kagame, have on China's overall Africa strategy is undoubtedly worthy of further research. In addition, I think Rwanda as a security actor in Africa could be further investigated. In particular, the purpose Rwanda has in mind with these security operations. Finally, I believe it is exciting to investigate further the role Rwanda plays in the trade of natural resources from the DRC. The big question in this topic remains to what extent the Rwandan government is directly involved in smuggling minerals from conflict areas of eastern Congo. This is a research topic that I would love to investigate with great passion.

Finally, I am proud that my thesis has shown that China and Rwanda have a strong and growing relationship. This relationship is best described by Xi Jinping in his letter to the Rwandan people as "*A friendship higher than mountains*".

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