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Changing Tides: The Impact of Chinese Investment In Gambia's Fishing Industry

by Abdallah Alami

University of San Francisco

May 2020

Master of Arts

in

International Studies

**Changing Tides: The Impact of Chinese Investment on Gambia's Fishing Industry**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS  
in  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by **Abdallah Alami**  
May 1, 2020

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

APPROVED:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Capstone Adviser

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Date

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**Abstract:** *Changing Tides: The Impact of Chinese Investment In Gambia's Fishing Industry*

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This thesis analyzes the presence and impact of Chinese fishing companies in the West African country of The Gambia. The presence of the Chinese companies have resulted in drastic changes in the country's fisheries industry where they have a comparative advantage due to their geographic location. Through interviews conducted with Gambian officials in the Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources, and members of the fishing community (both fishermen and merchants), I conclude that the Chinese presence is a trade-off between the Gambian government and the Chinese investors. It is positive because they are engaged in a beneficial partnership with the Gambian government where both sides can have long term benefits to their economic systems, and also negative because it has outcasted the older and less educated sect of the fishing community who cannot advance with the swiftly evolving and modernized fisheries industry of The Gambia. The Chinese presence in the Gambia and the rest of Africa has gained a lot of scrutiny due to the belief that their presence is a form of neocolonialism. The case of the Gambian fishing industry, however, reveals a different narrative. Chinese companies are aiding in the development of a major source of future economic growth for a developing nation, and they are operating under the regulations and guidelines set forth by the Gambian government. To sum it up, The Gambia is facilitating the creative destruction of their fisheries industry in order to gain long term economic strength and independence in the foreign trade market.

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## **Acknowledgements**

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I would like to applaud my Mom and Dad because without their constant motivation and guidance during my life I would not have been in the position I am in today. Next, I would like to thank my Advisor Jeffrey Paller for his wisdom and genuine interest in facilitating the success of this thesis. I would like to commend the University of San Francisco and the MAIS program for providing the structure and support needed for us students to reach our maximum potential. Also I would like to thank my family in The Gambia and everyone who aided in the collection of my data there. Finally, I would like to thank my three sisters for being my driving force to succeed because being a good role model for them is the greatest motivation.

## **Introduction**

### **China and Gambia's Fishing Industry**

The emergence of China as a hegemonic power over the past few decades is well documented, and their rapid growth could be attributed to their economic power and their new presence in the African continent. Colonialism shaped the African continent and gave the countries their social foundations in the modern world, but the role China plays as a new “colonial power” is one of a partnership with the African countries compared to a totalitarian style of presence the European powers played in the “New Imperialism” era. To add a visual context, China's FDI in Africa increased from \$9.7 to \$215.9 billion between 2000-2014 (UN Comtrade Database). Africa is rich in not only resources, but also in geographic location. The Gambia is an important case study because it is located on the west coast of Africa, and the dominant industry in the nation is in their fishing sector, and the rich aqualife in their waters. The fish shortages in the Chinese sea territory have made them rely on importing fish and seafood products from overseas, and they have developed fish processing factories in African nations such as The Gambia due to their geographic location and waters untouched by large scale fishing vessels.

Chinese fishing companies have gone into business with the Gambian government with contracts allowing them to fish the Gambian waters and establish fish processing factories in the nation. Under this agreement China's presence in The Gambia has increased due to the size of the fishing industry in China in constant demand for seafood. One might ask, how does this presence of chinese fishermen impact the Gambian people? One might ask, “Why the Fishing

industry?; Why is it so important to the Gambian people?” The fishing industry is one which the majority of Gambians have historically been drawn to based on their geographic location along the ocean. Becoming a fisherman does not require formal education, and it is not restricted to anyone based on social class or status, making it a field many Gambians, and Africans in similar geographic locations have made their own and made it part of their culture and identity. There are pros and cons to every situation, and in the case of China’s presence in The Gambian fishing industry, there is no difference.

Hegemonic powers historically control the tides of the world’s economies, and their investments have large long term repercussions on how countries, especially third world countries, develop. The root of the topic being discussed in this paper dates back to the colonialist era and the manner in which the continent of Africa was divided among the European powers at the time. The period known as the “New Imperialism” era from 1881-1914 shaped the continent of Africa dramatically and began the colonialist era where European hegemonies stripped the regions which they colonized their resources such as raw minerals, coal, labor power, and strategic areas of land. The economic benefits from the colonization of the African continent played the largest role behind the beginning of the “New Imperialism” era. These hegemonies, most notably France, the United Kingdom, and Belgium, dictated this era with their deep rooted settlements in the continent of Africa which has left a lasting impression to this day. These influences from colonialism have been both positive and negative, but most importantly, it explains a pattern of colonial dependence of the hegemonic powers of the world to develop their countries.



## **Research Question**

The research conducted during my trip to the Gambia from December 11th-January 20th was intended to test my hypothesis: How have Chinese investments impacted the fishing industry and local's way of life in The Gambia? Interviews with the Gambian fishing community members, Gambian Government officials (Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources) in the fisheries sector, and other experts have provided ample evidence to supplement my research question and determine a proper explanation on the state of Gambia's relationship with not only China, but also the rest of the world regarding their resources. Through observations of theories such as creative destruction, comparative advantage, and socio-economic research on the region, I will be able to break down political agreements the Gambian government has with the Chinese private fishing companies. With this information being looked at through the theoretical lenses paired with the literary research on the China-Africa dynamic, the winners and losers of the Gambia-China relationship will become revealed, and its impacts on the Gambian fishing community, both short-term and long-term, will reveal a complex situation unique to The Gambia and the situation created by all parties involved. Chinese investment in African fishing industries creates a tradeoff, where long-term economic success challenges traditional forms of fishing, creating winners and losers in the process. At the same time it leaves one wondering, what happens to those who cannot keep up with the quickly expanding fishing industry?

## **Post Jammeh Gambia**

The nation is currently undergoing a major rebuild of not only the government structure, but also of the psyche of the Gambian people. Twenty-one years of oppression and fear of being

punished for speaking against the government will make any country become traumatized and slow to assimilate to newfound democracy. The Barrow regime is considered a “transitional” government put in place to manage the nation while the Truth, Reparations, and Reconciliation Commission (TRRC) completes its investigations, and the political parties in the country reform and select their candidates for the next election to be held. The closure required after traumatic events (in this case an era) will only come after all of the offending parties involved with Jammeh and Jammeh himself get convicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC). Understanding this situation provides context when analyzing the interviews and the type of climate Gambia is currently in.

### **Literature**

My thesis project will examine the impact of Chinese investments on the fishing industry and locals’ way of life in West Africa. China’s role in Africa has been one of the largest geopolitical developments on the continent, and this literature review answers the question: What is the impact of Chinese investment in African fishing industries? There have been great improvements on economic development due to China’s involvement in Africa, but it is also creating tensions between different local communities and the foreign businesses. The fishing industry is suffering especially off the West African coast where the large scale Chinese financed fishing companies are decimating the local fishing community. The approach I will be taking with this capstone project is a socio-economic approach where I will examine the economic opportunities created from the fishing industry and the social elements which are impacted by the change in the fishing industry and the country’s economies. The literary research on this

issue is heavy on the economic and political factors, but both miss the social impacts on the peoples' everyday lives and how they deal with those threats to their way of life.

The concept of creative destruction will also be further examined in my findings but its relationship with comparative advantage is essential to the Gambian government's relationship with China. The *Law of Comparative Advantage* is a concept developed by the economist David Ricardo in 1817 where, "under free trade, an agent will produce more of and consume less of a good for which they have a comparative advantage". The theory of comparative advantage is very prominent in the Gambia-China partnership where both sides are engaging in trade regarding the fish of the Gambian waters where Gambia has a comparative advantage to many countries in the world due to their geographic location on the North Atlantic Ocean. Gambia has many reasons behind opening up access to their seas from foreign markets ranging from: strengthening their economy, the impact the open market will have on their economy, the direction the government wants to go regarding the long-term development of the country, the fishery revolution, skill development, etc. To understand those reasons, there must first be an understanding of many of the different elements in the China-Africa relationship and how it has evolved to the point where it is today.

### **Background:**

Since the creation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 with the intention of strengthening the economic cooperation and diplomatic ties between Africa and China, the volume of the trade between the two sides have drastically increased. (Guillon, Mathonnat, China Economic Review). With the creation of the FOCAC, Chinese foreign trade

with Africa has increased from \$9.7 billion in 2000 to \$215.9 billion in 2014. (UN Comtrade Database). Foreign aid has been dominated by western countries like the United States and other major European countries. The west looks at China's involvement in Africa as a way of securing access to natural resources. In the Forbes article by Wade Shepard, "What China is Really Up To In Africa", he states, "even though the colonial powers were largely gone or on the way out, the continent was still the same stockpile of natural resources it's always been, and China wasted no time stepping into the power vacuum" This perception is not entirely true. The Turkish Journal of International Relations article by Max Rebol states, "A closer look does not only reveal that China's disbursement of Aid to the continent is relatively unrelated to natural resources, but also that it fills exactly the areas that Western aid has increasingly neglected: Infrastructure, industrialization and manufacturing." (Rebol 2010). The sectors of aid which relate best to the cases I will be detailing in my Capstone project are the industrial and manufacturing aspects of Chinese aid. In the coastal countries of West Africa, the Chinese have focused on building fisheries with the purpose of manufacturing fish products to export back to Asia, but the trade off is that the local fishing communities are suffering and having to veer away from a way of life they have been accustomed to for generations. In "Beyond the Enclave: Towards a Critical Political Economy of China and Africa" by Giles Mohan he breaks down China's engagements in Africa in a political economy framework. There are many layers to the process of providing aid to Africa. Mohan explains how, "The Chinese government is also encouraging private overseas investment under the auspices of both the 'Going Out' strategy and its Africa Policy, which includes financial support, information dissemination, tax incentives, credit and loans." (Mohan 2013). The Chinese government is essentially polluting the African market economy

with foreign investment and corporations which are saturating the domestic market of China. These companies are taking sectors of African economies like the fishing industry and taking away from the established market in that country. The literary journal by Mohan details how agricultural villages which have grown fruits and vegetables which are necessities in their cuisine are now growing “Chinese vegetables for the Chinese workers.” (Mohan 2013). This relates to the fishing industry where these fisheries being established are bringing in tons of fish a day which takes away from the fishing community. In return they offer the fishermen higher rates for their fishing hauls, so now there is a shortage of the fish these communities rely on. The country I will be detailing will be Gambia where the fishing industry is a major factor of the way of life. Gambians consume an average of 55 lbs per capita compared to the African average of 18 lbs according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). An integration of a major fishing company takes away from these consumption rates in the Gambia and many other coastal African countries, and it makes life much harder on the society to attain the amounts of fish they are accustomed to at the same rates.

In a legal and political perspective, Chinese investment involves many different layers and agreements which will only expand and restructure as the relationship between African governments and China evolves. According to the journal titled, “China in Africa and the Law” by Salvatore Mancuso in the *Annual Survey of International & Comparative Law* journal; the systems of business law in Africa are out of date and there has been a push by many African countries for “legal integration in Africa”. (Mancuso 2012). The African countries lack protections from the saturation of Chinese investments and their markets are feeling it the most in the local and social levels. One might ask why the international organizations such as the

United Nations don't play a larger role in the regulation of the trade and development of African countries, but they simply don't provide as much benefits to the continent as China has been providing. The Chinese acknowledges this lack of involvement by the international community and they provided an assurance of solidarity with the African continent by stating, "China is devoted, as are African nations, to making the United Nations play a greater role, defending the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, establishing a new international political and economic order featuring justice, rationality, equality and mutual benefit, promoting more democratic international relationships and rule of law in international affairs and safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries." (Mancuso 246). The African countries lacking legal integration paired with the international community not showing enough interest and concern in the continent elevates the influence the Chinese have in Africa's industries. The Chinese are impacting the country in many positive factors especially with regional development and economic trade, but at the same time the local communities are experiencing dramatic changes in their way of life, and there is a lack of solutions being provided for their struggles. In the journal titled "China's Impact on Africa – The Role of Trade, FDI and Aid" by Matthias Busse, Ceren Erdogan, and Henning Mühlen, they break down how Chinese, FDI and Aid in Africa affect economic growth. In their findings they concluded that, "African countries with a stronger rule of law benefit more from aid from the ROW and from Chinese FDI." (Busse, Ceren, Mühlen 2016). This could translate to a mishandling of the fishing industries in West Africa because they are some countries entering into agreements with Chinese private investors without having a proper government structure in place capable enough to facilitate these transitions of industry properly making it difficult to benefit and have the upper

hand in their own industry. Similar themes are reflected in the book, “Dead Aid” by Dambisa Moyo (2009) where she states, “poverty levels continue to escalate, and growth rates have steadily declined—and millions continue to suffer”. There are pros and cons to everything and in the situations of Chinese aid and involvement in Africa the narrative is the same. Most of the literature on Chinese aid and development in West Africa has focused on the economic and political influences Chinese aid and investment has had, but the aspect which lacks enough coverage is the social impacts. My Capstone project examines the fishing industry in The Gambia and how Chinese investments in fisheries in the country have impacted the local fishing folk community. With this research and literary breakdown I will be conducting, I plan on contributing to the library of literary research and articles which break down aspects of the vastly growing Chinese aid dynamic. My contribution will be providing unique access and first hand accounts of the impact of Chinese investment in the Gambian fisheries sector from Gambian fishermen and leaders in the industry. My cultural ties to the country enable me to gain access to intimate conversations from these people and it will allow me to get the raw and natural viewpoints of their daily lives.

### **Dead Aid**

The book titled “Dead Aid” by Dambisa Moyo asks the question, “Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa”. In the early stages of development, the private sector in African countries haven’t been large enough to assume a central development role, which has been the void where aid has traditionally stepped in. Aid has “not delivered and meaningful or substantial economic performance” according to Moyo, and she details how donor

countries are growing weary of the continent for a number of reasons with aid declining steadily over the past twenty years. Another reason for decline being that the donor countries are facing their own economic issues. Moyo states that, “Demographic shifts are putting further strain on Western economies. Increasing numbers of retirees and fewer productive young people means increasing health costs, lower tax revenues and less to give away” (Moyo 75). The continent has become dependent or “addicted” to aid due to the constant supply of it for the past sixty years, this dependence has made it difficult for Africans to “exist in an aid-less” world. Moyo believes that the alternatives to aid are predicated on transparency which will provide a new influx of life through the continent which will in turn grow the social capital and economies of the nations.

The role of capitalism played in the African aid dynamic is major, as the western nations have used aid a means of entry into the African markets, and it was a method intended to allow them to have more freedom in their strategy of extracting the continent of its rich resource deposits and strategic locations, especially along the coasts due to their easier trade routes and rich sea life. Moyo believes that the China-Africa dynamic is positive for the continent, and that relationship is much more beneficial to the growth of the African continent compared to the relationship with the Western powers of the world. Recently, there has been a surge of foreign direct investment intended for Africa, and it's only the beginning for the potential increases of investment to come into the continent. The nation leading this surge is the People’s Republic of China. Investment in Africa has always been a difficult road to take for prospective investors. The majority of it comes from infrastructure limitations such as poor roads, telecommunications, power, etc. Developing these necessities is too expensive making it easier for western countries to develop goods in China and other Asian countries and export it back to their nations even



though the African continent is closer to them. Moyo also adds that apart from the physical limitations, “man-made disincentives: widespread corruption, a maze of bureaucracy, a highly circumscribed regulatory and legal environment, and ensuing needless streams of red-tape” (Moyo 100), has made conducting business in Africa simply a nightmare. Another factor affecting investment in the continent is the delays in receiving documents such as business licenses and the opacity. An investor will take their business to South Korea for example opposed to Angola or Ghana because the time it takes for one to take twelve steps will be doubled because of less red-tape. The opacity adds to that because of the lack of clarity and direction on the proper procedures for receiving land information and documentation for their possible business investments.

All the hurdles mentioned can easily and swiftly be resolved if the government is operating in an entrepreneurial capacity, meaning they will open up their economies for the purpose of profiting and developing their industries which would draw foreign interest and investment. Moyo states that an enterprising government could easily, “reduce the paperwork, supply the coordinates, and speed up the process”, and by doing this it would increase the GDP and lift the economies. Between 1993 and 2002, Uganda improved its regulatory climate and the Commission for Africa noted a 7 percent growth in the country economy and the poverty rate decreased from 56 percent in 1998 to 32 percent in 2002 after measures to attract foreign investors were created by the government. The small sample size of African governments aiding in the expedited process of attaining business in the continent has returned great results with the economies thriving and both sides benefiting. Moyo states, “FDI is an engine for economic growth” (Moyo 101), and it will create more jobs, create an influx of new technology, improve

management knowledge, and aid many industries open up to the international markets. In the last sixty years or so, no country has made more strides in the African continent politically, and economically than China. China's aggressive investments in the continent have been profitable for all sides involved. What makes China's "colonization" of the African continent so significant is that they have done so through monetary means compared to the New Imperialist era where European hegemonic powers took over the continent by force with weapons. China has ramped up its investments in the continent and funded various billion dollar projects such as, "Roads in Ethiopia, pipelines in Sudan, railways in Nigeria, power in Ghana, etc." all being part of their master plan to become the dominant foreign force in the continent. China's cooperation with African leaders, and investment in various sectors in the continent has resulted in vast advancements and positive feedback from the people. In every situation negatives are expected, with many Africans who are weary of foreign investors believing that they are being taken advantage of in some way similar to how America and many European hegemonies have in the past. Moyo details how "China's influence is viewed as much more positive than America's", and polls taken all over the continent have resulted in similar sentiments with the majority of Africans seeing Chinese FDI in their countries as more beneficial than FDI from other foreign powers.

Another worry is that Chinese companies are taking local economies with their underbidding tactics and they aren't hiring Africans, but countries are beginning to step up in that front where, "African governments are legislating for a required minimum level of participation by the local population" (Moyo 111). African countries are much more involved and in control of the Chinese companies investing in their countries regarding their business

practices. This same practice of African government requirements regarding African worker's inclusion is reflected in my research in the Gambia and the Chinese fishing companies abiding by a Gambian government mandate to have a certain percentage of Gambian fishermen in all their fishing vessels.

Moyo states, "...throwing aid money at poor countries does not work, simply boosting investment is not the key to economic growth either" (Moyo 113). Unless African governments are given incentives to support the industries investing in their countries, then there will not be long term potential. For countries with resources in demand, such as Gambia's coast being valuable fishing waters, they will benefit more from FDI compared to nations with less resources. China in Africa is a relationship with many elements, resource extraction and trade being the most significant, and unless African governments take more charge of their resources and catch on to the trend of becoming more involved, then the era of "New Imperialism" will be repeated. In "China's distant water fishing industry: Evolving policies and implications" by Tabitha G. Mallory, she touches on many of the same claims as Moyo. She states, "In Africa, DWF has depleted fisheries resources through overfishing, misreported catches and landings, fishing in illegal areas (such as artisanal zones or in the waters of other countries), transshipped catch at sea, or using inappropriate methods or gear (e.g., trawling or illegal mesh sizes). Distant water fishing (DWF) has led to overcapacity in the fishing industry, and has negatively impacted domestic large and small-scale (artisanal) fishers by squeezing them out of the industry"; which means that the long term effects of the opening of African economies to foreign industries, such as the fisheries sector, are beginning to show and control must be regained to ensure these effects are not permanent. Fishing is an important source of many african countries and if there is

depletion due to overfishing by foreign companies in agreement with their governments, then the potential social and economic impacts will be grave.

The future looks bright for the African continent, investments seem to be on an upward trend, and the African governments are welcoming foreign partnerships where both sides could benefit. In the 2005 Second Conference of Chinese and African Entrepreneurs, then Chinese premier Wen Jibao “pledged that China’s trade with Africa would rise to US \$100 billion a year within five years” (Moyo 114). This trade pledge is solely between Africa and China, the number has increased by a great amount since that pledge was made and as long as China continues its partnership with African governments, the investments will increase and both sides will continue to develop and grow both of their interests.

### **China’s Second Continent**

In “China’s Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa” by Howard W. French, the lives of the over one million Chinese migrants making their livelihoods in Africa is examined, and what their impacts are on the continent’s development will reveal many positives. The China-Africa relationship is constantly growing as Chinese migrants are beginning to pump private funds into the many different industries and resource sources in the African continent. There are many narratives surrounding Chinese migrants in the African continent, some say it's another form of neocolonialism or imperialism, but what goes unnoticed is the initiative taken by the Chinese to settle in these foreign countries and aiding in the development and growth of their economies. French states, “When most people think about China’s relationship with Africa they reduce it to a single proposition: securing access to natural

resources, of which Africa is the world's greatest storehouse...But there is a more farsighted motive, one overlooked in almost all the speculation about China's ambitions in Africa: to cultivate, or even create, future markets for China's export-oriented industries, markets that could one day pick up the slack from aging consumers and debt-ridden economies of the West and of Japan." (French 42). The narrative of the Chinese's intentions in Africa is drawn mostly from the past presence of hegemonic powers in the continent, and that negative narrative overshadows what the Chinese are creating were alternate economic strongholds for their continent which comes from the generation and development of the industries they are involved with in the African continent. French details how "Across the continent, investment in education is booming, and according to the United Nations, enrollment in secondary schools jumped 48 percent between 2000 and 2008, while enrollment rates in higher education grew by 80 percent." (French 43) The long term effects of this generation of education by Africans will result in the future societies being dictated by a stronger middle-class and working-class. The Chinese generation of industry in the continent has sparked a greater need for education in order to become involved in the various industries they are establishing in the country. For example, in the Gambian fisheries industry, the Gambian government has mandated the Chinese fishing and fishmeal companies to employ Gambians in all of their operations, and to educate them in the operations so that they could be able to operate their own vessels and companies in the future. These partnerships are what French describes in his literature, and they are generating major changes to the societal structure and way of life of the African people. Many problems in the African continent such as power outages and water stoppages have become customary in the lifestyles of the African people. However, since the Chinese companies rely on consistent

supplies of water and power to run their businesses in the rural areas they settle and build their bases of operations, these rural areas are becoming modernized and consistent power is becoming the norm. The Chinese are making a statement by developing these areas so that themselves and the surrounding locals can live a certain standard of life because they are in the continent to stay, and they are in the continent to grow and create a better life for themselves. The constant issue at hand with the Chinese however is that they are entering into industries occupied by natives traditionally, and they are privatizing the industry. For example, French described the Chinese taking over the retail sector in Senegal in 2004 leading to protests by the merchants demanding the Senegales government to prevent the Chinese newcomers from putting them out of business. The issue stems from the lack of structure in place by the Senegalese government which allowed the chinese to freely occupy a major industry in the nation with any real restrictions, in any situation like that, the backlash will be swift and harsh. This notion is what drove to many early protests in The Gambia regarding the Chinese fishing companies settling in the nation and profiting off their fisheries industry, but unlike Senegal, the Gambian government was prepared and they had more of an administrative presence in the operations being conducted in their country by the Chinese private companies.

### **The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China In Africa**

To further touch on the privatization of many African industries by Chinese investors, we will take a look at “The Dragon’s Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa” by Deborah Brautigam. She details the realities of Chinese economic engagement in Africa and the many layers involved in the intercontinental relationship which is constantly evolving. She states,

“In 2008, Africans imported more than \$50 billion worth of Chinese goods. Many were inexpensive consumer goods that could be produced in the region: shoes, handbags, garments, household appliances. As we have seen, a growing number of Chinese companies are starting to do just this” (Brautigam 231). The importation of such large amounts of Chinese general goods will impact the various industries in African markets throughout the continent, and like we saw in Senegal with the fashion industry, there is an increased chance for pushback from the local merchants and traders in those industries in the African continent. Chinese aid and involvement in the African continent has sparked a lot of changes to the economies and communities they are getting involved in, some good and some bad, but as Brautigam states throughout her book, it must be done with consideration to the already established institutions in place throughout the continent.

### **Research Methods and Approach**

The research methods are based on the analysis of the literature surrounding the China-Africa investment relations as well as the narratives which surround it. The majority of literature surrounding the China-Africa relationship, specifically with the Gambian fisheries sector in this case, focuses on the political impacts, the economic impacts, and also the role of capitalism. But there is a lack of any real sufficient studies on the role these factors play on the social constructs of the fishing communities in Gambia and how they are being benefited and also hindered by the presence of Chinese fishing companies based in their country, and are benefiting from a trade they have been part of for generations.

### ***Research Design***

The Capstone project consists of two sections, literary breakdowns of several works by authors who studied the China-Africa dynamic, as detailed in the previous section, and field conducted interviews with members of the Gambian fishing community, both in the laborers portion of the Gambian community as well as the administrative portion of the Gambian community. This strategy was intended to cover the perspectives of this situation from the outside looking in, with the literary works based on the economic and political facets of the China-Africa relationship in the continent and fisheries sector, and the internal perspectives of the Gambians I conducted interviews with who are experiencing major social changes to not only their livelihoods, but also to the socio-economic constructs of their society. The findings will reveal the positives and negatives of the Gambia-China dynamic and who, if any, will be benefiting the most from this relationship.

### ***Interview Methodology***

The research trip to The Gambia was from December 11th 2019 to January 20th 2020. I started my research by investigating the different fishing markets in the country and the demographic which typically shops at those different markets in the country. I continued to break down the types of seafood each market was known for bringing in so that I could understand the price breakdown of each market. I continued by identifying the different levels of people in the hierarchy of the fishing industry in The Gambia ranging from the top with the administrative and judiciary sectors of the fishing commissions in the country. I followed that up by identifying the lower level, where the majority of Gambians are associated, which was the local fishing



merchants and the market leaders. These lower tier members of the fishing community are the most overlooked section of the Gambian demographic, but the decisions the lawmakers make affects them the most. An attempt to interview the representatives from the Chinese fishing companies based in the country were unsuccessful due to my status as an American and they instead referred me to their company's website on economic spending and investments.

I conducted ten interviews in total ranging from local fishing merchants and taxi drivers to government officials. The questions I asked developed in a conversational manner where I based the conversations on the structure fisheries industry, and how it has been impacted by the emergence of privately funded Chinese fisheries. My first interview was conducted with the Permanent Secretary of The Gambia's Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources Dr. Bamba A.M. Banja. This interview was carried out to find out the Gambian government's reasoning behind their relationship with China and their companies claiming a stakeholder in the Gambian fishing industry. Next, I wanted to gain an understanding of the short-term and long-term goals for Gambia's fishing industry and what doors it will open up for the country. The structure in place in this situation opens up the conversation for many different theories and concepts to be used as an explanation not just for Gambia and China's relationship being centered around their fishing industry, but they could be also used to explain the role of capitalism in Africa. It's a relationship which weighs *creative destruction or comparative advantage*. Creative destruction is the economic concept developed by the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter where he describes, "the process of industrial mutation that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one" (Schumpeter 82). The methodology behind this study of Gambia's relationship with China in

their fisheries sector is intended to highlight the many layers in the governmental structure in a developing nation and how interactions with foreign hegemonic powers will impact their economies and societies. The social impact perspective is one which lacks much coverage for many reasons ranging from a lack of infiltration with the local community and a lack of attention being paid to the lower tier of the society. What makes this thesis stand out is my background as a Gambian and a speaker of the local dialect, Wolof, which will allow the dialogue I initiate with the Gambian fishing community to be more natural and conversational. As many communities in developing countries, there is always reluctance to open up to outsiders, and my familiarity with the culture is what allows me to gain such intimate access and information with these interviews. It is important to get the perspectives of every section of a society when conducting such research because in such a small and developing country, there are many decisions made for the people of the country by the government and those decisions will impact the society almost immediately. The knowledge gained from the interviews I conducted with members of the Gambian fishing industry has made the adaptation of the many concepts and theories described more realistic and comparable. There are many direct scenarios and strategies which the Gambian government has in place regarding their movement with the Chinese companies which mirror theories such as creative destruction and comparative advantage. The findings along with the literary support will reveal a new adaptation of capitalism which is beginning to set a new trend of African countries using their abundant resources of their advantages, and using them to barter with the hegemonic powers such as China to not only boost their economies, but to also develop many regions of their countries which have previously been unoccupied or underdeveloped.

## **Analysis**

### **I. Introduction**

The previous sections have detailed the reasoning behind conducting this study on the Gambian fishing sector and how the country's relationship with Chinese fishing companies are impacting the economy and society. There are many layers and theories in place which explain the many reasons why this situation is both negative and positive for the country. In every situation there are pros and cons, and the conclusion of the study was carefully weighed and from that I was able to reveal new viewpoints on the complex situation of foreign investment in a developing country and the long term impacts this situation will eventually create.

The data analysis consists of interviews conducted with the Gambian permanent secretary and Minister of the Fisheries and Wildlife Commission, as well as interviews conducted with various merchants in the fish markets, and displaced workers formerly in the fishing community. These interviews provided different perspectives on the economic impacts of the Chinese presence in The Gambia, but also the major social impacts it has created for everyone in the country. Developing countries such as The Gambia have a more defined class structure in place which makes it easier to determine the hardships and impacts of economic changes each tier of the social structure faces. To further support the methodological inferences made in this thesis, the agreements, and the government strategies must be broken down because they provide the step-by-step breakdowns of the type of relationship the Gambian government has created to restructure their fishing sector of the government, and how the Chinese and other hegemonic

powers of the world legally fit into this dynamic. The Gambia is a small developing country and by opening their economy, and waters in this specific case, to the world, they are welcoming an exploitation by global powers, but they are also opening avenues for the nation to modernize its society and economy.

## **II. The Gambian Government: Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources**

### ***2.1: “The Gambia National Development Plan 2018-2021”***

The Gambian National Development Plan penned by president Adama Barrow and his cabinet was one of the new initiatives built on increased transparency of the government. The topic of the paper centers around the Gambian fisheries and aquaculture sector, and how its relationship with Chinese fishmeal factories regarding the Gambian fishing waters will impact the societal structure of the fishing community as well as the surrounding environment where the large scale fishing is taking place. The stated goal of the fisheries sector is to: “promote a vibrant Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector through research, sustainable management and utilization of the fisheries resources that would enhance employment and livelihood opportunities, income and foreign exchange earnings, food, and nutrition security.” The expected results from the revamped fisheries sector includes increases to, “Fisheries as a percentage of GDP from 6.4% to 15%, total production of fish resources from 53,719 tons to 75,000 tons, Budget allocation to aquaculture development from D(Dalasi) 2,000,000 to D 10,000,000, and increase the percentage of fish resources exported from 32% to 43%.” The country is putting an emphasis on increasing the revenue gained from the fishing industry in the country. The

advantage The Gambia has from their geographic location on the West African coast enables them to increase revenue for the country's economy at a quicker rate. The plans to create that revenue increase at a quick rate, it starts with: Strengthening Policy, Legislative and Regulatory Framework; Developing and Implementing a Comprehensive Capacity Building Programme. The long term development plan of the country is evident with this document revealing the gambian government's vision of what their ties with foreign markets, such as the Chinese fishing industry, can mean for the future of the gambian economy and society.

#### **A. Legislative and Regulatory Framework**

The fisheries sector of the country must first establish a proper structure and regulatory process to be able to sustain the growth of the fishing industry, and the population. An emphasis for this framework is to, "strengthen the legislative, policy and regulatory framework for the fisheries sector by aligning them with international best practices for good governance and sustainable fisheries management". The following measures stand out as significant milestones which will enable the success of the industry: "Government will revise the Fisheries Policy, Act and Regulations and include a strong incentive to attract the youth to the sector". The emphasis of attracting the youth to the industry is essential to the growth and successful future of the fishing industry in The Gambia. The fishing community in The Gambia is one which has been generational, and it's a craft passed down from parent to child. However, the industry has shifted towards

modernization due to the efforts of the Gambian government to replace the outdated system in place of trade in the fisheries sector, and they want to take advantage of their geographic advantage, and put a greater emphasis on the possibilities it could create for them economically as well as politically. The development plan states, “A fisheries trade policy will be formulated that will serve as a guide in regulating Gambia’s markets for fish and fisheries products overseas, and thus will support the country claim a greater share of the international market.” International market is the key word in this situation because the Gambian government wants to expand their economic opportunities in the international market, and they want to use their number one resource to do it, which is their fisheries sector. Continuing the trend of the national development plan with enhancing the fisheries sector and developing the government structure around it, it states that to enhance the fisheries sector’s contribution to the national development plan they must, “determine the potential sustainable benefits that The Gambia’s fish resources can generate and identify the viable approaches to realize such benefits and retain them by analyzing the comparative advantage of the country in the sector, and determining and developing the human resource, tools and systems required to promote the fisheries development agenda.” The comparative advantage of the nation relies on its advancement of the institutional, physical and financial infrastructures in order to receive the maximum dividends of the fishing industry in the country.

## **B. Fisheries and Aquaculture Transformation**

In order to meet the domestic demand and have product for export, and to boost the contributions of the fisheries to the GDP, meet the domestic demand and have products available for export, the Gambian government has pledged to undertake the following measures in their 2018-2021 National Development Plan:

- Initiating a study which will focus on the economic linkages surrounding tourism to investigate how “synergies in investments may be leveraged”
- “Providing material and logistics support to stakeholders especially the Gambia Navy, Gambia Maritime Administration, NASCOM and fishing communities, Government will during the period determine and seek the resource requirements for improved territorial water policing/monitoring to combat IUU...”
- “Establishing a revolving loan scheme for Industrial, Artisanal and Aquaculture operators to access affordable and sustainable financing for value chain transformation will be a top priority for the Government during the plan period.” This will ensure that operators have the wherewithal to fully exploit their potentials, expand and sustain fisheries related business operations. Putting an emphasis on this point in the development plan reveals a deeper meaning to the presence of the Chinese companies in the country.
- “Strengthening the microbiology laboratory from quality and standardization of fish and fishery products.” The Gambia can generate

immense revenue from the exportation of their fish and fish products. To gain the maximum potential of their geographic location and abundance of fish in their area, the Gambian government wants to use their laboratories at the department of fisheries to, “be made functional in testing fish, which in turn will help The Gambia meet EU standards, thereby increasing export base revenues.”

- Establishing freshwater and marine water research centers to promote aquaculture development which will “serve as a model learning centre for aquaculture operators to enhance knowledge and experience sharing in aquaculture development.” Ensuring the education of their citizens in the aquaculture sector is intended to eventually allow the country to become independent from foreign contractors and the country will be able to fully control the market, and benefit to their maximum economic potential.
- Finally, the Gambian government intends to maintain the partnerships and alliances in place (such as the Chinese private investors, and other foreign investors) for resource mobilization by entering into “strategic partnerships with national, regional and international strategic constituents of the fisheries and aquaculture sector and establish strong cooperation frameworks with them to enhance resource mobilization.”

### **III. Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources Perspective (Interview with P.S. Dr. Bamba A.M. Banja)**



The Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources has benefitted from the influx to the fisheries sector by the Chinese private fishing industry making the impact of the agreements they make, and how they regulate those agreements essential to the success of the Gambia-China relationship. The Gambian government is taking precautions in the development of their fisheries sector because they understand the value it presents to the development of their country's economy and the rural areas which have developed at a very fast rate since the settlement of Chinese fishing companies there such as the Golden Lead Fishmeal Factory. In a January 2nd 2020 meeting conducted with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources Dr. Bamba A.M. Banja, we discussed the settlement of the Chinese companies in the country and their impacts and he stated:

“The fishing industry in The Gambia is divided into two sub-sectors, Artisanal (small-scale) and Industrial (capital expensive), involving the use of fishing trawlers and fish processing plants used for import and export which are legislated. Companies cannot just come and join the sector like that however. There are guidelines and procedures which must be followed: they must have a registered company, a study report must be submitted with the company's intentions, and once we review it economically, socially, and culturally acceptable, then we will approve it.”

To follow-up with the topic of our conversation surrounding the Chinese fishmeal and fishing companies, I asked Dr. Banja, “So for these Chinese investors, are they intertwined with China’s Government or are they in the private industry?”

Dr Banja Adamantly stated:

“No,no, no. They are private, the Chinese government is not involved in the Gambian industry. These are private investors, private citizens of China. It is not the Chinese government. I don't know if they are in the fishing industry in their country but I do know that they are private investors in our country from China.”

The Gambia has many policy objectives, but their main policy objective in the fisheries sector is, developing industrial fisheries according to Dr. Banja. He stated, “*developing industrial fisheries means we have to have fishing trollers, fish processing plants, and fishmeal plants. We also have another policy objective which is to increase the participation of Gambians in the fisheries sector, particularly women and youth to generate revenue, foreign exchange, and create employment for Gambians, and we look at the improval along those lines which is another major criteria for approving the foreign investors to enter the Gambian fishing economy.*”

I explained that it appears to be that these policies they have in place are a method of modernization of the industry but at the same time it involves everyone. So as the industry

advances then it will enable Gambian people to advance and grow as well. Dr. Banja, agreed with my assumption and he detailed an example where this system is working. He stated:

“For example, you have companies that are having fishing trawlers. We have a policy that any vessel, fishing vessel, that is approved to fish in our waters must have a Gambian observer on board, or inspector. But must also employ Gambians to be at least 20-25 percent of their crew at a minimum. These terms are for all foreign fishing vessels. If it is a local vessel, apart from specialized positions, the rest of the crew must be Gambians, and by specialized positions I mean engineers, pilots, and skippers where the local expertise is not available yet. For fish processing plants, they mainly employ Gambians, men, women, and youth. In Fish processing, packaging, and export along the value chain, they create more employment for Gambians. Fishmeal plants create the most employment from the unloading of fish from the boats all the way to the packaging and export of the fish which will all create jobs for the Gambian people.”

The opportunities created by these companies are bringing innovation and opportunity to the gambian fishing industry, and it is modernizing the regions which were dead without the companies settling there. Dr Banja states:

“The trickle down effect of the fishmeal plants in Gunjur, Caton, and in Sanya, has attracted the establishment of many restaurants, many shops, traffic is

increasing, so both socially and economically it is playing a role in the livelihoods and the livelihood activities of the communities. The social interactions have increased, and if you go to Gunjur now, the community is alive, the demand for everything in the area has increased. These companies have corporate responsibilities to the communities as well which is another reason for such fast improvements and growth in the communities as well.”

As previously mentioned, the Gambian government is in a stage of transition to become democratic and open to the international markets after the ousting of dictator Yahya Jammeh. The engagement with Chinese investors is essential to speeding up that process because the Chinese companies are providing an economic invigoration to stagnant communities in the country, and development to the regions occupied by the Chinese companies. As Dr. Banja detailed, they have “corporate responsibilities to the communities'”, and the development of the regions and economies is essential to the success for all sides involved.

*\*These Chinese fishmeal companies are located in the Gambian rural towns of Caton, Gunjur, and Sanya. The fishing companies are in Kanifing and by the capital of Gambia, Denton Bridge, all owned by private Chinese investors.*

#### **IV. Local Gambians**

##### ***Positive & Negative Feedback***

When governments make decisions, they are representing the masses when they are making the decisions which will impact everyone. In a smaller country such as The Gambia,

these government decisions are more impactful because they make more noticeable changes to policies and regulations people are living under. In the “2018-2012 National Development Plan” , the Gambian government made very significant policy changes and objectives, with the most noticeable and impactful ones being made to the fisheries sector of the country. The fisher folk of The Gambia hold one of the oldest and longest standing trades in the Gambian population due to its simplicity and the valuable geographic location of the country, making it the easiest and cheapest trade for Gambians to pursue and make a living for themselves. The Gambian public has been torn between those supporting the foreign investors in the fisheries sector because they are modernizing the industry, creating more revenue, creating more jobs, and modernizing the regions which they are building their fishmeal factories thus creating greater economic flow in the formerly rural region. On the opposite side however, there are Gambians, mainly fisher folk, and the fishing merchants who oppose the presence of foreign investors in the fisheries sector, mainly opposing the Chinese fishing trawlers and fishmeal factories.

The second question in my hypothesis asks, How have Chinese investments in The Gambian fishing industry impacted the locals’ way of life? The interests of the local fishermen and fishing merchants in the major fishing markets in regions such as Gunjur, Serrekunda, Bakau, Banjul, etc., are to continue operating in the manner they have been operating for generations. As Dr. Banja stated, the fishing industry is divided into two sectors, the Artisanal fisher folk (small-scale) and the Industrial fishing sector which is legislated by the government. The artisanal sector is the one which has dominated the fishing industry where the fisher folk are operating on their own without much government regulation or interference, and that has been the trend for generations in the country. The tug of war ensuing is between those two sectors of

the fishing community, and the pushback is created based on the artisanal narrative that they being decommissioned by the Gambian government in favor of the Chinese private fishing companies they have gone into business with.

One interview I conducted with a fishing port manager in the Bakau port and market details the sentiments the majority of the small scale fisher folk in the region are reflecting. I met with Demba Jallow on January 13th at the Bakau fishing market and port. He has worked at the same port for the past thirty-five years and he began as a small-scale fishermen and moved his way up to eventually being a market mainstay and leader in the operations and organization of the fisher folk there. He took me through the fishing market where all the merchants were setting up their tables for the busy day. I remember seeing the tables bare with a few small fish on each one. I asked the woman selling at one of the tables if it was always this way (few fish on the tables) and she said “No, it was not always this way, but business is not what it once was.” Demba and I made it down to the beach



where the small scale fishing vessels were docked, and we began to go through some of the hundreds of old freezers converted to iceboxes where the fish were stored. We went through many coolers and we pulled out various types of fish ranging from catfish, to red snappers, to squids, and large king fish, and even though the coolers weren't full to the top, they each contained one of a kind types of fish that are unique to the region and are prized to foreign markets. Demba explained to me that, “Fish that once cost 500D (Gambian Dalasi) and were plentiful now cost between 4500D-5000D” and that is due to, “The big ships take everything so we can only get our hands on what we can get”. The impact of the large scale vessels of the

Chinese fishmeal companies on the small-scale fishing markets and fisher folk was evident. The small-scale fisherfolk have accepted the fact that they simply cannot compete with these companies for the seas anymore and the way of life they were accustomed to for generations is no longer the same. Demba explained that, “Many fishermen were complaining the other day, saying ‘If only we had large vessels like the Chinese, we would be rich’”. It was an interesting point made, but Demba detailed the lack of solidarity among his fellow fisherfolk, and fellow Gambians in general where he states, “Problem with our people is that we will undercut each other too much when they see others trying to do business... So we could not even build a private fishing industry up and have it organized like the Chinese do.” The root of this belief could be attributed to a cultural norm of a lack of trust for local businesses compared to a foreign business, where the foreign business is deemed “better”, and it could also be political where citizens are so used to the government acting on their own accord that they lack faith in being able to organize and function their industry in a professional manner like the Chinese companies. The hunger for more is evident, fisher folk like Demba are at a crossroads essentially where they see the only trade and industry they have known for their lives change in a matter of a decade. The industrialization of the fishing industry in the Gambia has been swift and it is trending towards a positive position economically in the international market for the country but at what cost.

After my interview at the Bakau market and port with Demba, I entered my taxi and directed him back to my residence. The taxi driver, named Alhaji, asked me why I was carrying around a notebook and what kind of notes I was jotting down in the car. I proceeded to explain the basis of my research and the experience I had at the market with Demba, and the

observations I collected while I was there. In only a matter of coincidence, it turned out that Alhaji was connected to the narrative I was gathering, and his life was also changed within the past ten years due to the shift in the Gambian fishing industry to an industrialized large scale fishing industry.

Alhaji comes from a fishing family which spans generations in the inner rural villages in The Gambia. Alhaji's trade as a taxi driver was a route he didn't prefer to take, but due to the lack of a steady income coming from the fishing industry anymore for small scale fisher folk like his family, he had to find a different means of providing for his family. Alhaji stated:

*“In my youth, my family fished with only nets and we caught a lot each day we would both sell and eat. We survived like that for my whole life until the large fishing vessels of the Chinese companies began to fish our waters.”*

He explained how their small boats could only go so far in the ocean before it becomes dangerous, so they have no chance to compete with the large fishing trawlers of the Chinese companies and get the same fish hauls they were accustomed to.

Alhaji expressed his feelings bluntly by stating:

*“With prices of fish so high now, I doubt my family and I will be able to afford to eat the fish we grew up enjoying. Maybe if I get it for free when I go to a rich person's home and they offer me a plate... The Chinese came in and changed everything for us, we cannot compete.”*



### *Tanji Market*

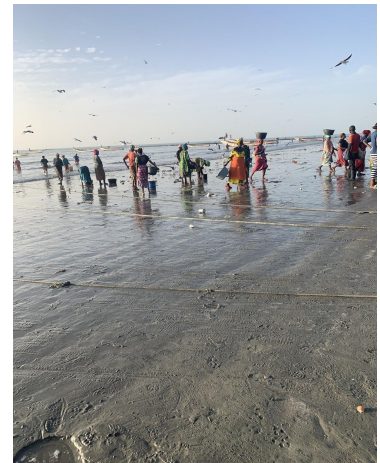
The Tanji market and sea port is a prime example of a rejuvenated and industrialized rural area as a result of the Chinese companies setting their base of operations nearby. Located about 40 miles southwest of the capital of Banjul, Tanji was known as a small fishing town where small-scale fishermen dominated the fishing market. The small-scale fishermen presence is still prevalent but there is a much larger player in the fishing industry now with the Chinese fishmeal trawlers roaming the waters in that region as well. As part of the “The Gambia National Development Plan 2018-2021”, the Gambian government has established a partnership with the private companies from China and as part of that partnership, the job opportunities for Gambians was one of the mandates.



Many of the locals in the area are employed in the fishing companies owned by Chinese private investors, and the majority of the fishermen hauling in fish everyday from their small vessels sell directly to the companies as well for prices such higher than the typical market value. This “gentrification” of the fish market has sparked a debate among the gambian community where there is the boat captain/merchant who can offload their hauls for larger profits at a quicker rate to the Chinese companies compared to selling it in the market and having uneven incomes every haul. The opposition to this is the consumer and

the market merchants who are not being sold the same fish for the same prices they are accustomed to because the vessel captains prefer to sell to the Chinese companies.

On January 15th 2020 I travelled to the Tanji market to meet with some fish merchants and explore the area and watch the shipping vessels come in for their last haul of the day. The logic behind each side taken in the state of the fishing industry in the country was revealed in one conversation I had with two fishing merchants in the market. The merchants engaged in a heated debate which revolved around a simple question I asked; “Do you think the Chinese presence in the Gambian fisheries industry is positive or negative?” On one end, a vessel captain and market merchant stated, “The Chinese are good for us, they are giving us many opportunities to make money and they are only making things better.” Almost immediately after that statement, Farba Sanneh, a fish dealer and veteran of the Tanji market for the past thirty years yelled:



*“You are a liar! Be honest and tell this kid the truth! You are only saying that because you own your business and they are making you money!”... “Let me tell you this, they are giving people money at the cost of making the merchants and small market workers become out of business, and they are taking more fish than they are reporting they are taking.”*

I asked Farba to explain that last statement he made and he stated:

*“There are Chinese trawlers that come at night when the market is closed and empty, they take so much fish at night that when we come in the morning our boats go and come without much fish, we cannot compete with that and it is hurting us”*

Some traders see the financial opportunities presented by the Chinese company's presence in their markets, and they want to exploit those opportunities by any means necessary. What Farba meant by “they are making you money” is that, to many merchants like the one he was debating with, they only care about the financial incentives involved with going into business with the Chinese companies, and they are ignorant to the impacts it has on the remainder of the market system. To most of the workers and merchants in the market, they depend on the hauls and business of seafood to provide for themselves and to maintain the economy of the community they are involved with, and that sense of community makes merchants such as Farba frustrated with the influx of competition by Chinese companies taking away capital and merchants from his community.

The grievances the merchants and fishermen in the Bakau Market, the Tanji market, and other markets in the country have against the Chinese presence in the Gambian fishing industry has been repetitive. The merchants do not have an issue with the government's agreements with the Chinese private investors who have brought their fishing trawlers and fishmeal factories to the country. They agree with the jobs they are providing to the Gambian people, and the opportunities they present to the fishermen to earn more income if they sell to them, going back to what Demba Jallow of the Bakau market stated, “Business is Business.” This issue is deeper rooted, it is both an anger towards the Gambian government as well as the reluctance of change

to an industry they have known for all their lives. That reluctance of change however will only make life harder because whether they like it or not, the fishing industry is rapidly evolving and it will not stop for anyone.

## **V. Research Question: True or False?**

Circling back to the research question which asks, How have Chinese investments impacted the fishing industry and locals' way of life in The Gambia? The data collected from my interviews with the P.S. of the Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources, the fisher folk in the major fishing markets and ports, and the Government development plans and agreements with the Chinese private investors has brought me to a conclusion which deviates away from my original hypothesis.

In my formulation of the research question, How have Chinese investments impacted the fishing industry and locals' way of life in The Gambia?, my mindset looked at the relationship as a negative and a typical case of neocolonialism in the modern era like many situations experienced in the African continent. However, that is not entirely the case, there are still elements of neocolonialism in this situation, but there are also major influences of creative destruction where the Gambian government is using their comparative advantage with their geographic location and robust aquatic life to modernize not only the Gambian fishing industry, but the Gambian society as well.

Opening up the Gambian markets, the fishing sector in this case, leads to the expedited modernization of an outdated and small-scale society which relies on their traditional knowledge

of fishing and business practices to control an industry which has so much more potential to drive the gambian economy towards new heights. The “power struggle” of sorts comes from the Gambian government’s new initiatives to exploit their comparative advantage and use of it to drive the Gambian economy and societies’ growth. The swiftness of this national development plan has created reluctance among the artisanal fishing community and they are no longer part of the same industry they have become accustomed to. History has proven that sudden change creates reluctance, and in the case of the Gambian fishing industry, the implementation of new mandates by the government, sharing the waters with the legislated industrial large scale fishing trawlers owned by Chinese companies, and the lack of real communication between the small-scale artisanal fishing community and the Gambian lawmakers has created what I classify as a hysteria.

Communication is the issue in the Gambian society. There is a lack of transparency in the Gambian government regarding their legislative actions and intentions. Simply publishing a national development plan stating the actions they intend to proceed with regarding foreign policy and partnerships with foreign entities is not enough, that confusion creates unnecessary tensions and resent from those being affected, especially when the confusion is misplaced. There must be a greater policy emphasis on communication and involving the community in their decisions in order to figure out what is best for everyone. The Gambian government is in control of the relationship with the Chinese fishing companies, and they have facilitated the changes to the fishing industry and trade market. As the “*The Gambia National Development Plan 2018-2021*” stated, there were mandates to be put in place to provide training to Gambian youths involved in the fishing sector, and that training was intended to inform them of the current

policies and structure the country wanted to achieve in the fishing industry, so that they could maximize the potential of not only the Gambian fishing industry, but also the Gambian fisherman in the modern era. The Gambian government created mandates extending to all of the foreign companies hoping to profit off of the Gambian fishing industry which included, having a certain percentage of Gambian fishermen on all foreign fishing vessels and those foreign companies must also aid in development of the surrounding areas, because the labor forces in these fishmeal factories will be local Gambians, and the companies have no choice but to take vested interest in the local community as they are the driving force behind the success of their business.

With this push towards innovation and inclusivity to the youths sector, and creating a business partnership for the future with the gambian fishing community, the losers in this situation will obviously be the older demographic of members of the fishing community. The older artisanal fishermen will not get the same attention and training in the new regulations and trade agreements with foreign companies as the younger and more educated fisherman the Gambian government wants to put in line to become a leader in the trade market for the country. In situations of “gentrification” it is always out with the old and in with the new. Every situation is not perfect and there will always be winners and losers, and in the situation of the fishing industry in The Gambia opening up to international markets, fisherfolk such as Farba Sanneh from the Tanji market and Demba Jallow from the Bakau market will “phase out” making room for the new and informed generation of the fishing industry in The Gambia will take over.

## **Conclusion**

Knowledge is the key to understanding in the world, without knowledge, people will shape their narratives to fit their belief systems in place. The intention of this research is to provide knowledge with perspective to allow the world to understand the China-Africa dynamic from the socio-economic point of view, and from the average Gambian's point of view. The narrative created by both the media and historical record is that African nations are susceptible to neocolonialism and there is always a situation regarding the African country being taken advantage of, but that is not the case. It is important to understand the role the Gambian government plays in facilitating the creative destruction of their fishing industry in order to transition into the modern era of international trade and maximizing the comparative advantage of their geographic location. There has been coverage on the political and economic situation in African nations such as the Gambia, but there has been a lack on the social perspective at the grassroots level, and how foreign intervention, China in this case, impacts their societal structures and ways of life.

Chinese investment has aided the Gambian society by providing new employment opportunities and training to Gambians, and it has also hurt those in the fishing industry who lack the knowledge and information on the new trade regulations structures put in place by the Gambian government. Empirically speaking, we now know that China's involvement in the fishing industry comes with many restrictions and guidelines in place, which is the case in Gambia, and the notion that a hegemonic power, like China, simply takes what they want in an African country without a fair return is not entirely true, and economic fairness plays a larger role in how business is conducted between both sides. There could be a great improvement in the

communication the Gambian government provides on the new programs and mandates they have in place to aid the fisherfolk of the country in attaining long term success. At the same time there could also be more emphasis on inclusion of the older and more experienced demographic in the fishing industry by the Gambian government and the Chinese private companies who are mass fishing with their large fishing trawlers. The Gambian fishing industry has operated the same way for generations, and the sudden changes to their livelihood by the government and chinese fishing companies will obviously create resentment from the masses in the nation. To ease that resentment there must be a greater emphasis on informing the nation, fisherfolk community specifically, on the long term vision the Gambian Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources and government sees their sector advancing towards, which is becoming a major contributor to the foreign seafood product trade market, and generating an economic stronghold for the country which will attract future investment and employment opportunities for the developing nation.

This research should serve as a reminder to pay attention to the grassroot levels of society to understand the reasoning behind tensions and disgruntled sentiments towards governments, and there should also be more of an emphasis on understanding the Government's perspective in situations surrounding why a nation is the way it is. The Chinese companies are not in The Gambia on a strictly neocolonialist level, instead they are in The Gambia on an investment level in partnership with the Gambian government to generate economic commerce and trade. When studying Chinese relationships with African countries, there must be a lack of bias and an openness when conducting research, because in my study I admittedly came in with a belief that Chinese companies were exploiting the country and the Gambian government was being taken advantage of, but I was wrong and there were actually many layers to the relationship. Having an



open mind while studying the China-Africa dynamic will enable you to gain information quicker, and it will allow you to gain your own opinions and theories clear of any “western” assumptions.

The new era of colonialism in Africa is led by China, and it is not the typical colonialism where there is a large disparity on who is benefitting the most from the situation, even though there are still elements of neocolonialism, it still doesn't outweigh the new partnerships being created on the continent, and the swift advances being made in the many industries, such as the Fisheries industry in The Gambia, and societies in the nation which is modernizing a developing continent at a quicker rate than in any era in history.

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### **Interviews Conducted**

- January 2nd, 2020: Permanent Secretary of the Fisheries and Water Resources Commission Dr. Bamba A.M. Banja
- January 7th, 2020: Fishing merchants from Serrekunda and Banjul markets
- January 8th, 2020: Fishing merchants from Gunjur fishing markets
- January 13th, 2020: Gambian taxi driver and former fishing merchant Alhaji
- January 13th, 2020: Bakau fishing market market manager Demba Jallow
- January 15th, 2020: Tanji fishing market merchants including Farba Sanneh (longtime merchant and fish dealer)

