African Affairs, 00/00, 1–31 doi: https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adac005

WESTERN AND CHINESE DEVELOPMENT ENGAGEMENTS IN UGANDA'S ROADS SECTOR: AN IMPLICIT DIVISION OF LABOUR

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ABSTRACT

How has the process of institution and governance building in Africa, a domain traditionally subject to western development interventions, been changed by Chinese-led development? Taking Uganda's roads sector, and particularly its main implementing agency the Ugandan National Roads Authority as a case study, I argue that traditional donors' influence on sectorial institution building has not been replaced or dislodged by China's growing presence. This presence primarily took the form of Chinese construction companies operating as profit-driven contractors interested mainly in quick project turnaround rather than in systematically shaping sectorial governance in the host country. Moreover, not only did traditional donors' development financing remain dominant vis-à-vis China, but the ways in which their interventions were designed, exercised, and monitored in the post-conditionality regime characteristically differed from their Chinese counterparts, ensuring their embedded and enduring role in the reforming of sectorial state institutions. As such, a tacit division of labour took shape between Chinese and western engagements in Uganda's roads sector: China focused on 'hard' physical road construction whilst traditional donors on the 'soft' aspects of sectorial governance and policy. The availability of both forms of development engagements with their distinctive foci enables issue-specific agency for Uganda to

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develop its roads sector, and yet they together appear to create favourable conditions for the Ugandan leadership's increasing authoritarianism.

Since the 1990s, at the forefront of a 'profound global project of socio-political engineering',[1] African states have undergone a series of western governance interventions that aim to reconfigure their institutional and administrative structures. The resurgence of China as a global development actor and leading provider of South–South Cooperation (SSC), beginning more than two decades ago in the early 2000s, has brought about seismic shifts in Africa's development landscape. By attending to the intersection of these two processes, this article seeks to examine how the process of institution and governance building in African states, a realm heavily subject to western-promoted neoliberal practices of development, has been influenced by China's rise as a major player in African development.

The case of Uganda's roads sector is of special interest in exploring this puzzle. Since the late 1980s, guided by the logics of New Public Management (NPM), a series of public sector reform initiatives was promoted primarily by the World Bank. These initiatives focused on institution building (constructing state institutions and installing administrative and governance processes, systems, controls, and logics) within the field of Uganda's national road development and maintenance, although substantial changes did not occur until 2008 with the launching of a semi-autonomous agency—the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA). Seven years into its operation, the exposure of the scandalous awarding of the Mukono-Katosi road-upgrading project to a ghost company in the United States revealed 'in a dramatic way the insufficiency of formal institutional reform in the face of well-entrenched patronage politics'.[2] In 2015, in the aftermath of this scandal, President Museveni appointed Allen Kagina, the well-regarded former head of the Uganda Revenue Authority, as the new Executive Director of UNRA. A major internal restructuring exercise was then initiated, which was still ongoing at the time of my research at the end of 2018. The period starting with the establishment of UNRA in 2008 up to the present also broadly corresponds with that of China's expanding role in Uganda's roads sector, in Uganda, and more generally, in Africa, making this sector an interesting case to investigate how Chinese bilateral engagements impact sectorial institution building in Uganda's roads with potential relevance to the broader African context.

1. Graham Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa: The construction of governance states* (Routledge, London, 2004), p. 3.
2. David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, *Reforming the roads sector in Uganda: A six-year retrospective* (Overseas Development Institute, London, October 2015), pp. 1–19.

Indeed, infrastructure development, and especially road construction, has been key to China's SSC with Africa,[3] with about 30,000 km of highways estimated to have been built or upgraded by Chinese enterprises by 2018.[4] Therefore, if one is looking for evidence of the observable impacts of China's growing presence on institution building in African hosts, the roads sector would be a highly likely candidate. In other words, if China's significant presence in Africa's road building has not been accompanied by reconfigurations of sectorial institution building, the chance of such reconfigurations in other sectors would arguably be even slimmer. Yet, my choice of a sectorial analysis is also to recognize that 'actual modern states encompass dozens of institutionally distinct policy sectors with highly diverse organizational architectures'.[5] This zeroing in on Uganda's roads sector allows us to better gauge and juxtapose traditional donor's influences on the sectorial-institutional reality of the Ugandan state with respect to those of China, whilst avoiding 'methodological nationalism',[6] in which sovereign states are perceived as unitary and principal actors of study. In terms of the broader implications of this research on roads institution building, my emphasis on this sectorial approach is not to espouse a blunt application of its findings to other African contexts, but to encourage more empirically grounded comparisons between Chinese and western development interventions in other sectors. Such comparisons will have to tease out the quantitative and qualitative manifestations of Chinese and western development engagements in Africa. More importantly, scholars should give due attention to the historically sedimented institutional legacies that precede these contemporary external engagements and investigate how they interact with each other in a given sector.

Through a sectorial study on Uganda's roads, this article makes three interlocking arguments. Firstly, despite China's growing profile in the African development landscape, institution building in Uganda's roads sector still relies primarily on financial and ideational resources from traditional donors, channelled through and couched in the language of a

3. Miriam Driessen, 'Pidgin play: Linguistic subversion on Chinese-run construction sites in Ethiopia', *African Affairs* 119, 476 (2020), p. 432. Tim Zajontz, 'The Chinese infrastructural fix in Africa: Lessons from the Sino-Zambian "road bonanza"', *Oxford Development Studies*, Ahead-of-Print (2021), p. 1.
4. Hannah Edinger and Jean-Pierre Labuschagne, 'If you want to prosper, consider building roads: China's role in African infrastructure and capital projects', *Deloitte Insights*, 22 March 2019, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/china-investment-africa-infrastructure-development.html> (4 December 2021).
5. Jefferey M. Sellers, 'State-society relations', in Mark Bevir (eds), *The SAGE handbook of governance* (SAGE, Los Angeles, 2013), p. 126.
6. Christopher Alden, 'China and Africa: The relationship matures', *Strategic Analysis* 36, 5 (2012), p. 706; Jon Phillips, 'Who's in charge of Sino-African resource politics? Situating African state agency in Ghana', *African Affairs* 118, 470 (2019), pp. 101–24; Daniel Large, 'Beyond "dragon in the bush": The study of China Africa relations', *African Affairs* 107, 426 (2007), pp. 45–61.

western promoted post-conditionality regime. Put differently, the new 'age of choice'[7] available to African recipients does not necessarily augur the end of 'governance states'[8] as described by Harrison.

The second and related argument is that significant differences continue to exist between Chinese and western approaches to development engagements, especially when it comes to how they are designed, exercised, and monitored day-to-day. This is not to advocate for an essentialist construction of traditional donors/China or Development Assistance Committee (DAC)/Non-DAC binary, because the increasingly polycentric development geography is indeed no longer anchored in these dichotomous framings.[9] However, by disaggregating Chinese presence in Uganda's roads and comparing it with its western counterpart, I argue that traditional donors, by retaining a far more involved approach to the reform of Uganda's roads institutions, remain committed to embedding and internalizing the latter with logics and mechanisms of governance in this post-conditionality era. Neither Chinese actors on the ground nor Chinese SSC engagements have sought to infuse themselves habitually and deeply into the fabrics and workings of sectorial institutions to a similar degree or in the same way as their western counterparts.

Taken together, this juxtaposition of Chinese and traditional donors' development engagements sheds some light upon the ongoing debate about African agency and structural dependency. Within Uganda's roads sector, the agency enabled by China's growing presence is issue-specific and uneven. The shaping of Uganda's sectorial institutions in roads remains dependent upon traditional donors' interventions underpinned primarily by neoliberal development strategies, whereas China's presence provides alternative financing sources and contractor options for Uganda to broker and hence slots neatly into its road-building aspiration. However, whether this agency being actualized as a form of diversified construction outsourcing contributes to effective road development or even structural transformation remains uncertain and contingent upon the political realities in Uganda. At present, the coexistence of both forms of development engagements characterized by their distinctive foci seems to provide an enabling environment for the Ugandan leadership's authoritarian exercise of power, a point I return to below.

7. Annalisa Prizzon, Romilly Greenhill and Shakira Mustapha, 'An "age of choice" for external development finance? Evidence from country case studies', *Development Policy Review* 35, 1 (2017), pp. 29–45.
8. Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa*.
9. Emma Mawdsley, 'Development geography 1: Cooperation, competition and convergence between "North" and "South"', *Progress in Human Geography* 41, 1 (2017), pp. 108–17.

I witnessed this intersection in Uganda's roads sector between the growing Chinese presence and traditional donors' governance interventions over the course of a 1-year fieldwork in Uganda in 2017 and 2018, during which I conducted an ethnography of bureaucracy within UNRA. The empirical evidence underlying this article is mainly drawn from materials I collected during my field research through the following three research methods. First, interviews with Chinese contractors and Chinese official representatives in Kampala, western development partners' representatives in Kampala, and current and retired bureaucrats within UNRA and the Ugandan Ministry of Works and Transport (MoWT). Second, participant observation on the then ongoing restructuring exercise within UNRA, including shadowing UNRA engineers in the office and on road-building sites to observe how they supervised construction works and interacted with different funders and Chinese contractors day-to-day. And third, textual sources—I studied both donor and government official reports on Uganda's roads sector, correspondence between UNRA and development partners and between UNRA and contractors as well as media reports. Worthy of note is that my Ugandan interviewees were mainly confined to mid- and low-level bureaucrats with whom I interacted daily during my fieldwork within UNRA rather than high-level politicians, partly explaining why the article speaks primarily to the everyday routinized and ingrained interactions between UNRA agents and development partners rather than the high politics between Ugandan political leaders and donors.

Governance interventions amid the changing African development landscape

Since the turn of the millennium, China's rise as a development actor has epitomized the expansion of SSC and substantially changed the circumstances for the global development regime that had been dominated by the norms and practices of northern donors. Debates on SSC and especially China–Africa have intensified, advancing opposing perspectives. These range from 'the alarmists' who considers southern development partners like China as a threat to the North-led global aid regime, to 'the sceptics' who admit the imperfections of this regime but remain committed to preserving it, to 'the pragmatic cheerleaders' perceiving this new donor landscape as an opportunity for recipient countries to pursue their own development path.[10] Northern actors initially sought to socialize China into the existing aid regime through various ad hoc institutional

10. Fantu Cheru, 'Emerging Southern powers and new forms of South–South cooperation: Ethiopia's strategic engagement with China and India', *Third World Quarterly* 37, 4 (2016), pp. 592–610.

arrangements.[11] However, in lieu of a one-way assimilation of China, the latest studies reveal partial convergence on specific development agendas (e.g. stabilization policies in peacebuilding[12] or the shifting of foreign aid towards productive sectors and infrastructure[13]) between China and northern actors, leading to 'the southernization of development'.[14]

What drives this debate about the rejuvenation of China–Africa and the divergence or convergence of SSC and traditional development co-operation is the following puzzle: To what degree does China behave differently from traditional donors, and does its development engagement constitute an alternative to the northern one? The varying answers to this question account for different positions within the debate on African agency versus dependency vis-à-vis external actors, a subject of perennial controversy that has gained further traction against the backdrop of China's re-emergence in Africa.[15]

Critics who emphasize the differences between Chinese and traditional donors' development engagements argue that the availability of Chinese development finance—and broadly speaking, intensified SSC—has ushered in an 'age of choice'[16] and the 'revival of triangulation'.[17] This diversification of bilateral co-operation enables African states to not simply accept donors' and investors' offers and acquiesce to external impositions, but to play them off one against another.[18] However, a less rosy reading emerges from scholars who identify signs of convergence between the two

11. Adriana Erthal Abdenur and João Moura Estevão Marques Da Fonseca, 'The North's growing role in South-South cooperation: Keeping the foothold', *Third World Quarterly* 34, 8 (2013), pp. 1475–91; Cheryl McEwan and Emma Mawdsley, 'Trilateral development cooperation: Power and politics in emerging aid relationships', *Development and Change* 43, 6 (2012), pp. 1185–209; Peter Kragelund, 'Towards convergence and cooperation in the global development finance regime: Closing Africa's policy space?' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 28, 2 (2015), pp. 246–62.
12. Devon Curtis, 'China and the Insecurity of Development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)', *International Peacekeeping* 20, 5 (2013), pp. 551–69.
13. Kragelund, 'Towards convergence and cooperation in the global development finance regime'.
14. Emma Mawdsley, 'The "Southernisation" of development?' *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 59, 2 (2018), pp. 173–85.
15. Most recent research includes Folashadé Soulé, "Africa+1′ summit diplomacy and the "new scramble" narrative: Recentering African agency', *African Affairs* 119, 477 (2020), pp. 101–24; Johanna Malm, *China-powered' African Agency and its Limits: The Case of the DRC 2007–2019* (South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg, November 2020); Phillips, 'Who's in charge of Sino-African resource politics?'.
16. Prizzon, Greenhill and Mustapha, 'An "age of choice" for external development finance?'.
17. Daniel Large, 'China and the contradictions of "Non-interference" in Sudan', *Review of African Political Economy* 35, 115 (2008), pp. 93–106.
18. Marcus Power and Giles Mohan, 'Towards a critical geopolitics of China's engagement with African development', *Geopolitics* 15, 3 (2010), pp. 462–95; Maurizio Carbone, 'International development and the European Union's external policies: Changing contexts, problematic nexuses, contested partnerships', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, 3 (2013), pp. 483–96.

sides and argue that this convergence would limit African recipients' room for manoeuvre.[19] Rather, the perceived increase in selected African capitals' bargaining power vis-à-vis traditional donors is more likely a result of the periodic rise of foreign direct investment or commodity prices.[20] Since China's launching of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, more critical research has emerged, which argues that Africa serves as a 'spatial fix through the provision of market, investment and debt outlets' to alleviate the over-capacity and over-accumulation of the Chinese economy.[21] Attending more to structural conditions, these scholars assert that China's SSC engagement displays structural tendencies inherent to the capitalist mode of production, representing for Africa not an opportunity to partake in a process of autocentric or self-reliant development, but merely a diversification of dependency.[22]

However, largely absent from these two interrelated debates—on the comparison between SSC and traditional North–South Cooperation on the one hand, and African agency versus dependency amid the new donor landscape on the other—is due attention to the actual impacts on governance and institution building in Africa. Empirically speaking, this absence is striking given the continued anxiety within the West that China's rising profile risks weakening progress made by traditional donors towards introducing standards, building institutions, and strengthening capacities on the environment, governance, and anticorruption in developing countries.[23] This anxiety remains often presumed rather than being empirically interrogated, reflecting partly racialized fears of the West being supplanted. Analytically speaking, these debates have been disconnected from the rich critical literature in development studies that investigates the crucial role of the World Bank through its evolving interventions since the 1980s in

19. Kragelund, 'Towards convergence and cooperation in the global development finance regime'.
20. Haley J. Swedlund, 'Is China eroding the bargaining power of traditional donors in Africa?' *International Affairs* 93, 2 (2017), pp. 389–408; Kragelund, 'Towards convergence and cooperation in the global development finance regime'.
21. Pádraig Carmody, Ian Taylor and Tim Zajontz, 'China's spatial fix and "debt diplomacy" in Africa: Constraining belt or road to economic transformation?' *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Advance online publication (2021), p. 7.
22. Behrooz Morvaridi and Caroline Hughes, 'South-South cooperation and neoliberal hegemony in a post-aid world', *Development and Change* 49, 3 (2018), 867–92; Ian Taylor and Tim Zajontz, 'In a fix: Africa's place in the Belt and Road Initiative and the reproduction of dependency', *South African Journal of International Affairs* 27, 3 (2020), pp. 277–95; Pádraig Carmody, 'Dependency not debt-trap diplomacy', *Area Development and Policy* 5, 1 (2020), pp. 23–31.
23. Dominik Kopiński and Qian Sun, 'New friends, old friends? The World Bank and Africa when the Chinese are coming', *Global Governance* 20, 4 (2014), pp. 601–23; Ngaire Woods, 'Whose aid? Whose influence? China, emerging donors and the silent revolution in development assistance', *International Affairs* 84, 6 (2008), pp. 1205–21.

shaping the development agenda of African recipients.[24] More specifically, having shifted away from the earlier prescription of rolling back the state and minimizing bureaucracy which was central to structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s, the World Bank's governance interventions became, especially during the 1990s and early 2000s, preoccupied precisely with constructing state institutions and embedding them with neoliberal administration logics premised upon rational-choice modelling, NPM, and institutionalism.[25]

I propose bringing back critical studies on governance interventions to these two debates in order to fill both the empirical and analytical lacunae as to the impact of Chinese development engagement on institution building in Africa. As a field 'not' void of pre-existing power arrangements and externally led interventions, institution building in Africa has been historically subject to evolving neoliberal reforms that reflect protracted periods of western-led developmentalism. Critical studies on the World Bank–Uganda post-conditionality partnership have revealed that, despite its more liberal and less coercive appearance framed by the languages of partnership and ownership, the specific processes involved in the World Bank's governance interventions are nevertheless more socially embedded than SAPs and enacted through indirect means of governance, resulting in the reproduction of lopsided aid relations and the internalization both of core features of neoliberalism and of the donors' ways of thinking.[26]

However, the field-based analyses of these studies were mostly undertaken during the first decade of the 2000s prior to the expansion of China's presence in Africa; therefore, one of my primary interests is to examine whether, amid the current polycentric development geography, traditional donors' development intervention remains characterized by good governance policies that enable the production of credible and capable institutional counterparts. Harrison's concept of 'governance states'[27] and Lie's 'developementality'[28] both provide helpful frameworks for identifying particular structural, practical, and discursive means of governance

24. For instance, Graham Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa: The construction of governance states* (Routledge, London, 2004); Jeremy Gould (ed.), *The new conditionality: The politics of poverty reduction strategies* (Zed Books, London, 2005); Jon Harald Sande Lie, *Developmentality: An ethnography of the World Bank-Uganda Partnership* (Berghanhn Books, New York, 2015); Martin Doornbos, '"Good Governance": The metamorphosis of a policy metaphor', *Journal of International Affairs* 57, 1 (2003), pp. 3–17; Rita Abrahamsen, 'The power of partnership in global governance', *Third World Quarterly* 25, 8 (2004), pp. 1453–67.
25. Graham Harrison, *Neoliberal Africa: The impacts of global social engineering* (Zed Books, London, 2010), pp. 97–117; Jon Harald Sande Lie, 'Developmentality: Indirect governance in the World Bank–Uganda partnership', *Third World Quarterly* 36, 4 (2015), pp. 723–40.
26. Graham Harrison, 'Post-conditionality Politics and Administrative Reform: Reflections on the Cases of Uganda and Tanzania', *Development and Change* 32, 4 (2001), pp. 657–79; Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa*; Lie, 'Developmentality'.
27. Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa*.
28. Lie, 'Developmentality'.

enacted through and enabling the formation of aid partnerships. I draw heavily on these concepts to investigate whether these means of governance persist in traditional donors' operations alongside new donor dynamics in Uganda's roads. Additionally, I redeploy Bierschenk's concept of 'sedimentation', construing African bureaucracies as 'building sites' where cascades of bureaucratic reforms introduced to them at different times did not completely replace each other, but accumulated as geological sediments.[29] Initially intended to explain the complex normative universe within which African bureaucrats find themselves and which guides their quotidian professional practices, this concept provides a relevant device for attending to the long-standing and deep-rooted presence of traditional donors in institution building in African states.

With respect to Chinese development engagement in Uganda's roads, my analytical approach responds to scholars' calls and continued efforts to disaggregate, complexify, and ground 'China'.[30] Indeed, this epistemological and methodological approach has turned into a sort of norm in recent academic scholarship on China–Africa—albeit much less so in policy practice or media representation. China's presence in Africa is, in fact, actualized through multiscalar actors including national, sub-national, and non-state actors, whose relationships with one another and with state power in Beijing are complex, in flux, and sometimes conflictual. The ontological and epistemological tendency of perceiving China as a unitary and coherent entity risks flattening and homogenizing this presence. Capturing the complexities of China–Africa requires not an *a priori* assumption of the Chinese state in the manner of so-called 'China Inc.'[31] discourses, but empirically grounded evidence. Yet, the growing US–China geopolitical tension 'reinscribes neo-Cold War state-centrism',[32] rendering such an intellectual exercise regarding China–Africa increasingly difficult. By disaggregating Chinese presence along two axes—actors and financing—I attach particular attention to the specificities of Chinese as compared to western development finance and to Chinese construction companies as the dominant category of Chinese actor in Uganda's roads. As to

29. Thomas Bierschenk, 'Sedimentation, fragmentation and normative double-binds in (West) African public services', in Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (eds), *States at work: Dynamics of African bureaucracies*, (Brill, Leiden, 2014), pp. 221–45; Thomas Bierschenk, 'From the anthropology of development to the anthropology of global social engineering', *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 139, 1 (2014), pp. 73–97.
30. Julia C. Strauss and Martha Saavedra, 'Introduction: China, Africa and internationalization', *The China Quarterly* 199, (2009), pp. 551–62; Julie Michelle Klinger and Joshua S. S. Muldavin, 'New geographies of development: Grounding China's global integration', *Territory, Politics, Governance* 7, 1 (2019), pp. 1–21; Large, 'Beyond "dragon in the bush"'; Power and Mohan, 'Towards a critical geopolitics of China's engagement with African development'.
31. Ted Fishman, *China, Inc.: How the rise of the next superpower challenges America and the World* (Scribner, New York, 2005).
32. Klinger and Muldavin, 'New geographies of development', p. 5.

the latter, I aim to explore, more specifically, the link between Chinese construction companies' limited ability to influence institution building in Uganda's roads sector and the recent regulatory relaxation in China on foreign project contracting, a series of domestic policy changes that have yielded an increasingly fragmented ecosystem of Chinese companies overseas.

Focusing on the 'supply-side' elements relevant to institution building in Uganda's roads sector, this article is primarily concerned with an analytical and empirical comparison of traditional donors' and Chinese development engagements to gauge their respective influence on sectorial institution building. The subsequent two sections proceed with an empirical unpacking of Chinese actors and financing in Uganda's roads. Informed by critical studies in development, I then move to compare the designs and everyday practices of Chinese and western donors' development operations on the ground. In conclusion, I reflect upon the implications for the debate on African agency versus dependency that emerges from this juxtaposition of Chinese and traditional donors' development profiles as well as its potential meaning for the exercise and maintenance of political power in the Ugandan state.

China as a service provider in Uganda's roads sector

Chinese actors in Uganda's roads sector can be broadly classified into three categories: contractor, engineering consultant, and funder.[33] Chinese construction companies operating as contractors dominate road construction in Uganda, especially in national roads. This reflects the overall pattern of China–Africa economic relations, in which the role of China is succinctly characterized as 'goods supplier, service provider, rather than investor'.[34] By the end of 2018, among the 37 road upgrading or rehabilitation projects that were either in the process of construction or within the defects liability period under the mandate of UNRA, Chinese companies were the most represented, contracting 27 of them, followed by European firms on five projects. The construction of national roads in Uganda is therefore quasi-monopolized by foreign contractors, dominated by Chinese companies. Noteworthily, 23 out of 27 road projects Chinese companies built are financed by either Uganda's own government spending or its international funding partners, confirming that Chinese construction firms engage more

33. Uganda's road construction consultancy was typically dominated by western, African and, to a lesser degree, local Ugandan enterprises.
34. Thierry Pairault, 'China in Africa: Goods supplier, service provider rather than investor', *Bridges Africa* 7, 5 (2018), pp. 17–22.

in international bidding for projects supported by international funding agencies than in bidding for projects financed by Beijing.[35]

These 27 national road construction projects were being carried out by 12 Chinese companies, all state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Most of these Chinese companies are either provincial-owned by provincial governments (four) or provincial bureaus of Central SOEs (five). This ‘provincial dominance’ among the Chinese SOEs present also appears to be common in other African countries’ construction sectors because these provincial actors are in less advantageous positions to secure support from the Chinese central state. Africa therefore becomes a more tempting destination for these less privileged actors, who encounter difficulties in competing with central SOEs in both China’s domestic market and other developed countries.[36] Some Chinese companies were also constructing roads for Kampala Capital City Council (KCCA) and some even bid for District, Urban, and Community Access Roads (DUCAR), an area in which Chinese contractors had for a long time shown scant interest due to low project value.[37] This indicated an increasingly competitive road construction market facing Chinese contractors in Uganda.

According to my interview with the Chinese Economic and Commercial Counsellor’s Office (ECCO) in Kampala—a local antenna of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM)—the actual number of Chinese construction companies present in Uganda’s roads sector was at least twice the 12 Chinese companies that actually had road construction projects in hand.[38] Previously, Chinese construction companies were required to report to the local ECCO and join the local Chinese Enterprises Chamber of Commerce when they arrived in a foreign country. Moreover, if project value exceeded US$5 million, Chinese companies needed to go through with MOFCOM the prior approval formalities on bid tendering, and the endorsement by the local ECCO was indispensable in this regard. This regulatory mandate enabled the local ECCO to have a ballpark figure of the number of Chinese companies, particularly SOEs, in its jurisdiction. However, to obtain this approximate estimate has become an increasingly challenging exercise especially after Beijing’s announcement of a series of regulatory relaxation measures since 2016. For instance, in order to further encourage Chinese construction companies to compete globally, the Chinese State Council decided in 2017 to cancel the

35. Chuan Chen, Andrea Goldstein, and Ryan J. Orr, ‘Local operations of Chinese construction firms in Africa: An empirical survey’, *International Journal of Construction Management* 9, 2 (2009), pp. 75–89.
36. Katy N. Lam, *Chinese state owned enterprises in West Africa: Triple-embedded globalization* (Routledge, London, 2017), pp. 39–41.
37. Interview with SOE representative A, Kampala, 2 June 2018.
38. Interview, Chinese ECCO official A, Kampala, 17 December 2017.

approval system whereby a company acquired a 'foreign project contracting qualification' and to completely scrap the *Measures for the Bid Tendering (Bid Negotiation) for the Contracting of Foreign Projects*. The previous administrative set-up—which emphasized pre-qualification and ex-ante supervision, and bestowed ECCO with regulatory and supervision authority—has therefore been replaced by a new one relying on 'record-filing' and 'interim and ex-post supervision'.[39] As a result, ECCO in Uganda was confronted with greater difficulties in keeping abreast of the local presence of Chinese construction companies and in regulating their business operations, as an informant in ECCO admitted:

> We do not really have the means to coordinate Chinese companies. According to the new regulations, if they win a bid they should file records with us. SOEs tend to conform to this rule and it is still slightly easier to regulate them. But many private companies also come to Uganda and we cannot force them to report to us. There is not much we can do in this regard.[40]

Against this relaxed regulatory framework, the number of Chinese construction companies present was expected to further increase, aggravating the already intense competition among Chinese companies for road construction tenders. Indeed, some well-established Chinese construction companies complained to ECCO about the rise of cut-throat bidding practices among Chinese contractors. ECCO organized a dedicated symposium in May 2018 titled 'Regulating Chinese companies' overseas business activities' and the Chinese Ambassador demanded the attending representatives of Chinese contractors to 'think in big-picture terms', 'avoid engaging in disorderly competition' and 'strictly regulate their overseas business operations and behaviours'.[41] There was an ongoing discussion about whether the Chinese Enterprises Chamber of Commerce in Uganda could shoulder more responsibilities with regard to coordinating Chinese companies' business activities. However, this remained a controversial proposal because it would in principle defy the policy of regulatory relaxation announced by Beijing. For Chinese companies with a newer or weaker presence in road building in Uganda, this would also mean a return to the old days when it

39. 'Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Commerce on Effectively Conducting the Recordation of Foreign Contracted Projects [Effective]', *Pkulaw.cn*, n.d, <http://en.pkulaw.cn/display.aspx?cgid=cd5303bf3da58f4cbdfb&lib=law> (4 December 2021).
40. Interview, Chinese ECCO official B, Kampala, 17 December 2017.
41. ECCO in Uganda, 'Chinese Ambassador Zheng Zhuqiang Attended the Symposium "Regulating Companies' Overseas Business Activities" among Chinese Enterprises and Communities in Uganda 驻乌干达大使郑竹强出席在乌中资企业及华人华侨"规范企业海外经营座谈会"', *ECCO in Uganda*, 7 June 2018, <http://ug.china-embassy.org/chn/sgxx/dshd/t1566548.htm> (4 December 2021).

was more challenging for them to enter local markets and bid against their more established peers.[42]

These Chinese companies—whether central SOEs or provincial ones, whether building roads or working as engineering consultants—were all contracted by UNRA and made use of both Ugandan and external sources of funding to carry out works. Technically speaking, they were all 'contractors', 'not investors' taking a financial stake in the road project. The primary logic driving their operation was to ensure the successful and quick delivery of their bids—in this case, roads—and to win new ones to have a steady stream of work in the pipeline. This means that the idle periods between projects and the associated costs of maintaining machines and personnel could be minimized to the fullest extent. They did not have a vested interest in a road once it was handed to UNRA and passed the defects liability period. As contractors not investors, they were less inclined to take a deep interest in shaping the mid- or long-term development of Uganda's sectorial governance and institution-building on roads, and more preoccupied with fast turnaround of contracted projects within a relatively short-term horizon. Moreover, the increasingly fierce intra-competition among Chinese companies made it difficult for them to form a unified and cohesive interest group. The increasingly diminished regulatory mandate of ECCO also means that it did not have the necessary means and capacity to effectively manage this intra-competition among Chinese contractors or to organize them to present a common position with regard to the shaping of the institutional governance framework of Uganda's roads sector.

China as a relevant but not a dominant financier

The transport sector, including road construction, constitutes one of the prioritized areas for Chinese development finance to Uganda. China's main financial instrument takes the form of loans, including mainly export buyer's credits and *liangyou* loans (literally, 'two preferential loans'), which is to say concessional loans and preferential export buyers' credits disbursed only by the Export-Import Bank of China (Exim Bank).[43] Exim Bank remains the key Chinese financier active in Uganda (Table 1).[44]

42. Interview, a Chinese SOE contractor, Kampala, 20 July 2018.
43. Deborah Bräutigam, 'Chinese development aid in Africa: What, where, why, and how much?' in Jane Golley and Ligang Song (eds), *China Update 2011* (Australian National University, Canberra, 2011), pp. 203–22; Junda Jin, Xinyue Ma and Kevin P. Gallagher, 'China's global development finance: A guidance note for Global Development Policy Center Databases' (Global Development Policy Center, Boston University, July 2018).
44. One exception is the Ugandan government's recent plan to secure a loan of $119 million from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China to construct the critical oil roads (lot 5) and the proposal is under currently discussion within the Parliament. Additionally, Exim Bank disburses both *liangyou* and non-*liangyou* loans globally, with the latter composing a larger proportion of its total lending overseas. For a more detailed discussion about the

Table 1 List of major loans signed between Uganda and Chinese Exim Bank by 2020/2021.

Year	*Project*	*Amount ($)*	*Sector*
2007, 2009, and 2015	National Transmission Backbone Phase 1	106,590,305 (CNY 222,967,038)	Information, communication, & technology
	National Transmission Backbone Phase 2	(CNY 405,996,585)	
	National Transmission Backbone Phase 3	(CNY 96,966,600)	
2009 and 2011	Kampala City Council Procurement of Equipment	100,000,000 (CNY 69,437,058)	Works & Transport
	Equipment Supply to Local Governments	(CNY 631,034,482)	
2011	Kampala–Entebbe Expressway	350,000,000	Works & Transport
2014	Isimba Hydropower Dam	482,578,200	Energy
2014	Karuma Hydropower Dam and Associated Transmission Lines & Substations	789,337,275	Energy
2015	Karuma Hydropower Dam and Associated Transmission Lines & Sub-stations II	645,821,407	Energy
2015	Upgrade and Expansion of Entebbe Airport	200,000,000 (CNY 1,260,000,000)	Works & Transport
2016	4 Industrial Parks Substations (Luzira, Mukono, Iganga, and Namanve)	84,979,503	Energy
2019	Bridging the Electricity Demand Supply Balance Gap through Accelerated Rural Development Program	212,700,000 (CNY 1,448,000,000)	Energy
2019	National Science, Technology and Engineering Skills Development Project	84,736,583	Science, Technology, & Innovation
2020	Development of Critical Oil Roads lots 1–3	456,320,000	Works & Transport
N/A	Development of Critical Oil Roads lots 4 & 6	N/A	Works & Transport (Funding request submitted to EXIM Bank & United Kingdom Export Finance)
N/A	Standard Gauge Railway	Around 2,290 m	Works & Transport (under discussion)

The year generally indicates the commitment date as signed by the Government of Uganda.
Compiled based on Reports by the Committee on National Economy of the Parliament of Uganda and annual Reports on Public Debt, Guarantees, Other financial Liabilities and Grants for Financial Year 2013/2014–2020/2021.

Infrastructure comes after hydroelectricity as the second most financed area, with most of the loans from Exim Bank being directed to construction works, including two loans worth $800 million in total to finance roads construction.

Beijing also has two other financial instruments: grants and zero-interest loans, both of which would qualify as DAC-defined official development assistance. However, tracing their disbursements to Uganda remains challenging because China does not publish a comprehensive list of aid projects. The Ugandan Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) reports only one grant from China which was offered to conduct the feasibility study on Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) back in 2015/2016.[45] Beijing was also reported to provide a relatively trivial grant of Chinese Yuan (CNY) 50 million ($8.2 million), which might have been invested in infrastructure.[46]

It is necessary first to have a full picture of the funding landscape in this sector in order to assess the importance of Chinese development finance within it. Uganda's roads sector has taken up quite consistently around 15 percent of Uganda's national budget since 2008/2009, making it one of the most funded sectors (Figure 1). This lion's share of the national budget for roads represents President Museveni's long-held ideological commitment to the instrumental role that infrastructure potentially plays in the structural transformation of Uganda's agrarian economy.[47] Yet, it has also been increasingly driven by and leveraged for the President's interest in regime survival amid Uganda's descent into patronage-based electoral authoritarianism, especially since the re-introduction of multiparty elections in 2006.[48]

With the creation of UNRA as an implementation agency and the transformation of MoWT into a policy-making ministry, UNRA has been gradually allocated with a large proportion of this road budget, rendering it

lending mechanisms of Chinese policy banks and which category of their loans qualify the DAC-defined official development assistance, see Muyang Chen, 'Beyond donation: China's policy banks and the reshaping of development finance', *Studies in Comparative International Management* 55, 4 (2020), pp. 436–59.

45. MoFPED, 'Report on public debt (domestic and external loans), guarantees and other financial liabilities and grants for financial year 2015/16' (MoFPED, Kampala, 2016).

46. Alon Mwesigwa, 'China Gives Uganda $8.2 Million Grant', *The Observer*, 9 July 2013, <https://observer.ug/lifestyle/relationships/38-business/business/26319-china-gives-uganda-82-million-grant> (4 December 2021).

47. Interview with an Ugandan political observer, Kampala, 26 Mar 2018. Thanks also for reviewers' comments and see David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, '*The political economy of roads reform in Uganda*' (Overseas Development Institute, London, September 2009); Sam Hickey, 'Beyond the poverty agenda? Insights from the new politics of development in Uganda', *World Development* 43, (2013), p. 203.

48. Booth and Golloba-Mutebi, '*Reforming the roads sector in Uganda: A six-year retrospective*'.

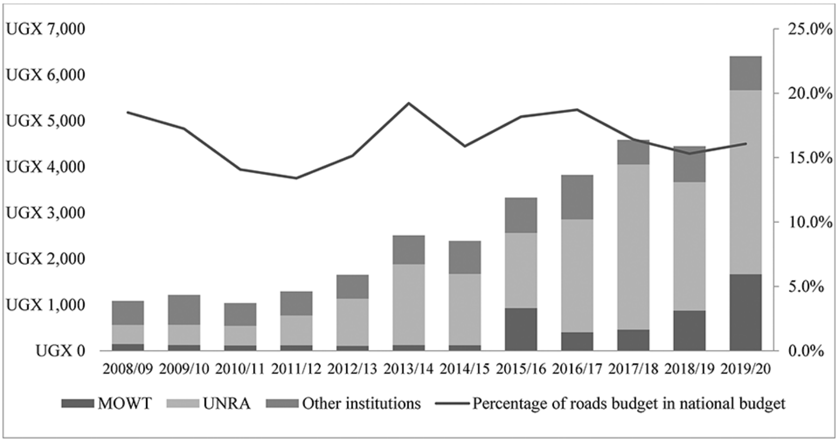

Figure 1 Uganda's roads budget (2008/2009–2019/20, UGX billion). *Sources:* MoFPED, 'Approved estimates of revenue and expenditure', various years, financial years 2008/2009–2019/2020.

one of the country's best-financed agencies.[49] Compared with the national budget, the roads sector had a higher degree of reliance on external financing, although it was still primarily financed by domestic resources (Figure 2). External financing represented approximately 30 percent of the roads budget between 2008/2009 and 2013/2014, but its importance increased in the years 2015/2016–2019/2020, making up about 40 percent of the roads budget. The highest percentage of external financing in this sectorial budget (48.8 percent) occurred in 2017/2018, deviating quite significantly from the trend in national budget where the importance of external financing started to decrease in the same year. This high percentage should be interpreted with caution. The Ugandan government initially planned to start road construction in the Albertine region with Chinese financing worth UGX 1,011 billion so that sufficient infrastructure would be in place to support future oil production. However, it was not until 2019 that Exim Bank offered a loan of UGX 456 billion to support some of those planned oil roads (Table 1). This budgeted (yet unrealized) Chinese financing of UGX 1,011 billion occupied almost half of the total amount of budgeted external financing for the roads sector in 2017/2018.

49. The institutional framework for Uganda's roads sector includes (I) MoWT as the lead ministry to formulate policies on road infrastructure and evaluate performance of road-related authorities; (II) UNRA, KCCA, and local governments to develop and maintain national roads, urban roads in Kampala, and DUCAR; and (iii) Uganda Road Funds to finance routine and periodic maintenance of public roads.

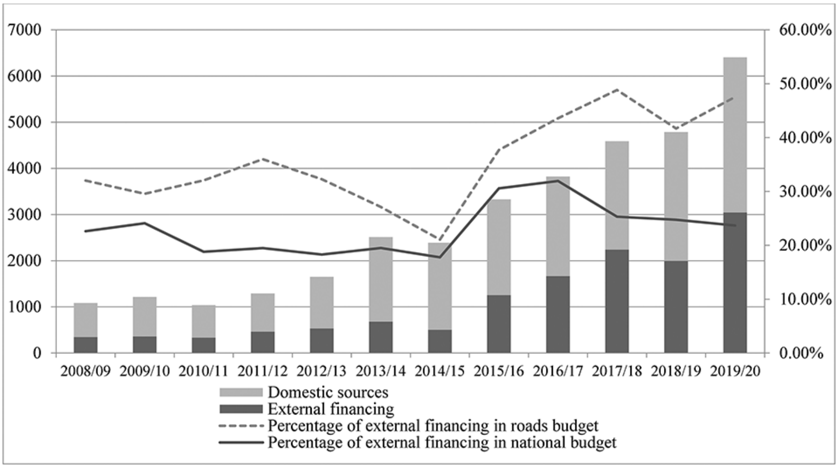

Figure 2 External financing in Uganda's roads sector (2008/2009–2019/2020, UGX billion).
Sources: MoFPED, 'Approved estimates of revenue and expenditure', various years, financial years 2008/2009–2019/2020.

As UNRA takes up the bulk of Uganda's roads budget, it is worthwhile examining the role of external financing within it specifically. Considering that UNRA is largely a product of sectorial reforms promoted by traditional donors, it is unsurprising that at the beginning of its operation, between 50 percent and 75 percent of its budget from 2008/2009 to 2012/2013 was financed by external sources. After a period of decrease in budgetary dependence on external financing to around 30 percent, it again reached around 50 percent by 2016/2017, coinciding with the inception of the restructuring exercise.

Chinese financing available to UNRA remained relatively limited. UNRA did not receive any Chinese financing during the first three years of its (Figure 3). Since then, the proportion of Chinese financing in UNRA's annual budget mostly remained around 10 percent. A closer look at the proportion of Chinese financial support to UNRA's external financing suggests that China was a relevant and important development partner for UNRA, but certainly not a financially predominant one. Despite some fluctuations, Chinese financing represented about one-third of UNRA's annual external financing at its peak, suggesting that other development partners supplied a more sizeable volume of financing to UNRA. The only deviation occurred in 2017/2018 for the same unrealized Chinese loans mentioned above. With adjustment, the budgeted Chinese financing would represent

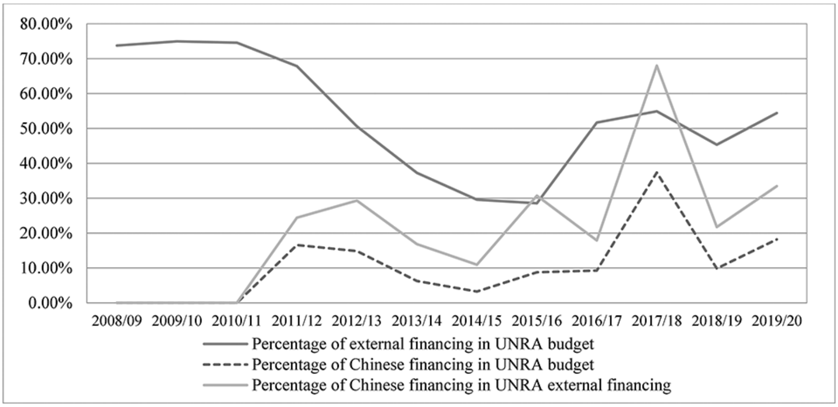

Figure 3 External financing and Chinese financing in UNRA budget (2008/2009–2019/2020).
Sources: MoFPED, 'Approved estimates of revenue and expenditure', various years, financial years 2008/2009–2019/2020.

about 13 percent of UNRA's budget and 34 percent of UNRA's external financing in that year, consistent with the overall observation.

Taken together, this sector was in fact characterized by an increasingly heterogeneous donor landscape, and therefore, no longer reserved solely for western partners. China is a part of this story of ongoing transformation, but not the whole. The Ugandan government brokered agreements with both northern and southern development partners, the latter not solely confined to Chinese development finance. Recent years saw the growing role of non-traditional development partners—like China's Exim Bank, OPEC Fund for International Development, Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, and Islamic Development Bank—in enabling the concretization of road projects that would otherwise not have been possible. However, traditional donors (e.g. African Development Bank [AfDB], Japan International Cooperation Agency, Department for International Development [DFID], European Union [EU], and Danish International Development Agency [DANIDA][50]) continued to contribute a larger proportion of external financing in this sector. The fact that China often embarked on financing physically, symbolically, and visibly grandiose infrastructural projects like the Kampala–Entebbe Expressway likely gives rise to the (mis)perception of China's predominant role in financing Uganda's roads sector. We should therefore examine Chinese

50. After a 17-year presence, DANIDA exited Uganda's roads sector in 2016.

development financing empirically and put its contribution into perspective. Whilst Chinese development finance indeed contributed quantitatively to the decreasing relative importance of traditional donors' financing in the roads sector, its scale did not appear to be as significant as often assumed and could not have constituted 'a direct alternative'[51] to western financial assistance.[52]

Apples and oranges: western and Chinese donor-creditors

Owing to the growing financial support from non-traditional actors like China, the relative importance of western donor-creditors' financing decreased. This diluted presence, however, did not necessarily suggest the weakening of their influence on sectorial policy and institutions. In the case of Uganda's roads, as elaborated above, this was partly because Chinese financing was still far from being dominant. More crucially, it is the different ways Chinese and western development partners designed, executed, and monitored their development programmes and loans that ensured traditional partners' entrenched influence in sectorial institution building. The following analysis outlines four key features characterizing traditional actors' interventions in Uganda's roads sector, respectively: strong interest in institution building and capacity building, omnipresence of the 'methodology of governance'[53] in the programme cycle, intense and routinized involvement in sector-wide policy making, and coordination between like-minded western donors' development portfolios.

Firstly, the establishment of UNRA itself is the result of a decade-long process primarily driven by donor programmes funded by western partners. Since the establishment of UNRA in 2008, their efforts to build institutional components and strengthen core functions within the agency have not wavered. As shown in Figure 3, the fact that more than 70 percent of UNRA's annual budget was externally funded during the first

51. Swelund, 'Is China eroding the bargaining power of traditional donors in Africa', p. 404.
52. The same caveat of putting China's role into perspective should also be applied to the debate about Uganda's debt sustainability. Uganda's finance minister expressed concern over China's possible takeover of Uganda's assets 'given what is happening in [their] peer countries as regards to China debt' (The Independent, 2019). However, Bräutigam (2020) finds scant evidence substantiating the 'China's debt-trap diplomacy' narrative. While China represents a growing amount of Uganda's external debt (22.6 percent), multilateral creditors occupy 61.9 percent (MoFPED, 2020). The call for a more nuanced understanding of Chinese lending is not to deny the need for Beijing to increase lending transparency, but without it, the chance of reaching a collective and coordinated position between China and western donors to address Africa's unique debt challenges amid a global pandemic becomes even more remote (Deborah Bräutigam, 'A critical look at Chinese "debt-trap diplomacy": The rise of a meme', *Area Development and Policy* 5, 1 (2020), pp. 1–14; MoFPED, 'Debt sustainability analysis report 2019/20' (MoFPED, Kampala, 2020); *The Independent*, 'Uganda's big China debt', 4 February 2019).
53. Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa*, p. 89.

three years of its operation when there was no Chinese financing at all is indicative. Western donors such as the World Bank, DFID, and EU were particularly active at this stage. For instance, in 2009, DFID financed technical assistance consultants to advise UNRA on the establishment of a bridge management unit and provide a road map accordingly.[54] The World Bank also funded external audit work of UNRA until 2011/2012. CrossRoads, a DFID/EU/World Bank five-year development programme of £20 million, was launched in 2011 to provide technical support to UNRA's procurement process and institutional restructuring in MoWT among other objectives.[55] This donor influence was also perceptible during my fieldwork on the restructuring of UNRA. For instance, through its 2016 grant *Institutional Capacity Building for the Transport Sector in Uganda*, the EU helped establish a monitoring and evaluation framework and an internal audit system within UNRA to support the restructuring exercise.[56] Another new EU grant in 2018 contracted a consultancy firm to 'strengthen [UNRA's] core functions of procurement, land acquisition, contract management, public-private partnership management, drainage design, safety management, and environment and social safeguards management'.[57] What underlined these programmes was their shared focus on institutional and capacity building that allowed heavy imprints by western development partners in the recipient agency's core functions and, therefore, their integration into its routines.

In this regard, Bierschenk's concept of 'sedimentation'[58] sheds some additional light on western donors' protracted influence. In examining public services in Africa, he discovers that '[e]ach institutional reform, each development project negotiated, leaves an institutional legacy which is incorporated into the existing body of institutional mechanisms'.[59] UNRA

54. WSPimc, 'Technical assistance to UNRA for the establishment of a bridge management unit - Final report)', (Republic of Uganda, UNRA, 2009) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b3ced915d3cfd000c02/TI_UP_Consultancy_Mar2009_Technical_Assistance_to_UNRA_for_the_Establishment_of_a_Bridge_Management_Unit.pdf> (4 December 2021).
55. Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, '*Reforming the roads sector in Uganda: A six-year retrospective*'.
56. European Commission, 'Annex 4 - Action document for institutional capacity building for the transport Sector in Uganda' (European Union, Brussels, 2016) <https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/4._institutional_capacity_building_for_the_transport_sector_in_uganda_-_action_document.pdf> (4 December 2021).
57. IMC, 'Uganda: Providing technical assistance to Uganda National Roads Authority', *IMC Website*, 7 March 2018, <http://www.imcworldwide.com/project/uganda-providing-technical-assistance-to-uganda-national-roads-authority/> (4 December 2021).
58. Bierschenk, 'Sedimentation, fragmentation and normative double-binds in (West) African public services'; Bierschenk, 'From the anthropology of development to the anthropology of global social engineering'.
59. Bierschenk, 'From the anthropology of development to the anthropology of global social engineering'.

can be perceived as a sedimented result of different blueprints from different eras, which followed each other in relatively rapid succession: the attempt to promote NPM principles to improve road sector performance across Africa from the late 1980s, the creation of a Road Agency Formation Unit in 1998, the formal establishment of UNRA in 2008, and more recently, the restructuring of UNRA since 2015. With continued emphasis on institution building in their interventions, traditional donors' influence can be found in all these blueprints: the sort of historically lasting influence that none of the Chinese actors in Uganda has had or is likely to have in the near future.

Secondly, and more subtly, these programmes also encapsulated what Harrison terms the 'methodology of governance'—'[w]ith donor funding comes a new set of regulations concerning the technique of the policy process' and representing 'donor ideological hegemony'.[60] Many of these programmes were characterized by the pervasive use of surveying and situational analysis. For instance, Japanese consultancy firms were contracted by JICA to prepare for MoWT a survey for the improvement of municipal roads in Gulu in 2015 and a study on Greater Kampala Road Network and Transport Improvement in order to formulate a public transport plan and a road safety improvement plan.[61] In UNRA, the 2016 EU grant financed external consultants to 'carry out a situational analysis of the institution including a capacity/needs assessment and an analysis of the status of the implementation of their corporate and business plans'.[62] Commonly, these surveys in the transport sector resembled censuses on the regional, local, or institutional levels that collected data on social, economic, and geographical conditions, as well as human experiential dimensions. They sought to provide stabilized statistical and cartographic foundations for any future sectorial policy formulations or project intervention by donors. The state itself or the institution concerned might not have any *a priori* opposition to this hegemony on surveying, and in fact, these surveys were often done at their request, as indicated in the final reports of these surveys. However, through surveying, western donors enjoyed data parity with the recipient and assumed *de facto* part of its core functions. They therefore acted like the state and further blurred the line between foreign and national interests.

Moreover, the everyday monitoring of these programmes took the form of regular information generation and meetings, which were internalized

60. Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa*, p. 89.
61. JICA, 'The study on greater Kampala road network and transport improvement in the Republic of Uganda - Final report' (JICA, Tokyo, November 2010) <https://openjicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/12013025_01.pdf> (4 December 2021); JICA, 'The preparatory survey for the project for improvement of Gulu municipal council roads in Northern Uganda - Final Report' (JICA, Tokyo, March 2016) <https://openjicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/12251419_01.pdf> (4 December 2021).
62. European Commission, 'Annex 4'.

into the everyday routines of the government. It was a common practice among major western donors that monthly, quarterly, and annual reports should be put in place for monitoring and regular check-ups, and prior to any disbursement of funds. The production of these reports became a core job skill that UNRA project managers were expected to have and a key indicator to evaluate their performance. Some major donors like the World Bank and AfDB also institutionalized regular meetings with UNRA, in addition to supervision meetings or special field trips by delegations from local, regional, and international headquarters of the organization. All of these meetings were again made intelligible to participants in paper form through prior preparations and final presentations of 'action matrixes', 'meeting minutes', and so on. For instance, during my fieldwork, AfDB held monthly meetings with UNRA, which were usually composed of the Head of the Road Development Department, project managers, procurement officers, and monitoring and evaluation officers to keep track of all the road development programmes funded by AfDB. Each monthly meeting was concluded with the presentation of a 'portfolio action matrix' detailing required actions, responsible parties, original timelines, updated timelines, and records of comments from previous meetings for each issues discussed. What these tools deployed on a project or programme level reveal is a strong emphasis on performance and effectiveness. This has become, since the early 2000s, an essential characteristic of the current international aid regime that finds its root in the 'neoliberal globalization movement'[63] and attempts to 'attribute responsibility to states by evaluating programme performance and governance systems'.[64] Put differently, diverging from the discourse and approach of conditionality or bypassing states in the 1980s and 1990s, donor interventions now mobilize standardized and performance-related instruments, measurements, and tools to model the everyday conducts of states, enabling therefore a more surreptitious form of infiltration.

The 'methods of governance' in these donor programmes also included notable reliance on technical assistance undertaken by external technical experts. For instance, the above-mentioned 2016 EU grant funded both long-term and short-term technical personnel in MoWT to carry out a review of Uganda's National Transport Master Plan and to support the restructuring of UNRA.[65] In the financial 2015/2016 year, the World Bank also funded six long-term 2-year advisors and one short-term advisor, ranging from bridge and highway specialists to a management advisor and a

63. Lydie Cabane and Josiane Tantchou, 'Instruments et politiques des mesures en Afrique', *Revue d'anthropologie des connaissances* 10, 2 (2016), pp. 127–45.
64. *Ibid.*
65. European Commission, 'Annex 4'.

sociologist, in UNRA.[66] The composition of these teams of advisors suggests that these experts did not only cover purely technical aspects of roads development, but some of them also undertook policy and management advisory roles. Contrary to Harrison's account of 'governance states' in Uganda and Tanzania, in which technical assistance was foremost carried out by expatriates, I only encountered one British expatriate expert during my fieldwork, who was contracted by DFID to support UNRA's work on occupational health and safety through short-term stays within the agency. All the other technical assistants I met funded by, for instance, the World Bank were Ugandans or other African nationals working primarily on land compensation and social and environmental safeguards. However, regardless of the nationality of technical consultants, Harrison's central argument remains relevant, which is that their presence 'reinforces both the international orthodoxy of reform and [embodies] the new methodologies of donors'.[67] This prevalent resort to technical assistance went beyond the transport sector and formed an important portion of all aspects of western development cooperation with Uganda. The disbursement of experts and technical assistance to Uganda funded by DAC countries underwent a 5-fold increase from $10.8 million in 2009 to $56.7 million in 2017. It remains difficult for Kampala accurately to track technical assistance, due to the absence of an institutionalized reporting system and the fact that many technical assistance support and experts are often procured and managed directly by development partners.[68]

Thirdly, the influence of western development partners in Uganda's transport sector was even more apparent on the sector-wide policy level. The production of Uganda's only long-term framework for the transport sector—the National Transport Master Plan including a Transport Master Plan for the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area (NTMP/GKMA)—was financed by the World Bank's 10-year-long (1998–2007) *Road Sector Institutional Support Technical Assistant Project*, which aimed to strengthen Uganda's roads sector policy and management capability.[69] More recently, the 2016 EU grant sought to develop the transport planning capabilities of MoWT with the goal of assisting the design of 'a new one [NTMP/GMKA] to support Vision 2040 with a focus on intermodal/multimodal planning,

66. MoFPED, 'Report on Public Debt 2015/16', p. 84.
67. Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa*, p. 90.
68. MoFPED, 'Report on Public Debt 2015/16', p. 31; MoFPED, 'Report on public debt (domestic and external loans), guarantees and other financial liabilities and grants for financial year 2018/19' (MoFPED, Kampala, 2019), p. 29.
69. World Bank, 'Implementation completion and results report on a credit in the amount of SDR 21.6 million to the Republic of Uganda for a road sector institutional support technical assistance project' (Document of World Bank, Report No: ICR0000688, Washington DC, 25 June 2008) <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/290121468175741421/text/ICR6880Box03341IC010disclosed081251.txt> (4 December 2021).

an appropriate investment-maintenance mix, gender analysis, and climate change mitigation and adaptation'.[70] This kind of long-term transport sectorial policy would guide the design of mid-term and annual sectorial plans and interventions by the Ugandan government. With a strong imprint on the long-term policymaking, western donors were therefore able to maintain a lasting impact on the entire transport sector.

Lastly, this influence was further shored up by the sector-wide coordination mechanism among western donors. They established the Local Development Partners' Group (LDPG) in Uganda, composed of more than 30 western bilateral aid agencies and international organizations. Within LDPG, there were sector and thematic sub-groups responsible for coordinating sub-group members' engagements with the recipient government on sector-specific issues. They were also the main interlocutors of the 16 sector working groups that the Ugandan government created under the Office of the Prime Minister to coordinate the implementation of each sector of the National Development Plan. When it comes to the transport sector, these coordination efforts, for instance, led to the establishment of a joint institutional support initiative to the transport sector between 2009 and 2014. This was worth $65.3 million co-funded by the leading western donors in transport—the EC, DFID, DANIDA, and the World Bank.[71] Since 2004, a joint transport sector review has also been undertaken on an annual basis, which gathers together the main traditional donors and all the relevant government institutions in transport. It has emerged as a main instrument for participant donors to monitor the performance of their government partners (and therefore the results of their financing), discuss policy progress, and consider further intervention priorities.[72] This coordination led to relatively complementary financing portfolios and priorities by different traditional donors. For instance, DANIDA (before its exit from Uganda's roads sector in 2016) focused on district roads and EC on national roads; the World Bank concentrated on the regional corridor in connection with South Sudan, while AfDB focused more on Western Uganda. This enabled their more comprehensive and encompassing presence as a group of like-minded donors in the transport sector.[73] This is

70. European Commission, 'Annex 4', p. 6.
71. World Bank, 'Implementation completion and results report (IDA-46790 IDA-49490 TF-11094) for a transport sector Development project' (Document of World Bank, Report No: ICR00002228, Washington DC, 5 June 2017), pp. 38–39 <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/284931506968826934/pdf/cleared-ICR-P092837-docx-09292017.pdf> (4 December 2021).
72. European Commission, 'Country level evaluation Uganda - Final report volume 2: Annexes' (European Commission, Brussels, November 2009), p. 75 <https://www.oecd.org/derec/ec/44653376.pdf> (4 December 2020). The idea of joint annual sector review was first embarked upon in 2002 and funded by DANIDA, but officially launched in 2014.
73. European Commission, 'Country level evaluation Uganda', p. 75.

not to suggest that traditional donors were monolithic, in perfect coordination, and free of any disagreements, but to highlight that these existing sectorial coordination platforms and mechanisms that traditional donors disposed of became a routinized and embedded interface between them and the recipient government. Through this interface, traditional donors shared information regularly with one another and with the government and, more importantly, coordinated efforts to collectively exert influence on the government when opportunities arose.[74] The above four features of traditional donors' engagement in Uganda's transport sector depicted not a dichotomous donor–state relation, but one of intimacy, interrelatedness, and integration in the post-conditionality regime, revealing 'the extent and reach of a particular kind of exercise of power' by these programmes over *the state*.[75]

None of these characteristics have featured prominently in China's current development engagement with Uganda's roads sector. Unlike western donors, providers of Chinese development finance (both grants and loans) showed scant interest in sectorial policy or governance reform that might shape the policy environment for their projects or engineer institution building in Uganda's road sector. Road construction and provision of construction and maintenance equipment remained the sole focus of Exim Bank's loans to Uganda. These loans were primarily allocated to promote the globalization of Chinese enterprises—through serving as contractors of Exim Bank's funded projects—and the export of Chinese machinery and equipment. As for Chinese grants, despite the lack of official data, the available evidence suggests a similar rationale. The grant MoWT secured from China for the feasibility study of SGR likely paves the way for the loan currently under negotiation between Uganda and Exim Bank on the construction of SGR, which would without doubt be contracted to a Chinese SOE once the negotiation is completed. Consulting Uganda's annual approved budgets over the past decade revealed another Chinese grant of UGX 20.8 million budgeted in the financial year 2008/2009 for MoWT to construct government office blocks, again confirming China's primary interest in physical infrastructure building. This is not to say traditional donors did not engage in infrastructure construction, but that they financed road construction often as one component of either a sector-wide transport or a regional cross-cutting development programme (e.g. World Bank's Albertine Region Sustainable Development Project). Chinese grants and loans to Uganda's roads were more limited in scope and solely financed project-type interventions that favoured infrastructure building. None of

74. Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa*, p. 88.
75. James Ferguson, *The anti-politics machine: Development, depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994), p. 274.

the Chinese financing was used to assist sector-wide planning and policy-making or to fund expatriate technical consultants to work directly within relevant government institutions in the roads sector. The way Chinese financing was designed and manifested itself in terms of its focus, scope, and modality simply did not equip its financiers for equivalent access or provide entry points by which to exert influence on the policy and institutional environment of the roads sector, and neither did this appear to be its primary aim.

Compared with the suffusion of the 'methodology of governance' into traditional donors' financing, the monitoring regime of Chinese financial support appeared to be much weaker, less institutionalized, and primarily ad hoc. Unlike AfDB or the World Bank with their well-staffed national offices in Uganda, Exim Bank only has one Southern and Eastern African regional office in Johannesburg, which supervises five working groups to cover the Bank's engagement with 26 English-speaking African countries, making it organizationally unable to monitor the implementation of its loans on the ground as closely and constantly as its western counterparts. During my fieldwork in UNRA, project managers working with the World Bank- or AfDB-financed projects needed regularly to prepare specific project briefs and presentations for donors at monthly meetings and periodic field missions. However, similar routinized reporting to Chinese financiers did not occur. Those UNRA colleagues working at the Kampala–Entebbe Expressway also prepared project briefs but mostly for internal monitoring and audit purposes, as well as for visits to the Expressway by the Ugandan government or international delegations. 'You see how many World Bank meetings my colleagues need to attend? How many with AfDB? Compared to that, they [people from Exim Bank] really don't come visit often. And they don't even have a country office here in Kampala', as one UNRA colleague who had been working at the Expressway project for the past five years related to me.[76]

The Chinese Embassy, particularly ECCO, was responsible for following up the performance of Chinese financial support. However, equipped solely with three Chinese secretaries in charge of all aspects of Chinese economic engagement and development cooperation with Uganda, ECCO was not prepared—in terms of its mandate, organizational structure, or human resources—to exert any significant sectorial policy or institutional influence in the roads sector. In fact, the working relationship between ECCO and UNRA appeared to be rather tepid. During my interview with ECCO, its staff actually commenced the exchange by asking me, 'As you have been doing research within UNRA, do you have any suggestion about how to improve our working relationship [with UNRA]?' and continued,

76. Author's fieldnotes, 7 March 2018.

> We do not really have many interactions with UNRA now especially since the restructuring … many Chinese contractors also feel that the new leadership is not so approachable or friendly towards Chinese companies. We want to have a better working relationship with UNRA and we are trying to figure out ways of dissipating any misperceptions the new UNRA leadership might have about Chinese companies.[77]

This lack of regular contact or routinized meetings was further attested by the fact that the very first working meeting between Allen Kagina and both the Chinese Ambassador and the Head of ECCO took place only in July 2017, 2 years after Kagina's arrival at UNRA.[78]

When it comes to donor coordination, despite some western donors' invitations, China was reluctant to engage with the LDPG transport working group.[79] Its engagement with Uganda's roads sector remained on a strictly bilateral basis. In fact, China did not participate in any of the LDPG's sectorial working groups, including the agriculture sector, in which China had a record of trilateral cooperation with DFID and FAO in Uganda.[80] As LDPG in Uganda is composed almost exclusively of DAC members and observers, China's hesitancy in joining LDPG still reflects its symbolic, discursive, and normative distance vis-à-vis DAC countries, which serves to maintain its identity as a southern development provider.

Conclusion

This article seeks to address a question that has attracted much speculation but limited empirical investigation: how has Chinese-led development changed the process of institution and governance building in Africa, a field traditionally subject to western development interventions? Beijing has prioritized infrastructure cooperation in its relationship with Africa, and since 2008, its growing presence in road building in Uganda, but also broadly in Africa, has coincided with major institutional re-engineering initiatives in Uganda's roads. This makes Uganda's roads sector one of the most likely cases where one would expect its sectorial governance and institutional building process to be significantly reconfigured by Chinese-led development. However, my empirical unpacking of the role of Chinese financing and actors in Uganda's roads, particularly in the restructuring

77. Interview, Chinese ECCO official B, Kampala, 17 December 2017.
78. Chinese Embassy in Uganda, 'Chinese Ambassador to Uganda met with UNRA Executive Director 驻乌干达大使郑竹强会见乌公路局局长', *Website of Chinese Embassy in Uganda*, 4 July 2017, <http://ug.chineseembassy.org/chn/zwgx/zzwl/t1475356.htm> (4 December 2021).
79. Interview with a western donor representative, Kampala, 18 February 2018.
80. Hang Zhou, 'China-Britain-Uganda: Trilateral development cooperation in Agriculture' (Working Paper, China Africa Research Initiative, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC, 2018).

of UNRA, suggests that this growing presence did not naturally translate into a substantial increase in China's influence on sectorial institution building therein. By drawing on perspectives from existing scholarship on governance intervention, my quantitative and qualitative comparison between Chinese and western development engagements in Uganda's roads reveals some continuing points of distinction. More crucially, it highlights how western development interventions were designed, implemented, and monitored in specific ways that ensured their continued sway in Uganda's institution building in the roads sector. This attested to the endurance of 'governance states' in Uganda despite the increasingly polycentric development geography it found itself in.[81] Similar western governance interventions were targeted at sectors beyond roads in different African countries. Given that China's presence in Africa is often most notable in infrastructure, institution building in other sectors that receive comparatively less prominent Chinese engagements would likely to remain heavily shaped by western interventions. Future study on other sectors should be encouraged to evaluate and enhance the generalizability of the findings of this research to the broader African setting.

The operational mode of both Chinese construction companies and development finance in Uganda's roads identified in my research, however, should not been seen as rigidly static, but evolving especially against the context of BRI. For instance, in 2019, Beijing issued guidance opinions to encourage its construction companies to shift from the mere role of contractor to that of operator or investor through the built–operate–transfer (BOT) model and urge its financing arms like Exim Bank to provide funds for such undertakings.[82] Africa's power and infrastructure sectors appear to be among the first to witness the concretization of projects of this sort.[83] If this trend continues, we need to follow closely whether this change of role may bring about an increase in Chinese construction companies' more conscious effort to engage in shaping sectorial governance in host countries.[84]

81. Hickey's analysis (2013) on the formulation of national development plans in Uganda also reveals that despite greater national ownership, international financial institutions have deployed strategies to maintain their influence.
82. 'Guiding opinions of the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the National Development and Reform Commission regarding Promoting High-quality Development of Foreign Project Contracting [Effective]', *Pkulaw.cn*, n.d, <http://lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=31859&lib=law> (4 December 2021).
83. Christopher Alden and Lu Jiang, 'Brave new world: Debt, industrialization and security in China-Africa relations', *International Affairs* 95, 3 (2019), pp. 641–57; Linpeng Du, 'Small-scale investment + the application of EPC model' 小额投资＋EPC 模式应用, *International Project Contracting & Labour Service* 国际工程与劳务 382, 5 (2016), pp.71–72.
84. The recently published 2021 White Paper on China–Africa cooperation appears to confirm the continuation of this trend and Beijing's interests to guide its construction companies

That said, China and western development partners were hitherto engaged in an implicit but *de facto* 'division of labour'[85] in Uganda's roads sector. China supported relatively large-scale road construction projects with significant financing packages. Meanwhile, traditional donors did not shy away from roads construction but located it within larger Ugandan sub-national or Eastern African intra-regional development programmes and maintained a strong emphasis on policy planning and formulation as well as institution and capacity building in the transport sector.

This supply-side observation has some implications for the ongoing debate on African agency. Even within a single sector, the impact of China's growing involvement in African agency is likely to be variegated and issue-specific. With its main interest being to finance 'hard' physical infrastructure, carried out primarily by Chinese construction contractors, China's presence introduced an important element of fluidity into Uganda's construction market by providing it with a larger pool of funding and contractor options to broker to its advantage and achieve its ambition in road development. However, this did not fundamentally change Uganda's dependence upon traditional donors' neoliberal interventions in the 'soft' aspect of the roads sector, that is, the socio-political shaping and re-engineering of its road institutions and sectorial governance.

Nevertheless, one should treat with caution this agency enabled by China in road construction for African states. On a sectorial level, without targeted and coherent state-level policy support to foster indigenous industry and capacity, this agency risks being confined to a short-run form of diversified construction outsourcing rather than ushering in a process of self-reliant development in the long term. Additionally, road building is never a simply economic proposition: it embodies constellations of political economy rationalities by the state. China's presence hence enabled road infrastructure—imbued with claims to power and authority on the part of national elites—to materialize, yet the outcomes of such projects remain uncertain if they lack the proper strategic planning. For instance, having had minimum planning inputs from city authorities, the Kampala–Entebbe Expressway has not been found to be integrated into existing city-region transport infrastructures in such a way that would bring about optimal socio-economic returns, but may be instrumental in gathering support

to engage in BOT, build–own–operate and public–private partnership in Africa. See The Chinese State Council Information Office, 'China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals' (White Paper, The Chinese State Council Information Office, 2021).

85. See Christopher Gore, *Electricity in Africa: The politics of transformation in Uganda* (James Currey, Woodbridge, 2017), p. 152. Gore's study asserts that in Uganda's energy sector: '[t]here now appears to be an implicit if not explicit divide in roles: China in supporting large, controversial hydroelectric schemes; European and other customary bilateral donors are focused on small renewables, mini-grids, grid extension and capacity-building'.

from the middle classes around Kampala.[86] In fact, given the 'patrimonial nature of government-business relations'[87] under Museveni's regime where support to local private actors remains capricious and politically aligned with his electoral authoritarian survival, this diversified construction outsourcing with the immediacy and visibility of its development outputs may well have become the preferred option for the President based upon political expediency and cost–benefit calculation.

Moreover, the past two decades have witnessed the Ugandan regime's deliberate effort to securitize its development partnership with western donors through, for instance, excluding them from security arenas while simultaneously including them in social and economic sectorial policy-making.[88] The continued reliance upon traditional donors' neoliberal interventions to restructure road institutions can hence be read as being co-produced by western-led developmentalism and calculated decisions on the part of Uganda's top leadership. Taken together, embedded within the particular power configurations and political realities in Uganda, the 'division of labour' between Chinese and western development engagements in Uganda's roads sector may, rather unexpectedly, constitute an awkwardly beneficial match in the interest of the increasingly autocratic Ugandan leadership. The development outcomes of this 'age of choice'[89] therefore remains highly ambiguous and crucially shaped by the agency and political incentives of African political elites.[90] This applies particularly to African states like Uganda, where the leadership has a proven track record of strategically enlisting and carving out space within traditional donors' changing interests, resources, and discourses to (re-)enforce regime authority, even prior to southern development partners' re-emergence on the scene.[91]

86. Tom Goodfellow and Zhengli Huang, 'Contingent infrastructure and the dilution of "Chineseness": Reframing roads and rail in Kampala and Addis Ababa', *EPA: Economy and Space* 53, 4 (2021), pp. 664–66. See also Tom Ogwang and Frank Vanclay, 'Resource-financed infrastructure: Thoughts on four Chinese-financed projects in Uganda', *Sustainability* 13, 6 (2021), pp. 9–10.
87. Roger Tangri and Andrew Mwenda, 'Change and continuity in the politics of government-business relations in Museveni's Uganda', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 13, 4 (2019), pp. 678–97. See also Robert Wyrod, 'In the General's valley: China, Africa and the limits of developmental pragmatism', *Sociology of Development* 5, 2 (2019), pp. 174–97.
88. Jonathan Fisher and David M. Anderson, 'Authoritarianism and the securitization of development in Africa', *International Affairs* 91, 1 (2015), pp. 131–51.
89. Prizzon, Greenhill and Mustapha, 'An "age of choice" for external development finance?'
90. See Yuan Wang, 'Executive agency and state capacity in development: Comparing Sino-African railways in Kenya and Ethiopia', *Journal of Comparative Politics* 54, 1 (2021), pp. 1–28.
91. See Jonathan Fisher, 'Managing donor perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda's 2007 intervention in Somalia', *African Affairs* 111, 444 (2012), pp. 131–51; Jonathan Fisher, 'When it pays to be a "fragile state": Uganda's use and abuse of a dubious concept', *Third World Quarterly* 35, 2 (2014); Ricardo Soares de Oliveira and Harry Verhoeven, 'Taming intervention: Sovereignty, statehood and political order in Africa', *Survival* 60, 2 (2018), pp. 7–32.

More critical attention should be directed to the nexus between this new diversified development landscape and authoritarian rule in the continent.