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**A RHETORIC OF CHINA'S EXPLOITATION OF RELIGION IN
WEST AFRICA**

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ABSTRACT

Chinese state-sponsored communications de-emphasize religious activism. Yet, following President Jinping's 2013 Belt-and-Road Initiative, there has been an uptake of religious activities by Chinese nationals in some regions of Africa. Based on a critical case study design, this paper deconstructs the rhetoric of Chinese non-state actors' exploitation of religion as an economic resource in West Africa. Drawing on three cases from Ghana, the paper argues that the religion project of Chinese non-state actors in West Africa involves three main rhetorical strategies. The analysis reveals that Chinese foreign workers employ an econometric model based on the working hypothesis that the average African of the postcolonial/ neocolonial epoch is economically vulnerable and yet passionately religious, and, thus, would look to religion for solutions. Implications of the findings are reported in the paper.

KEYWORDS

China, deconstruction, religion, rhetoric, resource

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Introduction

“For those that have 50 cedis, rush forward! For those that have 50 cedis, rush out quickly! Quickly, quickly, quickly. For those that have 50 cedis! And if you don’t have 50 cedis, rush out with 20 cedis, quickly!” These are the words of a tongue-praying Chinese pastor seen in a YouTube video titled “Yahoo Chinese Pastors Invade Africa and its Religion of Slavery!!!” Clad in an all-white apparel, the quinquagenarian “man of God” is seen happily commandeering activities in a Ghanaian congregation that is brazenly chanting a popular African spiritual “Send Down Fire”. As he sings the first verse, he is joined in chorus, during the praise-and-worship session, by jubilant church members who retort “The Holy Ghost Fire. Send down fire again, the Holy Ghost Fire”. In no time, a section of the congregation, male and female, young and old, acting fervently in the moment of the occasion, amid singing and dancing, takes turns to hand over what appears to be money to the jubilant pastor upon his instruction. The receipt of the 50 or 20 Ghanaian cedis, then, serves as a stimulus for the pastor to instantly stretch forth his hand, which he has anointed with oil, on the foreheads of the givers in the hope of unleashing God’s divine blessings impacted upon them by him.

Research has shown that religious activities, such as the vignette narrated above, are commonplace among Africans. Scholars have noted that religion, which in this paper is understood as humanity’s awareness and continuous search for a relationship with the supernatural (Turaki 1999), shapes the social and political organizations of many Africans (see Abhink 2014; Coker 2021; Onapajo 2012), with some writers describing the typical African as incurably and notoriously religious (Mbiti 1970). What remains as yet surprising is the penetration of Asian nationals into the spiritual lives of Africans. To be sure, there is scant literature concerning how Chinese migrant workers in Africa are taking up, for instance, pastoral work as a form of business (See Luedi 2018; Gong 2020; contra Zhang, 2023’s assessment of China’s religious diplomacy for its Belt and Road Initiative). It is only recently, specifically over the last decade, that the capitalist activities of diasporan Chinese who make a foray in religion are being critically questioned both by scholars and critics. For instance, there is evidence of Chinese involvement in Buddhism in Africa. Shi and Li (2023) write that the advent of Chinese Buddhism on the continent comes with its own political entanglements and contemporary Chinese transnationalism. Using ethnographic data from South Africa, Tanzania, Botswana, and Malawi, the authors examine the mobility of transnational Chinese Buddhism by probing retrospectively into their origins and drives, and investigate their connections with the evolving China-Africa/Taiwan-Africa engagements. Shi and Li (2023) conclude that contemporary Chinese Buddhism in Africa is a product of connections and competitions between states, African politics, and the multi-layered Chinese diaspora.

Watchers are concerned that a revisionist Marxist-Leninist-Maoist China, with its Communist Party widely known for its atheist posture and incessant war on religion and proselytization, is now building houses of worship across Africa. Adopting an intense surveillance culture of religious restrictions and a total ban on online sales of Bibles, dynamite churches, and arrests of Christians for inciting subversion of state power (Kuo 2019; Vejpongsa & Kang 2022; Zylstra & San 2023), diasporan Chinese are currently exploiting religion on the African continent as a resource. Yet Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution, which guarantees that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief”, bans discrimination based on religion and proscribes state organs, public organizations, or individuals from compelling citizens to believe in—or not believe in—any particular faith. Luedi (2018) reports that one-quarter of all the Bibles printed

worldwide are printed in China, and that the world's largest Bible printing factory opened in Nanjing in 2008. The author goes further to explain that while it seems bizarre, China's mass production of Bibles is merely a logical extension of its export-centric economic paradigm, which is aided by the efforts of local African churches to reach out to Chinese networks such as the Southern African Chinese Outreach Network and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF). Luedi (2018) adds that Chinese firms have ventured into the church business because of their logistical advantage. As the leading trading partner with Africa, having invested over US\$90 billion worth of trade, ahead of France and the U.K. (Nzwili 2011), China has clearly expanded its influence in Africa. Chinese companies, estimated to be about 10, 000 in number (Jayaram, Kassiri & Sun 2017), are winning contracts to construct buildings and churches in Nairobi. For instance, China Zhongxing Construction is building Maurice Cardinal Otunga Plaza, and is just one of many church contracts Chinese construction companies have won in recent years as China has expanded its influence in Africa. It has also built a church for the Faith Evangelistic Ministries, a Kenyan Pentecostal group (Nzwili 2011).

Study objective

This study interrogates Chinese migrant workers' exploitation of religion as an economic resource in West Africa, drawing ideas from rhetorical theory, geopolitics, and African postcolonial studies. We use the term *exploitation* to refer to two basic senses: *utilization* and *misuse*. While the first meaning of the word *exploitation* brings up the idea of religion as an economic resource to be utilized, the latter sense of the word connotes the idea of abuse. In fact, it is this application of the term *exploitation* that can be found in the works of Rich and Tecker (2013) and Corkin (2013) in their analyses of Sino-African relations. Thus, it is in this context that the present study aims at deconstructing rhetorical strategies employed by Chinese workers in the West African state of Ghana (See also Botchway & Coker 2023). We will unpack the belt-and-braces strategies employed by Chinese workers to 'sell' religion to Ghanaians, focusing on three main elements, *viz.* religious commodification, repackaging of African/Ghanaian Christian gospel songs, and enstoolment of Chinese as African chiefs. The analysis will show that Chinese foreign workers employ this econometric model based on the working hypothesis that the average African is economically vulnerable and yet passionately religious, and, thus, would look to religion for solutions.

The rest of the paper is structured into four strands. The first reviews literature on the history of China in Africa. The next section discusses three cases obtained on YouTube as the data set, and how they were gathered and treated. This strand is directly followed by a critical analysis of the cases. The final part summarizes major findings and their implications for future work in Sino-African relations.

The geopolitics of Sino-African imaginaries

Chinese operations on the African continent have been normatively traced to the post-Bandung Conference of April 1955. This period has been noted to officially mark the initiation of a cooperation policy of Communist China with African states for the decolonization in Africa (Ismael 1971). While work on Sino-African relations has grown exponentially to cover areas of their strategic partnership, the bulk of prior research, nonetheless, has focused on the economic and geo-economic imperatives of their partnerships. The development is occurring on the back of a slow growth of China's

economy, following the global financial crisis. Pigato and Gourdon (2014) note that the relationship between China and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has grown significantly in terms of trade, especially over the last decade, and that there are no immediate signs that the two will break this economic tie soon. They go as far as positing that the union has improved the economic growth of several SSA states. The authors aver that SSA nations prefer to do business with China because the latter's import pricing is exceptionally lower when compared to that of Europe and the United States. Yet they concede that although SSA states have benefitted from China's demands for exports, the trade has, nonetheless, been characterized by an unhealthy competition between imported goods from China and goods locally produced.

Some scholars have, thus, expressed concerns that China may not after all be in Africa for altruistic purposes. Scholars dread that Sino-African trade relations take place on an uneven playground. Bräutigam (2011) asserts that China is offering a surprising bargain to many African countries, which a number of them are not adequately leveraging to their advantage. She cites as examples the resources of oil in the Republic of the Congo (Congo Brazzaville), sesame in Ethiopia, cocoa in Ghana, and tobacco in Zimbabwe. The author argues that in exchange for these resources, China secures finance to build the hydropower, telecoms, power, and rural electrification projects that are believed to be necessary for the modernization of African countries. Bräutigam (2011) concludes that China is practicing a new form of neo-colonialism in Africa by employing and/or combining several diplomatic strategies. These include financial and foreign aid policies, regionalism, and past experiences to shape her international dealings with Africa. The author goes as far as insisting that China is influencing the education and governance architecture of many African states. Ayodele and Sotola (2014) affirm the speculations of scholars concerning the role of China on the African continent. The authors identify three main suspicions: (a) whether China is in Africa for purely economic reasons; or (b) whether vigorous Sino-African relations will give way to the exploitation of Africa; and (c) whether suspicions *a* and *b* will eventuate in a new wave of neocolonialism. The authors, however, concede that China's involvement with Africa has been more gainful to Africans when compared with the European occupation of the continent. This is because, according to Ayodele and Sotola (2014), the Chinese have massively invested in the infrastructural facelift and agricultural sector of six main African states *viz.* Angola, South Africa, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria and Ghana. Wang and Elliot (2014) include Botswana, Kenya, Madagascar, Namibia, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

There are works that, on the contrary, consider Chinese investments in Africa as exemplary and a model of growth for the continent. Some authors argue that Chinese strategic diplomatic support of and non-interference in African nations' politics, continuing military exchanges, constant medical assistance, trade, and aid are more than enough justifications for China's renewed partnership with Africa. Chun (2014) views the presence of Chinese mercantilism in Africa as alluring, focusing on Zimbabwe. In his estimation, the relationship between the two countries dates back almost 600 years ago during the Ming and Qing dynasties, and was based on trade and cultural exchange. Chinese assistance to the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), one of the movements that fought for Zimbabwe's liberation in the early 1960s, marked the beginning of China's current engagement with Zimbabwe. This backing of Zimbabwe's liberation war against colonialism and racial injustice began in 1955. Since then, there have been three eras of development in the China-Zimbabwe relationship. Chun's (2014) work seeks to disrupt two parallel interpretations of the relationship between China and

Zimbabwe: on the one hand, it is often viewed as a microcosm of China–Africa relations due to its economic and resource elements; on the other, it is portrayed as an example of China’s support for a ‘pariah regime’ without any consideration of human rights and good governance. In Chun’s (2014) view, the China–Zimbabwe relationship is neither of these, but rather a possible model for China–Africa relations as a whole. Driven by the ‘Look East’ policy on the Zimbabwean side and the engaging policy supported by the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation on the Chinese side, this relationship has its own dynamic development path and implications. Zeleza (2014) agrees that there have been conflicting reactions to China’s growing influence in Africa. He notes that some scholars, we can call up Bräutigam (2011) and Chun (2014), are worried that Africa’s potential for industrialization and self-determination may be hampered due to China’s geopolitical influence in global supply chains.

Reports of human rights abuse and unfair labor practices have also been made about Sino-SSA relations. Zeleza (2014) identifies the poor wages given to local workers, the breach of labor laws and regulations, and deindustrialization brought about by the importation of low-quality Chinese goods, especially in smaller African economies. He stresses that the development has caused the relationship between the two blocs to be innately unequal since African countries have difficulties in coordinating Chinese policies. China has sought to respond to these infractions through the implementation of a variety of policy actions and efforts. Ongoing research, however, speaks to the contrary. Osondu-Oti’s (2016) showcases several instances of human rights infringement caused by Chinese operatives in Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Angola. The study concludes that Africa should embrace the economic and political development avenues that China presents to reduce the “over focus” on human rights issues, which the study claims China shows little interest in. Africans, therefore, perceive Chinese migrants in many different ways. For instance, competition, real or perceived, plays a significant role in forming unfavorable sentiments toward Chinese immigrants in the wake of unfavorable reports about China. Ultimately, purists posit that sustained relationships between African states and China will make way for the colonization of the former. Khodadadzadeh (2017) analyzed China’s engagement with Angola from 2000 to 2017 neo-colonialist traits. Five essential features of neocolonialism, namely, influence in politics, control of the economy, reliance on foreign currency, showing off of military might, and the promotion of social and educational norms were identified. The results of the study revealed the presence of neo-colonial tendencies, particularly in the fields of economics and finance.

In a word, the review of extant literature shows that scholars have paid less attention to the rhetorical strategies employed by Chinese migrants in exploiting religion as a commodity in African countries.

Data and study methods

A critical case study design was employed to download three significant cases from YouTube video sites. A critical case study generally refers to the process of selecting a small number of important cases that are likely to “yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge” (Patton 236). Critical case studies, to a large extent, permit analytic generalizations, and are, thus, useful for building theory (Patton 2014). The three cases sampled in the present study were selected based on their thematic relevance as they revealed a great deal of information concerning the commercialization of Christianity, in particular, and efforts made by Chinese migrants to buy chieftaincy titles in West Africa. We focused on the three YouTube cases used in this

research because it was methodically challenging to identify and physically locate Chinese migrants who are into the religion business in Ghana and Nigeria.

The data were analyzed based on semiotic deconstruction. Semiotics is a field of communication that studies the dialogicity of meanings and interpretations. Analyzing the stories of the Chinese in religious spaces on YouTube from a semiotic perspective was, therefore, crucial for exploring how much meaning we could assign to their actions. Carefully analyzing the data required that we painstakingly deconstruct the YouTube videos as textual materials. As a method of critical textual analysis, deconstruction is opposed to the idea that texts have a single, immutable meaning. Rather, analysts argue strongly that all texts have multiple meanings (Derrida 1970). To analyze a text such as a YouTube video, therefore, involves seeing beyond a fixed interpretation of the text. The goal is to examine the text to decode its multiple significations. Its essence is to bring to light the taken-for-granted assumptions, occluded values, and ideologies hidden in the text. As Coker (7) notes, "...deconstruction is interested in what is happening in a text, what is not happening in a text, and why". Deconstruction enables the analyst to take account of presences and absences in texts. Put simply, to deconstruct a text is to identify the rhetorical operations existing in the text (for limitations of the study, see the conclusion of the paper). The next section of the paper seeks to serve this purpose.

Deconstructing the rhetoric of Chinese exploitation of religion in Ghana

The three cases discussed in this section proceeds on the hypothesis that Chinese interest in religion in West Africa operates based on a business model. The assumption is, in fact, congruous with China's policy for Africa (Ayodele & Sotola 2014; Meidan 2006; Zheng 2010). The study revealed three main rhetorical strategies employed by the Chinese in selling religion to Ghanaians, *viz.* commodification of religion, the repackaging of Ghanaian gospel songs, and the enstoolment of Chinese as traditional rulers.

Religious commodification

The analysis of the data set showed that the primary rhetorical method used by the Chinese in this study is the commodification of religion, in general, and Christianity, in particular. The research revealed that this Chinese econometric method works on the assumption that Africans are largely a religious people (Mbiti 1970), mainly economically deprived, and, therefore, may be willing to do just as anything to get out of their economic quagmire. Figure 1 below paints a vivid illustration of this idea:



Figure 1: A Chinese pastor imparting blessing on a congregant
Source: Hadassah (2019, YouTube)

In this YouTube video, the audience is made to witness a rare uptake of pastoral work by an unnamed Chinese pastor in a Ghanaian congregation. The ‘Yahoo’ preacher presented at the beginning of this paper is the same pastor being referenced here. Remember he is enthusiastically urging the congregation to “sow seeds” of 50 and 20 Ghanaian cedis in order to attract God’s blessings. A deconstruction of the video clearly reveals a transactional act between the Chinese pastor and his Ghanaian congregation. The business deal is reminiscent of a story in the Bible where Simon Magus, a sorcerer in Samaria, sought to offer money to Apostles Peter and John in exchange for the gift of a miracle to heal the sick (Acts 8: 9-24). The story says the apostles took strong exception to the business deal and cursed him. It goes without saying that for conservative Christians God’s giftings are not for sale for both the seller and buyer. As it is noted, “Freely have you received, freely must you give”. In fact, the term “Yahoo”, as used in West African popular imaginary, commonly refers to online fraudsters and their fraudulent practices. The analysis affirms the large body of research in religion that points to the idea that the average African, as posited by the renowned Kenyan theologian, Mbiti (1970), is incurably and/or obdurately religious. The Nigerian producer of the video, Hadassah (2019), goes as far as calling this form of capitalist exploitation “enslavement”. In other words, the Yahoo case study compels us to think about the way some Africans conceptualize reality. A legion of scholars in critical and postcolonial studies have sought to dispel the myth that Africans are infantile in thought, and far from capable of managing their affairs (Fanon 1967; Memmi 1965; Retamar 1989). Clearly, the work done by Corkin (2013) provides contrarian evidence as it proves that the Angolan people enacted their agency in dealing with Chinese credit lines. We move on to the second case.

Repackaging African gospel songs

Singing spirituals and highly inspirational songs, popularly termed as *gospel songs*, forms a significant part of Christian worship. Whether among Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal, Charismatic, or New Religious Movement adherents, it is almost inconceivable to hold a Christian service devoid of songs of worship and praises. This is because song ministrations, Christians believe, brings them closer to God and can cause breakthroughs¹. The analysis of the second case shows that knowledge of the aforementioned claim by Christians may have motivated Chinese workers to “repackage” melodious Christian gospel songs sung in Ghanaian local languages such as Twi, one of Ghana’s most popularly spoken languages. The research indicates that the strategy of singing the people’s songs in their own languages by the Chinese is extremely persuasive as it has the potential to let the Ghanaian people welcome the former as belonging in the Ghanaian identity. Concerning the theory of shared values, we may argue that this strategy was used by the colonizers in sports and other cultural activities. For example, to allow the colonized to play golf or polo with the colonizer, and be in the same clubhouse drinking beer, made the colonized to think that after all they shared values with the colonizer, which made it easy for the colonizer to continue colonizing the colonized. Moreover (as shown in Figure 2), the strategy serves as a commercial venture of allowing Ghanaian Christians and enthusiasts of patronizing Chinese African gospel music concerts and shows.

¹ The walls of Jericho tumbled through prayers (Joshua 6: 1-27) as well as Paul and Silas songs of worship open prison doors that kept them bound in jail (Acts 16:25-26).



Figure 2: Chinese singing a Ghanaian gospel song in a Ghanaian church
Source: Wide SOFT Hannover (2019)

In this two-minute video posted on YouTube by Wide SOFT Hannover, the audience is made to see a Chinese in action accompanied by a group of three other Chinese women singing heartily what is usually referred to as praises and worship in the Pentecostal and Charismatic wings of the Christian faith. (We were informed that their presence at the church marked an official visit as fellow Christians.) Singing impeccable Twi gospel songs in a branch of one of the largest churches in Ghana, the Church of Pentecost, it is not surprising how the congregation is urged on to join in the singing and dancing. But while the fervent Christian may consider the ministration the result of proselytization and manifestation of God's handiwork in the lives of these Chinese converts, one may not fail to notice that what may be happening is that the Chinese are given a frontal role in the Church: in fact, they are leading the church in singing and praising their God. In other words, the Asians in the video are, thus, leading the Ghanaian church to God. A critical analysis of the video, however, makes two staggering revelations: the first is that a huge offering bowl is placed in front of the dancing minister. As was noted in the earlier discussion, the visual symbolism of the offertory bowl is to stimulate and attract congregants to willingly give their moneys unto the Lord. While the practice may not be one done under duress and compulsion, it is important to note that the ritual is indeed a stimulus, in the parlance of classical conditioning literature, to which the joyous congregation must favorably respond. Second, while almost all Ghanaian faithful in the auditorium, that is, both clergy and laity are busily dancing, the crew with the Asian singer are seen filming the event. In other words, they could be described as perhaps not being fully immersed in the tradition of praises and worship, or at best are simply performing. In the sociological framework of Goffman (1969), we would describe their use of front-stage impression management as involving persistent smiles, body genuflections, constant cooperation, and clapping. Notice how none of the female Asian women joins in vigorous dancing nor makes efforts to get closer to the Ghanaian congregants. What does this level of consciousness in a frenzy environment charged with vigorous dancing and singing reveal? From a psychoanalytic perspective, we could speculate that the

Ghanaian congregation is moved into action because the presence of the singing Asian visitors could have triggered their Id, the egocentric pleasure-seeking node of their minds (Baran & Davis 2009). The analysis here, however, need not be taken as an endorsement of Senghor's (1984) theory that Africans are inherently emotional. Compare this high tempo singing ministration to the almost all-female orchestra singing another popular Twi Christian spiritual. The soprano-like voice and the clarity with which the protagonist sings are, indeed, attention-grabbing (See Figure 3).



Figure 3: A Chinese orchestra performing a Ghanaian gospel song
Source: Wide SOFT Hannover (2019)

In rhetorical terms, the lyrics of the song is congruous with the central doctrine of Christianity: it acknowledges the kingship and lordship of God the Creator as the ruler of the earth and everything therein. But perhaps what remarkably draws the worshiper to partake in singing along is the heightened pathos with which the song is ministered. To put it differently, the song's ethos may be intact as it may have no doctrinal distortions from a puritanical Christian perspective. This is realized by the simplicity of the tone and style of the song-message of the Chinese choir (Miles & Nilsson 2018). The corollary is that the careful rendition of this popular Ghanaian gospel song creates an emotional connection the Ghanaian audience can easily relate to. It has been observed that people are more likely to be persuaded if they are moved by a strong emotion (Renkema, 2004). But beyond praising God and the impressive accompanying performance, one cannot fail to recognize that it was a sold-out concert. Thus, the audience needed to part with money in order to participate in the show. In simple terms, the performance may as well be considered as a commercial activity.

Becoming African chiefs: The final phase of Chinese diplomatic offensive?

Analysis of the final case brings to light far more staggering revelations about Chinese mercantilist operations in Ghana. The analysis attempts to demonstrate that the desire for land acquisition appears to be the final diplomatic offensive employed in Sino-African relations. With land comes access to the natural resources of the people. These include a vast area of timber, cocoa, gold, and bauxite. The strategy involved here is to be first enstooled as a traditional chief. This type of soft power or charm offensive was witnessed

in Ghana when a Chinese businessman was enstooled *Nkosuohene* (i.e., development chief), and was given the name Ohene Kofi Ayebofo in a town called Kwawu in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The title itself, a modernist invention by local communities to court development, can be rendered in translation as *doer-helper* (See Bob-Milliar 2009 for a comprehensive discussion of the institution of the *Nkosuohene*). Traditionally, it is excluded from the religion and rituals of the people. But the office of the “development chief” is one of the innovative ways of enacting African agency in Sino-African relations (Corkin 2013).



Figure 3: A Chinese man enstooled as development chief in Ghana
Source: Wode Maya (YouTube, 2021)

In this video, Ghanaian vlogger, Wode Maya, arguably Africa’s most successful vlogger, highlights the complicity of African leaders, labelling them as interested in their partisan business gains rather than being patriots (Owusu, 2021). Some of the respondents interviewed by Wode on the subject revealed thus:

In my opinion, I think it’s because of the business deal the Chief has with the Chinese man that resulted in his enstoolment. Yet the town is endowed with many successful Ghanaian business men and women who are deserving of the title of Nkosuohene.

Checks indicate that Chinese business operatives are actively involved in commercial timber lumbering, leading to a high level of deforestation in the Kwawu forest belt. Moreover, though local settlers are not in support of the arrangement, they are, to a large extent, powerless to take up any action to prevent the deal. Local settlers also revealed that land acquisition has been increasingly difficult for rural dwellers because lands are being sold at high prices because they are being sold to the Chinese. The argument we are advancing here is that while a chief, in all the societies in Ghana, is a community leader, he unquestionably is also the religio-spiritual custodian of the customs and traditions of his people. The question one may ask then is, how can a Chinese traditional chief confidently propitiate African ancestors and deities? (Oku 2013; Tweneboah 2012). Thus, what we are witnessing in this case may be a foray of the spirituality of the Ghanaian people and their ancestral heritage. The analysis confirms a recent media report

filed by Ghanaian journalist Blessed Sogah in which he documented concerns expressed by Stanford University political scientist Larry Diamond to have expressed that China's concessionary loans to African countries such as Ghana are a form of "a trap" (Sogah 2023). The report explains that Prof. Diamond expressed fear that Chinese loans are not transparent because they are not reviewed by the parliaments of African countries, and, therefore, appear coercive in nature. This concern, according to the political scientist, is a deliberate neocolonial move by China to take over the strategic facilities of African countries including their natural resources. The political scientist's views agree with those of scholars such as Ayodele and Sotola (2014) and Khodadadzadeh (2017) who posit that China's conspicuous presence and interest in Africa could eventually lead to a new form of colonization of the continent although the study by Pigato and Gourdon (2014) tells the story of African leaders preferring Chinese concessionaires because they think they are more flexible in comparison with conditionalities from the West. The point, however, is that the Chinese are making their business agenda in Africa quite aggressively clear with religion being one of the conduits.

Conclusion, study limitations, and future possibilities

This study examined Chinese exploitation of religion in West Africa, using Ghana as a case study. The study argued that the effort involves three main rhetorical strategies: commodification of religion, repackaging of African/Ghanaian Christian gospel songs, and enstoolment of Chinese as African chiefs. The analysis revealed that Chinese foreign workers employed these business models on the working assumption that the average African is passionately religious and economically vulnerable.

The findings reported in this paper need to be understood within the context of their limitations. In the first place, the study could not include the voices and lived experiences of Chinese actors reported in the study. This problem could be considered as a form of methodological bias against the study. In much the same way, Ghanaian subjects around whom the analysis was done were also not consulted, given that data gathered for the present study were all harvested online on the YouTube platform. This made it difficult to comprehensively grasp the contextual cues of the videos. Second, the research focused exclusively on Ghana as a stand-in for West Africa though the phenomenon has also been observed in other West African states such as Nigeria.

Future work could consider the lived experiences of Africans concerning the proselytization of religion by Asians in Africa. Scholars may also conduct in-depth studies about Chinese persuasion strategies employed in Sino-African diplomacy, and the role religion plays in the encounter.

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