

CHINA'S DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN GHANA, 1961-2011

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ABSTRACT

China's growing relationship with African countries has received relatively widespread criticism in the presses of the United States and the United Kingdom for undermining human rights, good governance, and environmental protection. This paper examines 50 years of Chinese development assistance to Ghana to determine the extent to which such general criticism of the Chinese in Africa holds true for an individual country. Economic and Technical Cooperation (ETC), the official term for Chinese development assistance, is assessed based on the nature of, and overall level provided to Ghana's democratically and non-democratically-elected regimes, and perceptions of it as expressed in scholarly studies, Ghana's and China's state newspapers, and Ghana's independent news sources. Findings indicate that Chinese ETC: 1) varies by stability at home and in Ghana, 2) is viewed more favorably in Ghana and China than in Western presses, and 3) has been the most environmentally unsound and ethically questionable since 2003.

Keywords: Bui Dam, China, Ghana, development assistance, Economic and Technical Cooperation (ETC), sustainability

INTRODUCTION

China's greatly increased involvement in Africa over the past decade has been met with considerable alarm in the West, despite the precedent set by China's continuous diplomatic and economic presence on the continent since the Cold War. Alarm stems from questions over the motives behind China's relationship with African countries with authoritarian governments and suspicion that the Chinese are seeking access to natural resources, without adequately considering impacts on human rights, the environment, or good governance (Collier, 2007). Considerable concern from the West also has arisen from the belief that the Chinese were major, indirect contributors to the most recent crisis in Darfur. Western media sources and a human rights campaign spear-headed by Mia Farrow dubbed the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the "Genocide Olympics," and advocated that the United States boycott the games in protest of Chinese support of oppressive regimes justified under a doctrine of non-interference in the domestic affairs of their aid-receiving countries (Alden and Davies, 2006; Kristof, 2008).

Attacks on China's presence in Africa are frequently based on analysis of Sino-African relations in multiple countries or on a continent-wide scale, China's activities within the last decade, and China's relationships with countries under dictatorships, such as Sudan under Omar al-Bashir, Guinea under Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, and Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe (Alessi, 2012; Brautigam, 2009). This paper examines the relative merit of Chinese Economic and Technical Cooperation

(ETC), the official term used by the Chinese for their development assistance, to Ghana over five decades (1961-2011), adding a historical perspective to a single African country with decades of democratic rule to the literature analyzing Chinese ETC to Africa.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

Key word searches of English-language, state-owned Chinese newspapers (*China Daily* and *People's Daily*) and Ghana's state- (*Daily Graphic*) and independently-owned news sources (*The Chronicle*, *Accra Daily*, Joy FM radio, ModernGhana.com, and GhanaWeb.com) provided 72 primary source articles (20 Chinese, 52 Ghanaian) that were analyzed for tone to understand perceptions of ETC and content to assess the sustainability of projects funded, potential human rights' violations associated with Chinese ETC, and variation of level of ETC in Ghana across democratically and non-democratically-elected regimes. Secondary sources were analyzed for content using the same criteria. Primary and secondary sources were accessed at the United States Library of Congress and three North Carolina libraries (Duke University, the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and Elon University). China restricts public access to ETC-related numerical data, including the precise amount of Chinese foreign assistance annually by country, making it difficult to compare the quantity of Chinese assistance to Ghana to other countries. Certain other direct country-level comparisons of China's foreign assistance were limited because China's definition of foreign assistance differs from that of most countries.

CHINESE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE DEFINED

Since the 1950s, China has built a foreign assistance policy on the stated principles of equality, ideological blindness, and mutual benefit. The Chinese government states that it imposes no political conditions on foreign assistance to uphold the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, upon which Chinese foreign policy is based. The Chinese government indicates that its ETC policy fosters local development, self-reliance, and is designed to aid both the giving and receiving country and to strengthen bilateral relations (*China Daily*, 2011). China has tailored its ETC toward private and Chinese state-owned enterprise investment in recipient countries, supporting a wide range of projects, from community infrastructure to planes for national airlines (Brautigam, 2011). Chinese ETC differs from the Western ideology of Official Development Assistance (ODA) outlined by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which mandates that the foreign assistance given must be from the government, not private corporations, and it must directly benefit the economic development and welfare of the recipient country. The DAC provides donors with a strict structure of aid packages that the Chinese do not use when determining their ETC.

The flexibility of the Chinese development assistance structure allows projects to fall into eight categories outlined in government releases as: "complete projects, goods and materials, technical cooperation, human resource development cooperation, medical teams sent abroad, emergency humanitarian aid, volunteer programs in foreign countries, and debt relief" (*China Daily*, 2011). Most projects, from transportation to education and communications, are considered "complete projects" and are typically funded through bilateral and regional agreements, as opposed to multinational organizations like the United Nations (*China Daily*, 2011). Typically, Chinese-funded projects are staffed at least in part by Chinese workers

and use Chinese-sourced materials instead of local talent and resources, providing few local jobs, but often allowing for the swifter completion of projects (Alden, 2007).

CHINESE ETC, 1961-1999

China's relationship with independent Ghana began on March 6, 1958, when a Chinese acrobatic troupe gave a performance in Accra to honor the first anniversary of Ghana's independence from British colonial rule. By 1960 formal diplomatic relations were established, making Ghana the second sub-Saharan African country to officially recognize China's government in Beijing following the expulsion of the Republic of China government to Taiwan (Chau, 2007; Davies, 2008). In the span of only a few months, Ghana allowed China to establish an embassy in Accra, appointed an ambassador to China, accepted military instructors and weapons for colonial liberation training camps, and Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah requested that China be granted membership in the United Nations (UN) during the first major speech by an African leader to the General Assembly.

During his first state visit to Beijing in 1961, Nkrumah signed three agreements that constituted Ghana's initial development assistance package from China. The Sino-Ghanaian Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation provided interest-free funds for several factories to enhance Ghana's export potential. Secondly, the Sino-Ghanaian Trade and Payments Agreement fixed the annual export volumes of both countries. Finally, the Cultural Cooperation Agreement advocated for technical cooperation in science, education, arts, medicine, and public health and provided technical training to Ghanaians to implement local development initiatives. ETC pledged from 1961 to 1964 totaled \$40 million, half of which was agreed upon in July 1964, however only \$19.6 million was used due to the 1966 coup that overthrew Kwame Nkrumah, and the new government's subsequent purge of all socialist-leaning foreign assistance (Chau, 2007; Larkin, 1971).

With the deposition of Nkrumah, China and Ghana began a period of estrangement. The new government, the National Liberation Council (NLC), a cabinet of eight men led by Lt. General J.A. Ankrah, severed ties with all communist partners and projects funded by communist regimes were halted. In a mass-repatriation, 430 Chinese security advisers, freedom fighter instructors, embassy staff, and technicians in fishing and construction, were deported from Ghana, along with hundreds more Soviet advisers. The NLC abandoned Nkrumah's Seven-Year Development Plan and stopped the construction on all prestige projects, such as the Accra-Tema motorway and the Nkrumah Tower in Accra (Gocking, 2005). From 1966 until 1972, China and Ghana had no diplomatic relations and all aid agreements were disbanded.

In 1972, with the installation of a new government, Sino-Ghanaian relations were restored (Gocking, 2005; Chau, 2007). However, due to political upheavals in both countries, ETC was unsteady, though uninterrupted, and significantly less than during the Nkrumah years. Between 1972 and 1980, the Chinese ETC totaled only \$9.1 million. These limited funds were distributed to projects in health, agriculture, education and industry, such as the Juapong Cotton and Textile Factory in the Volta Region (ACET, 2009) [Figure 1]. Juapong became a major textile producing area of Ghana for some time, an industry that would employ 27 percent of Ghana's manufacturers by 1977; however the industry began to collapse in the early years of the twenty-first century, ironically due to the Chinese ability to manufacture very inexpensive textiles (Quartey, 2006).

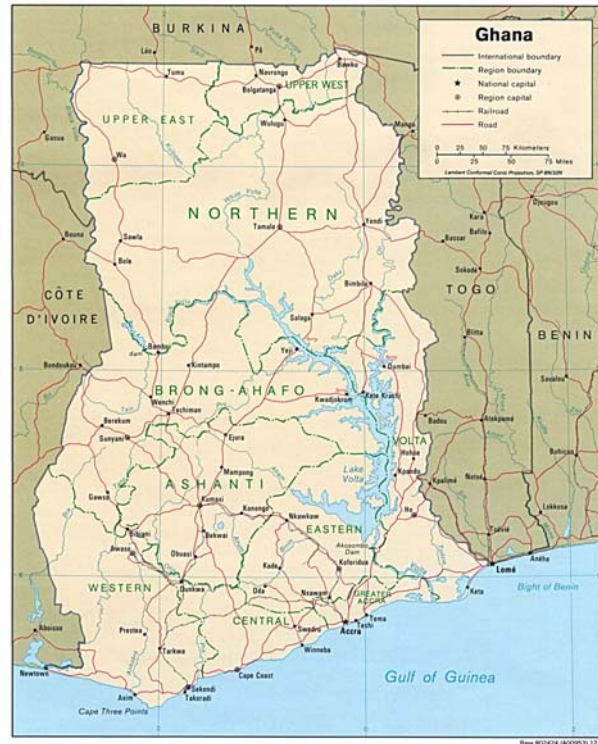


Figure 1: Map of the Study Area (Source: University of Texas Libraries)

In 1979, Flight Lieutenant John J. Rawlings overthrew the military regime of the time and established a different military government. By 1983, the economy of Ghana was doing poorly, so reluctantly, Ghana accepted World Bank funds and began an Economic Recovery Program (ERP) that aimed to increase the production and the export of Ghana's natural resources. Rawlings also signed bilateral development agreements with China that provided an interest-free loan of \$3.1 million to the Nobewan and Afife Irrigation Projects in the Volta Region, grain depots and rice-grinding mills at Afife, the construction of a bank, woolen sweater mill, and several school buildings (Davies, 2008). These projects allowed Ghana to increase the output of agricultural crops and provided basic community infrastructure. Development projects such as those sponsored by the Chinese aided the success of the ERP; by 1987 inflation had dropped to 20 percent and development assistance from all sources was averaging \$430 million, more than double that of a few years earlier (McLaughlin and Owusu-Ansah, 1994).

The 1989 Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing signify a turning point in China's relationship with all African countries, including Ghana. Shunned by the West for its communist government and human rights abuses, China turned to Africa with promises of increased ETC, and established or strengthened numerous partnerships in exchange for support in the international community. Ghana's historical ties with China, dating to the Nkrumah era, resulted in increased ETC beginning in 1990. China continued its trend of funding smaller infrastructure projects, such as the Ghana Cocoa Processing Project and the Fishing Ropes and Net Processing Project. It also continued to fund community development projects such as the Dansoman Training Center in Accra and the University of Ghana-Legon's Drama School (ACET, 2009).

CHINA'S CHANGING ETC IN THE 21st CENTURY

As China emerged as a global economic leader, it diversified its ETC programs to include more countries and different project types. As Chinese development projects increased in size and scope across Africa, Western think tank analysts and media sources began to write about the potential dangers of Chinese ETC. By 2005, the Council on Foreign Relations, *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, and *The Washington Post* began to focus on China's increasing oil imports from Africa and its rising arms trade with oil-producing countries including Nigeria, Angola, and Sudan. Ghana also was making the news because after being turned down by several Western donors, China offered Ghana a \$622 million loan towards the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Volta River that was anticipated to have negative environmental impacts and require the people's forcible resettlement from Bui Gorge (Davies, 2008).

Despite concerns raised in the West, China increased its African ETC and supported several projects in democratic Ghana following the 2000 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) at which Ghana signed an agreement for \$28 million to restore the Accra-Kumasi highway and \$7.25 million to construct a military barrack in Accra (Davies, 2008). China also cancelled \$66 million of Ghana's debt in 2003 and another \$24 million in 2007. In 2006, Ghana and China signed six bilateral agreements through which China sent medical teams to Ghana to prevent and treat malaria, provided scholarships and professional training to Ghanaian students, and enhanced cooperation on transnational issues, including human rights and counterterrorism (Xinhua, 2006). At the 2009 FOCAC meeting, Premier Wen announced that China would be focusing its ETC on enhancing African well-being through projects in human resource development, strengthening infrastructure, agricultural abilities, and ability to respond to climate change. Ghana was given a \$99 million interest-free loan to construct landing sites for fishing communities, provide social services, build schools and hospitals, and continue educational exchanges and scholarships (ACET, 2009).

Of all Chinese ETC projects in first decade of the twenty-first century, the 2003 loan to build the Bui Dam not only dwarfs previous ETC agreements in size, it remains the most controversial not only due to environmental and human rights concerns at the site, but because Sinohydro's construction of Bui Dam appears to have led to increased interest by other companies to target Ghana's natural resources. In recent years, Bosai Minerals has expanded its bauxite and aluminum mining and refining capabilities in Ghana through the China-Africa Development Fund, a government-sponsored private equity fund protecting Chinese investors from the potential risks of investing in Africa (Yan, 2010; Bofo-Arthur, 2007). In 2010, President John Atta Mills negotiated a \$15 billion fund for oil infrastructure development and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation bought exclusive rights to a portion of the Jubilee Oil Fields (Mohan, 2010). This is in addition to the contract with the China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation, or Sinopec, to build a natural gas processing plant in the Western region, scheduled to be completed in December 2012 (Kokutse, 2011). The project includes the construction and commission of a processing plant, offshore and onshore pipelines, a jetty, and a control center (Kunateh, 2011).

CHINESE ETC, GOVERNANCE, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Increasing ETC and private investment and the recent discovery of Ghanaian oil fields have Western onlookers concerned about how the Chinese presence will impact Ghana's environment, human rights practices, and governance despite an investment history dating to 1961. Although Western critics have claimed that the Chinese target countries with poor governance, in the Ghanaian case, the Chinese did not discriminate by type of governance, distributing ETC throughout most of Ghana's military dictatorships and democratically-elected presidents. Indeed, as noted by the author of *The Dragon's Gift*, a major work on Chinese ETC in Africa, it would be rather hypocritical for a non-democratic government to make democracy a requirement for ETC (Brautigam 2009).

China has drawn negative attention for its ETC to Sudan during that country's time of internal crisis and rampant human rights abuses in Darfur, but in the Ghanaian case Chinese ETC was greatest in times of internal stability in both countries. Significant ETC was given during the Nkrumah era and since the mid-1990s, periods largely marked by peace, stability, and democracy, and very little ETC during the 1970s and 80s when both China and Ghana were experiencing domestic instability.

The second common Western concern with the Chinese in Africa stems from human rights abuses associated with Chinese ETC. In the Ghanaian case, the accusation is partially supported. Ghanaians have been violently removed from lands by mining companies seeking access to minerals and workers are paid poorly. In the construction industry, Ghanaian workers have been hired by Chinese companies without contracts and paid wages far below what was promised. Ghanaian workers have been attacked by guard dogs while Chinese handlers look on (Dowuona, 2011). To Bui Dam, Bui Gorge was flooded and 1,000 people were resettled to Bui Township which lacked adequate access to electricity and potable water and resettled farmers were issued fewer, less fertile acres than they previously worked, forcing many to learn fishing or other skills to get by (Selby, 2009). If the relocated people from Ghana's other large dam, Akosombo, also on the Volta River, is considered predictive, the people of Bui Township can anticipate an increase in water-borne illness, including bilharzia (Gyau-Boakye, 2001) and HIV associated with people's temporary migration during dam construction to cities with higher infection rates (Suave, et al., 2002). The China National Offshore Oil Corporation, which has been investing in oil fields throughout Africa, but focusing on deposits in the Gulf of Guinea, which includes Ghana's coastal zone, has been accused of heroin trafficking and human rights abuses in Myanmar, but no charges have been raised in Ghana (Kwok, 2008; Adler, 2012). Overall, human rights abuses associated with Chinese ETC in Ghana are fewer than in other countries and according to the Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining (WACAM) co-hosted conference with Oxfam Britain in 2006; working conditions and mining practices used throughout Ghana are industry-wide and not limited to Chinese mining companies (GhanaWeb, 2006).

Whereas Chinese ETC has had little or no influence on Ghana's governance and modest to moderate impact on its human rights situation over the past 50 years, it has been associated with notable negative environmental impacts. Although Bui Dam should provide Ghana with energy resources necessary for development and potentially energy to sell to neighboring countries, it has led to the flooding of approximately one fifth of Bui National Park, negatively impacting wildlife, especially

Black Hippopotami populations (Davies, 2008). In the extractive sector, bauxite mining entails removal of local vegetation by mining machines creating shallow pits, three to four yards deep over a large area (Rio Tinto Alcan, 2012).

CHINESE ETC AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In 1987, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development published the Brundtland Report, which outlined an international perspective on the future of development. Within the report, the commission describes sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). From this general definition, three domains can be separated: environmental, economic, and sociopolitical. In order to achieve environmental sustainability, consumption of natural resources must be less than nature’s ability to renew itself. Additionally, extraction practices should not be harmful to other aspects of the environment, such as the local flora and fauna. Economically, sustainable development focuses on the inclusion of human and knowledge capital. This provides future generations the opportunity to build upon this base to continue along a developmental trajectory. Finally, sustainable sociopolitical development ensures that there is a healthy political process in place in a country, and that the population is well equipped to take part in the process via education, health, and societal inclusion. Together, these three aspects create sustainable development strategies, which can enhance a country’s prospects in both the short and long term.

Although the energy, mining, and construction sectors suggest that Chinese ETC is associated with unsustainable development in Ghana, some Chinese ETC has and will benefit generations to come. The Cultural Cooperation Agreement signed by President Kwame Nkrumah funded technological training, education and medical exchanges with China that provided for the exchange of ideas and knowledge generation. China has given ETC to Ghana’s fishing industry for fisher education in aquaculture and fish farming and the rehabilitation of a fish hatchery in the Ashanti Region (Idun-Arkhurst, 2008). Huawei Technologies is installing fiber optic cables to link the majority of Ghana to faster, less expensive phone and Internet services via the National Communications Backbone Network Project. The increased fiber optic capabilities will support “e-governance” and “e-education,” allowing the Government of Ghana to better assess the needs of rural communities in the north (Donkor, 2008). Huawei Technologies is the largest China-based networking and telecommunications supplier. It has won many awards, including places on *Forbes’* World’s Most Respected 200 Companies list and *Business Week’s* World’s Most Influential Companies list (*Forbes*, 2007; McGregor, 2008). Although the Chinese have concentrated the majority of their ETC on advancing Ghana’s basic infrastructure, such as roads, barracks, and sporting stadiums, sustainable endeavors including technical cooperation, human resource development, volunteer programs, and medical teams sent abroad remain significant aspects of their development assistance (*China Daily*, 2011).

The Chinese officially seek to invest in projects that can benefit both the receiving country and China. Most energy sector projects provide this in raw resources to feed China’s increasing need for energy and Ghana’s ability to repay China’s loans through oil exports. In the case of Bui Dam, Sinohydro, China’s state-owned construction and hydro engineering company contracted to build the dam, profits from the project, and is virtually guaranteed repayment, because Ghana can sell the excess energy produced by the dam. In addition to the electricity generated, 2,900 Ghanaians have benefitted from short-term

employment as manual laborers at Bui Dam and others may benefit from the increased irrigation and fisheries development potential at the site (Joy FM, 2011).

MEDIA ANALYSIS

The increase in Chinese development assistance in the twenty-first century has been associated with an increase in the volume and depth of media coverage. The first article of this millennium on ETC in *The Chronicle*, Ghana's major independent newspaper, is from November 2006 and entitled "Sino-hydro to Help Build Power Plant in Ghana;" it is only 88 words. With few exceptions, in the following years, Ghanaian newspaper articles on Chinese ETC are lengthier and more detailed. In Chinese news sources, the trend of longer, more in-depth coverage of ETC in African countries holds true, but with fewer Ghana-specific articles.

Bui Dam was the subject of more media coverage than any other Chinese ETC project. Articles from government newspapers, including the *China Daily* and Ghana's *Daily Graphic* gave mostly positive coverage of ETC and used an official tone and fact stating to describe aid packages, bilateral agreements, worker strikes, resettlement of the people of Bui Gorge, and the potential environmental concerns caused by the construction of the dam.

Public opinion articles are not widely available in Chinese newspapers or state- or privately-owned Ghanaian papers, but examination of websites including ModernGhana.com and GhanaWeb.com, revealed that Chinese investment has become a divisive issue among Ghanaians. A common general criticism of ETC on the Ghanaian web sites is that by accepting more ETC loans the Ghanaian government increases national debt. Overall, Ghana's independent media coverage in ModernGhana.com, GhanaWeb.com, Joy FM and Peace FM, was more emotionally charged than that in the *Daily Graphic*, whether describing ETC positively as good, great, a gift, blessing, or benefit, for which to be thankful, or negatively as bad, an atrocity, bringing destruction and harm. Some Ghanaians expressed outrage at poor working conditions at the Bui construction site and the lack of compensation given to resettled people and feared that China's relationship with Ghana had become a neo-colonial one. Other Ghanaians applauded Chinese natural resource extraction as an economic boost to Ghana that would assist in the transition to a more service-sector based economy.

Overall, Ghanaians opinions of ETC projects were split relatively evenly when it came to radio coverage and in independent newspaper opinion pieces. Analyzing Chinese opinions proved much more difficult, because there are no major independently owned English-language news sources available from China. State supported English-language media sources, including Xinhua News Service, *China Daily* and *People's Daily*, did not publish any stories that negatively portrayed Chinese ETC in Ghana or in Africa in general.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Though Chinese news sources and Ghana's *Daily Graphic* publicize the benefits of ETC, African countries including Ghana are finding themselves in increasing debt to China, even when some ETC takes the form of debt forgiveness (Tan-Mullins, Mohan, and Power, 2010). To offset its debt to China, Ghana has used its oil reserves as collateral for credit, an act

uncharacteristic of a healthy financial system or sustainable development. Furthermore, China's ETC does not always adhere to the regulations that the IMF imposes on borrowing (*The Chronicle*, 2011a) and, according to the World Bank, has included several "White Elephant Projects" for which loan repayment is more burdensome than the project's worth (*The Chronicle*, 2011b).

As Ghana's economy strengthens, it will continue to need infrastructure development, and China should continue to fund these endeavors (Awal, 2012). Oftentimes, the Chinese stipulate that Ghana contracts with a Chinese company or purchases Chinese materials for a project; however a more sustainable practice would be for Chinese investors to hire locals and train them to do skilled labor. This would enable Ghana to build local employment capacity, link assistance projects to local industry, and reduce the amount of foreign support.

China has pledged \$1.6 million to support the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) that addresses uneven development in Ghana by funding projects in Ghana's underdeveloped northern region. Under SADA, a rice mill and a cement factory have been completed and other projects started including a Shea nut factory, a groundnut processing plant, and an irrigation project (*The Chronicle*, 2011c). Such initiatives can provide economic opportunities that can reduce migration to the Ghana's more urban south and represent a mutually beneficial aspect of China's presence in Ghana, especially when technical assistance is included.

Western criticism of Chinese practices in Ghana need to be considered in context. Many Chinese practices parallel the norms of Western aid. In 2004, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the oversight organization for the Development Assistance Committee, reported that only 41.7 percent of aid given that year by DAC countries was untied and the rest had stipulations about sourcing goods from donor countries, similar to China requiring the contracting of Chinese companies and goods (Manning, 2005). Western companies have also invested heavily in natural resources throughout Africa. The US's Volta Aluminum Company funded the Akosombo Hydroelectric Project, which in the long term will likely have more of a negative environmental impact than Bui Dam due to its size. Similarly, just as the China National Offshore Oil Corporation bought shares of Ghana's oil, Royal Dutch Shell has been operating in Ghana since 1928 (Shell, 2012). While these are private companies, and their investments are not included in Official Development Assistance, they have impacts similar to the Chinese state-owned enterprises included in ETC.

In an era in which development partnerships are stressed, power differentials remain between China and Ghana. Although China supports SADA, relatively recently it chose to fund Bui Dam over a railway project Ghanaians also proposed which would have linked Ghana's landlocked northern neighbor Burkina Faso to the sea (Tan-Mullins, Mohan, and Power, 2010) and provided considerable benefit to Ghana's northern region. To date, China has directed little ETC toward Ghana's largest economic sector, agriculture. Agriculture contributes to approximately 40 percent of Ghana's GDP and 50 percent of employment, yet from 2000 to 2008 China only invested \$4.7 million in agriculture (ACET, 2009). Africa is the only world region not self-sufficient in food production and investments in agriculture hold not only the potential promise of improving food security and reducing malnutrition, but could provide technical training and export revenue used to pay off debts.

Although considerable criticisms exist, Ghana's economic engagements with China have had several benefits: bringing jobs, technology, affordable manufactured imports, and a degree of investment. Chinese investments in road and highway construction, energy, industry, and services, have assisted Ghanaians with skill building and offered some employment opportunities. Huawei is engaging in "Green Communications" and offering educational opportunities and training in the telecommunications sector. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, African countries, Ghana included, have options when it comes to aid. China's own considerable yet recent development puts it in a unique position to help Ghana create a more vibrant economy that will provide an improved investment environment for Chinese and non-Chinese companies wishing to expand to in Africa's rising economies.

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