

Mechanisms of Chinese Aid to Africa: A Comparative Analysis with Western Philanthropic and Development Models

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Abstract

This study examines the contrasting mechanisms of Chinese and Western philanthropic and development models in Africa and analyzes how these models shape development outcomes. Using a qualitative comparative methodology, the research draws on case studies, official aid data, and existing scholarly literature to explore patterns, institutional frameworks, and operational strategies employed by China and Western actors. The findings indicate that Chinese aid is characterized by state-led, strategic, and relational financing—primarily focused on large-scale infrastructure development. Chinese assistance often features flexible financing arrangements, long-term engagement, and geo-economic considerations embedded within bilateral partnerships. In contrast, Western philanthropic and development models emphasize project-based sponsorship, governance reform, and accountability mechanisms. Western funding is typically conditional upon governance benchmarks, involves structured monitoring systems, and often maintains continued oversight even after project completion. While Western aid frameworks promote institutional reform, transparency, and accountability, they may be constrained by bureaucratic procedures and limited contextual adaptability. Conversely, Chinese infrastructure financing facilitates rapid implementation and bilateral development but may raise concerns regarding transparency, sustainability, and long-term institutional capacity. These contrasts underscore the need for African policymakers to adopt a more strategic and context-sensitive approach when engaging with external development partners. Recognizing the distinctive features of Chinese and Western aid systems enables African governments to design resilient policy frameworks, strategically leverage diverse funding models, mitigate associated risks, and promote sustainable development outcomes.

Keywords: Chinese aid; African development; Western philanthropy; foreign aid mechanisms; sustainable development; development policy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

For several decades, foreign aid has served as a primary tool to encourage development throughout Africa. Foreign aid has, until recently, been predominantly Western, notably bilateral agencies like USAID, multilateral actors like the European Union (Chick & Farag, 2026; Fentahun, 2023; Hayton & Cacciotti), and the Nordic countries' development agencies. In Africa, aid has been targeted to the areas of governance, health, education, and poverty alleviation, often using frameworks of conditionality and accountability (Dreher, 2025; Morgan, 2018; Tan-Mullins et al., 2010). The Western "traditional" model focuses on project financing, building institutional capacities, and using international standards, thereby showing a governance-related and, at times, overly prescriptive approach to development (Zubler et al., 2025). In recent

years, China has become a significant player in reshaping foreign aid in Africa. Aid from China combines economic and geopolitical strategies, focusing on trade and bilateral cooperation, especially in infrastructure (Harchaoui et al., 2020; Mulugeta, 2025). As opposed to Western aid, which typically involves extensive conditions, Chinese assistance prioritizes flexible, state-led, non-interference solutions, which include funded infrastructure development and technical support (박다인, 2023). This model has enabled African countries to achieve rapid development in transport, energy, and industry, while retaining policy flexibility. The differences between Chinese and Western aid mechanisms are notable, particularly in the Western case where Western systems show a strong emphasis on conditions, clarity within the process, and a focus on the restructuring of governance, while Chinese aid stresses the importance of creating and maintaining relationships, developing

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partnerships of a more strategic nature, and developmental pragmatism (Gilpin, 2023; Wang & Rosenau, 2009).

1.2 Significance of the Study

The African policy makers, development practitioners, and scholars need to understand the various aid mechanisms available to them. Comparative studies analyzing similarities and differences in Chinese and Western aid models outline how the varying priorities, approaches, and operational mechanisms influence development, funding, and institutional building (Dreise, 2018; Onyekachi, 2020). In addition, these differences enrich the debates on the effectiveness of aid, the questions of aid recipients, and the degree of local stakeholder's influence in shaping the development hierarchy (Fowler & Mati, 2019; Mati, 2025). This study aims to bridge the gaps, and strengthen the evidence-based policy frameworks in improving the sustainable development potential of the various African regions by profiling the merits, demerits, and strategic complementarities of the Chinese and Western aid models.

1.3 Problem Statement

Although more literature is emerging on the relations between China and Africa and the theories on the models of aid from the West, the studies that empirically deal with both of these models remain sparse (Gülseven, 2025; Rudyak, 2023). Most studies focus on Chinese aid or the philanthropic model of the West, ignoring the relations between corporate philanthropy, government-to-government aid, and the local cultures that affect the practices and outcomes (Fowler, 2022; Wang & Rosenau, 2009). The fragmentation of studies calls for more holistic-comparative approaches that examine the cross-aid relations of both the Chinese and the West, the practices, and the development effects of aid.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study has filled these gaps through three key pillars: (1) examine the mechanisms and the scaffolding of Chinese assistance to Africa in terms of strategic flow, funding channels and relations, and structure; (2) analyze Chinese assistance vis-a-vis Western philanthropy and development models to determine the similarities, differences, and operational trade-offs, as well as the west and Chinese aid relations; and (3) examine the impacts of aid relations on Africa's development policy, aid, and Africa's development in terms of the sustainable and

structural dimension of development. Hence, this study has provided a refined perspective of the aid relations of Africa and has assisted Africa's policymakers and development practitioners to achieve the most within the development continuum of Africa.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Chinese Aid in Africa

Chinese involvement in Africa has undergone drastic transformation in the past six decades. This is due to the changes in China's domestic policy as well as global policy on development. Chinese involvement in Africa has expanded from simple 'knowledge' and humanitarian support (Tong, 2024) to much more complex collaborations. The 2000s marked the beginning of the rapid transformation of Chinese aid to Africa, which has been fueled by the Belt and Road Initiative and has been accompanied by a shift of China's major collaborations from Africa to other regions (NRDC-ITA, 2022; Tong, 2024). Presently, China has a well-structured system of aid to Africa which consists of a variety of financial and non-financial components, such as grants, debt relief, and; in the areas of infrastructure and technology, aid and investment. A unique aspect of Chinese aid is its government focus and the aid's focus on state-built infrastructure and construction projects as indicated in Table 1. Research shows Chinese funding is directed toward construction of cross-border projects like roads, railways, ports, and energy facilities which they consider mutually beneficial to China and the African partner countries (Harchaoui et al., 2020; Morgan, 2018). These projects often combine public financing and Chinese state-owned enterprises which means they can implement projects quickly and in the process, build long-term bilateral relations (Bagus, 2023). In addition, the Chinese principle of non-interference means that the countries that receive Chinese aid get to make their own choices about domestic policies while still aligning with China's non-interference strategy. Non-state Chinese aid is supply-state sponsored aid construction projects. Chinese NGOs participate in corporate philanthropy, private foundations, and increased construction projects in the health, education, and agriculture sectors, providing technical aid, humanitarian aid, and community support (Afsharipour & Rana, 2013). These actors aid construction projects by providing funding and support, which also builds community relations. In addition, they mitigate the government construction project focus with diverse support.

Table 1 shows Comparative Features of Chinese Aid Projects by Sector and Year

Sector	Number of projects	Funding (USD Millions)	Key Countries
Infrastructure	120	15,000	Ethiopia, Kenya
Health	45	2,300	Nigeria, Ghana
Education	20	1,500	Tanzania, Sudan
Agriculture	25	800	Zambia, Sudan

This table illustrates the dominant role of infrastructure in Chinese aid portfolios, while sectors such as health, education, and agriculture receive targeted but smaller-scale investments. The distribution underscores the strategic prioritization of projects that promote economic connectivity, trade facilitation, and resource access.

2.2 Western Aid Models

Western models of aid, including the US, the EU, and Nordic countries, have framed development as a mix of philanthropy, aid with conditions, and reform in governance (Regilme & Hodzi, 2021). Western models, in contrast to Chinese state-led models, intertwine almost every form of Western ‘assistance’ (which usually contains elements of proponents’ conditionality on human rights, accountability, and democracy) with the governance structures of recipient countries. This ‘aid’ is designed through a mix of multilateral organizations, bilateral aid, and NGOs, which represent a multi-layered and pluralistic approach to aid, and, at least, keeps accountability in view. In Western development models, private sponsors and corporate philanthropy have a considerable impact. State-related models of development, complemented by the Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, European NGOs, etc., in the provision of funding, technical assistance, and project monitoring, initiate and lead development programs (Lambin & Surender, 2021). Targeted programs in health, education, poverty, and other measurable areas have become the hallmark of these sponsors and have shown a preference for international development goals (e.g., SDGs).

2.3 Comparative Studies and Critiques

Chinese aid projects have been shown to help establish strategic commercial partnerships, especially in the construction and resource extraction industry. By involving Chinese contractors and state-owned investment tools, these partnerships can be intensified. Chinese and Western aid strategies tend to align and diverge in multiple ways. Convergence shows through the shared prioritization

of the construction, health, and education sectors, where both paradigms appreciate the role of the human and physical resources in economic growth. Divergence, on the other hand, is visible in the implementation philosophy and the respective aid conditionalities. Western aid incorporates governance, accountability, long-term capacity-building, and even a procedural policy framework, while Chinese aid focuses on the relationship, rapid implementation, and, most importantly, the strategic linkage of commercial interests, as revealed in Figure 1 (Gülseven, 2025; Mohan & Power, 2008).

The critiques of Western aid highlight the issues of dependency, rigidity, and lack of local context adaptability of aid bureaucracy. Aid project implementation and recipient autonomy are negatively impacted as the governance promoting conditionality requirements slow down project activities. On the other hand, aid criticism from Harchaoui et al. focuses on lack of transparency, debt sustainability, possible alignment with self-interested commercial interests of China that disregard the local development needs (Arviso, 2024; Harchaoui et al., 2020; Tong, 2024). Developmental asymmetries and economic dependent intertwining are also possible outcomes of Harchaoui et al.

2.4 Research Gaps

Over the past two decades, the landscape of foreign aid to Africa has shifted significantly, marked by the rise of China as a major development partner. Traditional Western donors, including the United States, the European Union, and Nordic countries, long shaped prevailing understandings of aid provision. China’s expanded engagement has introduced alternative models, institutional frameworks, and relational approaches. Yet, there remains limited consensus on the scope and distinctive features of Chinese aid in comparison to Western systems (Chen, 2025; Wang & Miao, 2025). Much of the existing literature examines Chinese and Western aid separately, often through sector-specific case studies or analyses of economic and diplomatic effects. Comparative scholarship

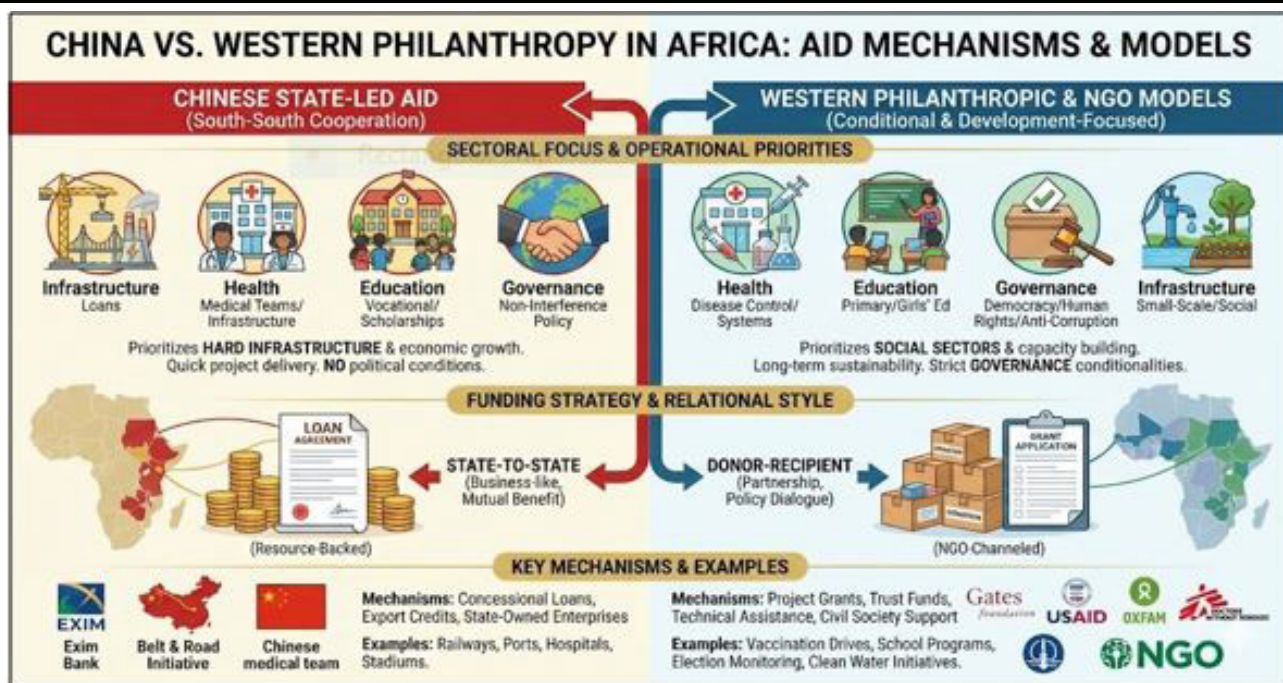


Figure 1 Comparative Overview of Chinese and Western Aid Mechanisms in Africa

that systematically evaluates differences in structure, conditionality, operational design, and development outcomes remains limited. This gap presents practical challenges for African policymakers who navigate multiple aid actors with differing expectations, priorities, and accountability frameworks (Fowler & Mati, 2019; Mottiar & Ngcoya, 2016). Without clearer comparative evidence, it becomes difficult to anticipate trade-offs, optimize aid flows, or strategically combine diverse forms of assistance. These challenges are compounded by the diversity of African contexts. Governance systems, institutional capacity, and socio-economic conditions vary widely across countries. Policymakers must align external assistance with national development priorities, sustainability goals, and socio-cultural realities (Tong, 2024). In the absence of systematic and context-sensitive analysis of Chinese and Western approaches, aid interventions risk inefficiency, misalignment, or the reinforcement of unhealthy dependencies. This study addresses these gaps through a comparative framework that examines Chinese and Western aid models, focusing on their operational structures, strategic orientations, and relational patterns. By clarifying their differences and areas of complementarity, the study offers practical insights for African policymakers and development practitioners seeking to manage external partnerships more strategically and advance sustainable development objectives.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a comparative qualitative research design to look at Chinese aid and Western philanthropic and development models in Africa. The analysis is empirically anchored in case studies of China, the United States, the European Union, and Nordic countries, which is how distinct mechanisms, strategies, and development outcomes are identifiable (Harchaoui et al., 2020; Tan-Mullins et al., 2010). By choosing a few representative actors from both Chinese and Western aid paradigms, the study identifies differences in policy focus, operational structures, and practices of systemic collaboration vis-a-vis the African partner countries. In order to capture the full spectrum of complexity inherent in the various modalities of aid, the study adopts a mixed-method approach, which combines qualitative document analysis and secondary literature synthesis, as well as a quantitative analysis of aid data. This approach makes it possible to analyze the patterns of declining foreign aid and philanthropic activity from multiple perspectives and to strengthen the evidence of the analysis. While the qualitative analysis focuses on the strategic and relational aspect of the various aid interventions, the quantitative analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the volumetric, sectorial, and project outcomes of the distributed aid. These combined approaches are aligned to provide an all-encompassing analysis of the

diverse effects resulting from Chinese and Western interventions.

3.2 Data Collection

This study utilized data from a wide range of credible sources to achieve comprehensive coverage. The main sources were government assistance databases, official policy documents, and publicly accessible statistical documents. The main relevant sources were the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and reports from non-governmental organizations monitoring development aid (Rudyak, 2023). Additional relevant sources included peer-reviewed academic publications, policy briefs, and comparative studies of aid mechanisms in Africa. Important metrics have been outlined to enable meaningful comparisons across aid systems. These include the amount and value of aid distributed, sector (e.g., infrastructure, health, and education), disbursement conditions and project results. From the case studies and other literature, metrics of a more subjective or qualitative nature, such as the relation or governance approach, and strategic or other objectives were also identified. Together, these metrics provide for a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the different aid modalities on developmental effectiveness and sustainability.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The study utilizes a comparative analytical framework, focusing on four areas: structure, strategy, relationality, and outcomes (Harchaoui et al., 2020; Morgan, 2018). The structural element concerns the arrangement of the aid delivery: public vs. private, and project vs. program interventions. The strategy dimension concerns the objectives of the aid, for instance, infrastructure, poverty, and governance. For relationality the interest is the power and character of the donor and recipient interactions, especially partnership, negotiation, and local ownership. Lastly, outcomes concern the empirical and non-empirical aspects of development be it through the completion of a project, a change in structure, a policy, or an empowered local system. The author has used tables and charts to show the aid flows, distribution by sectors, and the comparative outcomes. Quantitative data have been synthesized to produce illustrations, while qualitative data have been discussed and summarized in comparative tables, especially regarding the differences and complementarities of the Chinese and the Western

approaches. This presentation style adds to clarity and enhances evidence-based reasoning.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Taking into account the ethical implications of the study, especially from the secondary data perspective, Surveys express bias from varied sources, e.g. Publications from the government, MPG, or academia. The data reliability constraints due to Chinese aid reporting transparency, especially non-disclosure of financial terms, project evaluations, conditionalities, etc. were acknowledged. Some of the limitations were addressed using the triangulation technique, where information from several sources is combined, and the outcomes of the reports were compared to the outcomes of external studies.

4. Results

4.1 Aid Volume and Distribution

Between 2010 and 2023, aid from China to Africa has continued to grow, and has even overtaken the levels of most Western countries. Chinese aid constituted a steady upward trend from 2015 to 2021, growing from 12,000 to 18,200 million dollars (Harchaoui et al., 2020; Zhaohui, 2022). For example, United States aid even remained stagnant during that period, growing from 8,500 million in 2015 to 9,500 million dollars in 2021 (See Table 2). The same trend can be seen in European Union aid, which grew from 6,200 to 7,100 million dollars in that period of time, and a similar trend can be seen in the aid from the Nordic countries, where less contribution saw aid flows grow from 2,100 million dollars in 2015 to 2,600 million in 2021.

This table illustrates that China has become a dominant provider of development finance in Africa, particularly in terms of total volume. The data indicate a sustained commitment to expanding bilateral partnerships, largely through large-scale infrastructure projects, loans, and concessional financing. Western aid, while substantial, demonstrates slower growth and is often concentrated in governance, humanitarian, and social service sectors.

4.2 Sectoral Focus

Aid focus from both the West and China shows noticeable differences in priority. Most Chinese aid goes to roads, ports, energy, and telecommunications (Harchaoui et al., 2020; Morgan, 2018) as indicated in Figure 2. Building more infrastructure goes towards trade and economic partnership(s). Developing the agriculture, health, and

Table 2 shows Aid Flows Comparison (USD Millions)

Year	Chinese Aid	US Aid	EU Aid	Nordic
2015	12,000	8,500	6,200	2,100
2018	15,000	9,000	6,800	2,400
2021	18,200	9,500	7,100	2,600

education sectors are left mostly to the government and corporate philanthropy. Western aid emphasizes governance, health, and education more than others. US, EU and Nordic funding are more focused on institutional

capacity, democratic governance, human rights, and social welfare (Chen, 2025; Regilme & Hodzi, 2021). There is an attempt to encourage policy transparency and conformity to the international fabric through conditional grants.

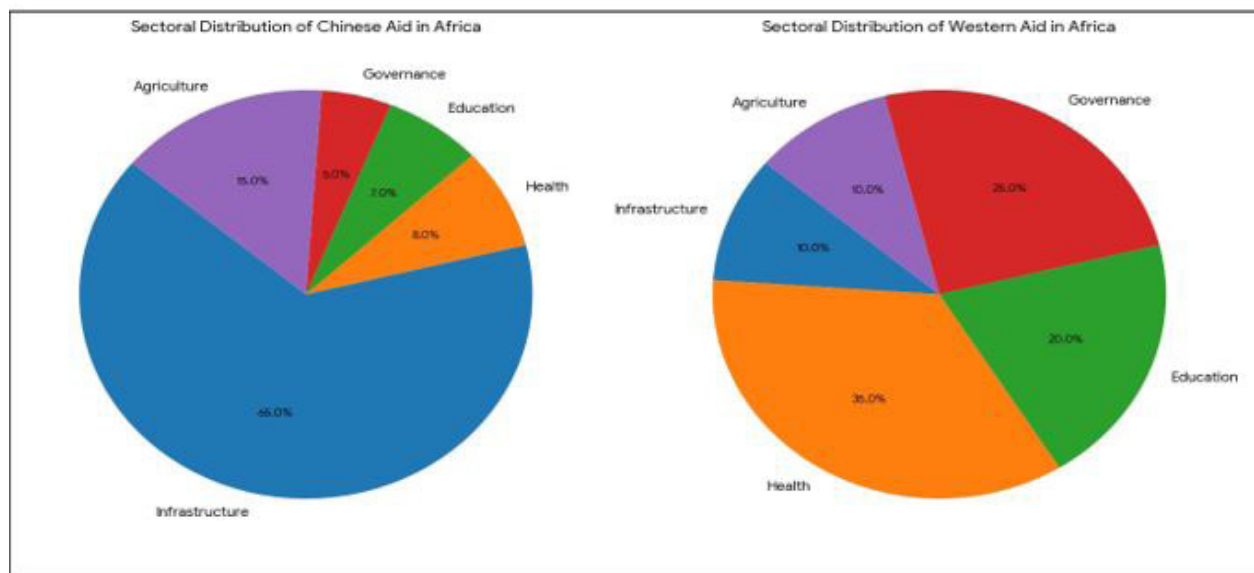


Figure 2 shows Comparative Sectoral Distribution of Chinese and Western Aid in Africa

4.3 Mechanisms and Conditionality

The differences between Chinese and Western aid most vividly come to surface in aid delivery mechanisms and related conditionality. Chinese aid tends to come via government-to-government deals that are often tied to specific projects by Chinese state-owned enterprises (Al Amin, 2025; Gülseven, 2025; Hoeffler & Sterck, 2022). These projects, in principle, have very little conditionality, and often stress relational cooperation, and flexibility with medium to long term time frames. Consequently, recipient countries are able to exercise more policy space to take ownership over the implementation of the policies and programs. However, this approach tends to raise concerns over the sustainability and transparency of the debt involved. Western aid structures, in contrast, involve high conditionality. Western grants are often channeled through multilateral bodies, NGOs, and local partners (Dreise, 2018; Fowler & Mati, 2019). There is a high emphasis on

monitoring, evaluation, and the use of specific performance frameworks to ensure accountability, and to achieve the primary goals of Western aid, which are Prescriptive goals, such as governance, democracy, and human rights, and instrumental goals, such as capacity building.

4.4 Strategic and Relational Patterns

The significant analysis has suggested diverse conceptualizations of Western versus Chinese approaches on aid. While Western funding is primarily designed on normative applications and aid influence on the policies and governance, Chinese funding is seen as supporting strategic diplomatic and economic relations, and thus keeps the funding flows more transactional (Harchaoui et al., 2020). Western funding is more normative and seeks to influence policies to meet defined governance and social outcome as states fund what is seen as diplomatically and humanly appropriate (Osella, 2018; Regilme & Hodzi,

2021). Funding Western projects, despite the definable diplomatic ends, focus more on the Western determined governance (the systems and standards of governing, such

as democracy), and human outcome (the end result of the funding and what it seeks to achieve), see Table 3.

Table 3 shows Comparative Mechanisms and Strategic Approaches

Aspect	Chinese Aid	Western Aid
Conditionality	Low	High
Focus Sector	Infrastructure	Governance/Health
Delivery Mode	Government-to-Government	NGOs/Multilateral
Strategic Objective	Economic and political Leverage	Normative Influence
Duration	Medium- long term	Short-Medium term

The table shows the differences in the strategic focus of Western and Chinese aid. China focuses on infrastructure-led development and bilateral relations, whereas Western donors focus on normative relations, conditionality, multi-actor, and cross-sector partnerships.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Results

The analysis of aid mechanisms from China and the West shows differences in their strategies, frameworks, and effects in Africa. Western aid is more generalized and focused on social service systems and political governance, while Chinese aid is more focused and strategically aimed on bilateral partnerships, trade, and infrastructure. This allows them to rapidly complete significant and integrated projects like road networks, energy production facilities, and industrial centers (Harchaoui et al., 2020; Ilchman, 1998; Morgan, 2018). Their projects, due to their financing, create a medium to long term horizon and allow the recipient countries to retain a fair amount of control over their internal policy decisions. In terms of value of Chinese loans and the offered collateral by the African nations, the loans do pose the ethical dilemma of establishing whether the aid is genuine or whether countries on the periphery of the capitalist world system, such as China, are using African nations on the political or economic level to grow their primary capitalist system. African nations paradoxically find themselves as politically pro-China, west-eluding, self-developing primary capitalist countries and transforming their peripheries. In contrast, self-developing and transforming their peripheral capitalist regions, politically, authoritarian regime-similar to China, is required. From this vantage point, the Chinese strategy of providing aid in countries on the periphery of the capitalist world system is especially described as a tool

of a politically authoritarian regime to be countered so as not to sustain and grow a primary capitalist system in a peripheral dominating country. Conversely, Western aid models, focus on human development, a respectful and accountable form of governance, and project-based human aid delivered through multilateral agencies, the NGO and private foundations (Koch, 2018; Odén & Wohlgemuth, 2013; Regilme & Hodzi, 2021).

5.2 Comparison with Prior Studies

This study's findings are consistent with previous research on Chinese and Western aid paradigms. Empirical findings corroborate theoretical critiques on the strategic purposes of Chinese aid, asserting that the selection of projects and the relational dynamics are driven by economic and political levers (Huang & Behuria, 2021; Otele & Mitullah, 2025; Raess et al., 2022; Schlatter, 2024). Similarly, the Western aid's normative framing, focus on conditionality, human development, and strengthening of the institutional capacity, reinforces the structural governance of the Western development interventions (Lang, 2024; Ullah et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the research also points out some peculiarities. In particular, there is starting overlap in NGO involvement in both Western and Chinese aid initiatives (Esteban & Olivie, 2022; Mottiar & Ngcoya, 2016). Chinese aid, until recently, was seen as a mono-state system with little room for non-state actors (Atitanti & Asiamah, 2023). Newer studies show that Chinese corporate philanthropy, private foundations, and foreign-based INGOs are increasingly actors in the same projects in the areas of health, education, and agriculture (Fowler & Mati, 2019; Tilson, 2014; Yingjie & Guangsheng, 2024). This is the first indication that Chinese aid is beginning to show more complexity and may help close some of the previously identified human development gaps.

At the same time, Western donors are still strengthening their collaborations with private foundations and local actors, further multi-actor collaboration and enabling more tailored project interventions. The comparative analysis demonstrates both convergence and divergence. In particular, health, education, and community development demonstrate convergence by having both Chinese and Western actors.

5.3 Implications for African Policy and Development

The results of this study have a number of implications for African policy and planning for development. Calderwood stated that first, the harmonization of diverse aid mechanisms may increase developmental effectiveness. Having the Chinese focus their aid on the infrastructure of a country facilitates its economic development, while the West focuses on the governance and social and human capital of that country. It is suggested that the infrastructure and social institutions of a country would be developed in tandem (Fowler, 2022). The second finding is that strengthening local means is important. It is suggested

that African states should have the means of selecting, negotiating, and controlling a project in whichever way best meets the national development goals, and thereby reduces dependence and enhances sustainability. African governments should be able to exercise greater authority over the design, implementation, and evaluation of projects, whether they are funded by Chinese or Western aid, through mechanisms such as co-financing, joint implementation committees, and integrated monitoring (Mati, 2025). The risks of addressing sectoral gaps can be minimized through the diversification of partnerships. For instance, combining Chinese corporate philanthropy and NGO engagement with social development projects could be used to balance Western investments in governance and human development. African countries, by promoting multi-actor partnerships, can address their infrastructures, social welfare, and governance gaps for more integrated and sustainable development as demonstrated in Figure 3. Africa's policymakers need to be more strategic and coherent in their planning in order to understand the intricacies of the changing frameworks of aid.

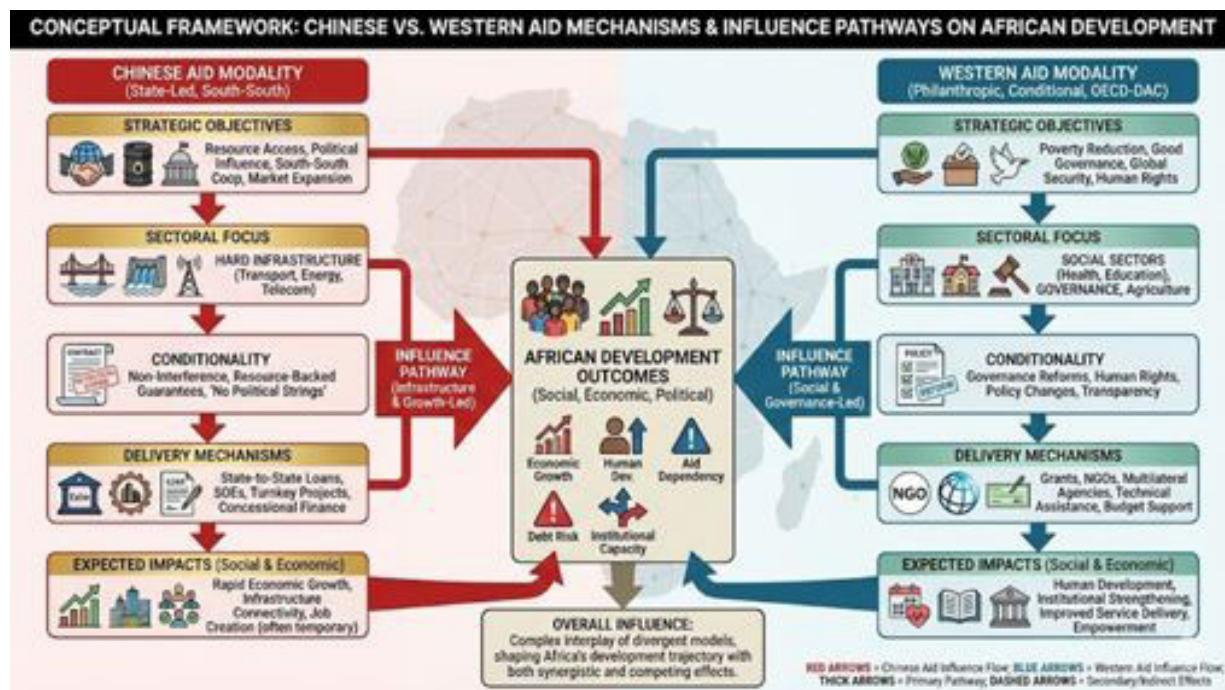


Figure 3 shows Conceptual Framework of Chinese and Western Aid Modalities and Their Influence Pathways on African Development.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the differences between Chinese and Western aid models in Africa and assessed their development implications. The findings reveal two distinct yet intersecting approaches. Chinese aid is largely

state driven and infrastructure centered, prioritizing transport, energy, and industrial development. Its emphasis on flexibility and limited political conditionality enables rapid project implementation and strengthens economic partnerships. For many African governments,

this model offers timely delivery of visible development outcomes and expanded trade linkages. Western aid, by contrast, places stronger emphasis on governance reform, institutional accountability, human rights, and social sector development. Delivered frequently through multilateral agencies and civil society organizations, it relies on structured monitoring and policy conditionality. This approach supports long term institutional strengthening and human capital formation, though bureaucratic procedures and compliance requirements may slow implementation and create administrative burdens. The comparison highlights both complementarities and tensions. Chinese financing advances physical infrastructure and economic growth, while Western assistance reinforces governance systems and social development. Misalignment emerges in strategic priorities, operational philosophies, and conditional frameworks. Yet convergence appears in shared engagement across sectors such as health and education and in the growing role of multi actor partnerships. For African policymakers, the central implication lies in strategic alignment. Effective development planning requires balancing infrastructure expansion with institutional strengthening. Strengthening domestic capacity to negotiate, coordinate, and evaluate aid partnerships remains essential to reducing dependency and ensuring sustainability.

7. Limitations

This study focuses on a comparative analysis of Chinese and Western aid mechanisms in Africa, yet several limitations must be acknowledged. Data constraints present the most significant challenge, particularly regarding Chinese aid flows. Western donors generally provide detailed, standardized, and regularly updated data. In contrast, information on Chinese aid often lacks transparency, consistency, and full disclosure of loan terms, project financing, and contractual arrangements (Arviso, 2024; Khan, 2023; Morgan, 2018). To address these gaps, the study draws on supplementary sources, including state records, academic research, and reports from international organizations.

Case selection also presents limitations. Representative cases from China, the United States, the European Union, and Nordic countries illustrate key differences in aid approaches. Yet these examples may not capture the full diversity of strategies across all donor countries or sectors (Harchaoui et al., 2020) As a result, the findings identify observable patterns but may not be universally

generalizable. Variation across African countries further complicates comparative assessment. Differences in governance systems, administrative capacity, political stability, and socio-economic conditions influence how aid is implemented and sustained (Fowler & Mati, 2019; Hayton & Cacciotti, 2013; Mati, 2025). A project that succeeds in one context may face obstacles in another. The comparative framework therefore highlights broad trends rather than deterministic outcomes. Finally, the study relies primarily on secondary sources, including scholarly literature and policy analyses, which are shaped by interpretation and evolving contexts.

8. Future Directions

Future research should deepen understanding of how Chinese and Western aid projects perform over time (Shih & Forsberg, 2023). Longitudinal studies that track infrastructure sustainability, debt dynamics, institutional reform, and human development outcomes would provide stronger empirical grounding for comparative assessment (Sani & Abdullahi). Micro level case studies can further examine how specific projects affect local communities, employment, governance practices, and social cohesion. Additional research should explore the evolving interaction between state actors, private firms, philanthropic organizations, and civil society groups within both aid systems. Comparative analysis of joint ventures, co financing arrangements, and blended finance models may clarify how hybrid approaches influence accountability and effectiveness. There is also a need for improved data transparency and standardized reporting mechanisms, particularly regarding financing terms and implementation outcomes. Strengthening collaborative research partnerships between African institutions and global scholars would enhance contextual insight and reduce reliance on externally produced data. By expanding empirical evidence and centering African perspectives, future scholarship can contribute to more informed policy design and a more balanced engagement with diverse global development partners.

9. Declarations:

Ethics approval and consent to participate: This study utilised secondary data from credible sources, including government databases and publicly accessible policy documents. As the research involved no direct interaction with human subjects and relied on anonymised, publicly available datasets, institutional ethics board approval was

not required. The study maintains strict adherence to ethical guidelines regarding data synthesis and triangulation to manage potential reporting biases.

Consent for publication: Not applicable. This manuscript does not contain any individual person's data in any form (including individual details, images, or videos).

Availability of data and material: The datasets analysed during the current study are available in the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and various official government assistance databases. All secondary literature and policy documents cited are available through their respective peer-reviewed publications or public institutional repositories.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares that there are no financial or personal relationships with other people or organisations that could inappropriately influence or bias the findings of this research.

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