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Scholars of the 21st Century have very well unfolded the chapter of colonialism and how the rise of colonialism swept most of the now developing countries. However, these days the focus shifts towards Asia and Africa who had been exploited in the past and the term coined for the present exploitation is what they call 'neo-colonialism.' Kwame Nkrumah is supposedly the first person to have used this term, in his book *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. But the study of neo-colonialism dates back to the time of Karl Marx when he identified class struggle across societal cleavages. Nkrumah says, "The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside." In a much simpler version, neo-colonialism has been defined as another form of colonialism where the present independent state remains dependent on their former colonial masters politically, economically and socially. Therefore, understanding the term requires in-depth research with certain examples.



Representation Image: Crowdh

The post-cold war period saw the emergence of a world hegemony, namely the United States hegemony. As a counterpart to this hegemony, China tried becoming the new face for world trade hegemony and the battle continues till date. Predictions have it that the rise of China will bring an end to the US unipolarity and dominance in matters of politics and trade. International Relation scholars have viewed this eventuality through two perspectives: one in its very obvious sense, the rise of China will lead to 'reorientation of the world' by the East and second, the overthrow of the US hegemon can simply mean the rise of Chinese hegemony, thereby putting a question of security to the international system. All these will definitely lead to a power transition, but the question does not lie in terms of power transition or overthrowing a growing hegemony. The question that needs an explanation here is what about the developing nations that have sought aid and how this exchange can be interpreted. The context of China and its development has time and again been linked to 'strategies' in capturing areas in the name of 'neo-colonialism'. The debate goes around Chinese investments and foreign aids as a way of being a 'neo-colonial' leader in the African and Asian regions.

Focusing first on the African region, the area has always been under exploitation since the colonial masters realised the value of the territory and also the strategic location. Africa was left with a legacy of imperialism and it became difficult in determining the path towards development and modernization. Sources from 'Harvard Politics' have mentioned that the path for modernization was chosen through financial aids and assistance from foreign societies who have contributed to around [\\$300 billion](#) since 1970. But this constant dependence on foreign countries for aid and the growing power of multinational cooperations directs the perspective towards neo-colonialism. Taking the recent example of the 'Belt and Road Initiative' a step taken by China in enhancing the trade and connectivity of Asia and Africa, it aims to [connect 65 countries](#) accounting for over 30% in the global GDP with a 62% of population in the concerned areas and contains 75% of the known energy sources. [The statistics provided by a World Bank report](#) which also highlights that the BRI will not only act as means of connectivity simultaneously will also change the existing trade routes and major trade powers. China has emerged as the largest investor for almost all African countries and the impact of such investments have been when [South Africa did not allow the Dalai Lama](#) to visit the country. The present era of globalization, which undoubtedly have brought world economies closer is now being scrutinized under the light of 'a corridor to neo-colonialism' with cultural subjugation. Africa can be seen locked up in between three dominant world powers; Europe, America and China, of which China has emerged the leader in increasing its home economy by channelizing local African companies to work for the new 'imperial.' The value of trade between China and Africa has amounted to [\\$200 billion back in 2014](#) and the numbers just seem to be ever growing. It has projected to amount to 25% of global power energy but is motivated by Beijing's resource extraction. Though the states of Africa have attained political freedom, economic and cultural freedom still lies with the world superpower.

Moving to Asia, another continent which had been a victim of colonialism is now being evaluated on its performance from being free from actual 'colonialism.' [The Financial Times](#) in a report released in May 2018 states that China is slowly emerging as the dominant economy in the whole South East Asia. Chinese military in the South China Sea is a global statement over a territorial dispute and it is very distinctive that although European, Korean, Japanese economies operate in the region, Chinese investments in the last decade have gone up and it is steadily increasing the investments too. In terms of infrastructure, the [Heritage Foundation's Chinese Global Investment Tracker \(CGIT\)](#) the construction projects are taken by China in the region amounts to \$100 million. The investment has gone from \$5.68 billion in 2005 to \$38.01 billion in 2017. Asia has attracted China mainly for its energy sources, and the investments amount to 38.4%, 60.4%, 93.8% and 47.3% for Southeast Asia, Western Asia, Central Asia and Southern Asia, respectively.

Last year, China was criticized for the BRI as well the development that took place in Sri Lanka when massive lands of the [Colombo port were given to Chinese multinationals](#). The scholars relate that this kind of behaviour very closely resembles the European colonialism. The tourism industry in the ASEAN region is also dominated by Beijing and is exerting great pressure on local political and cultural dynamics. Also, these investments are putting some countries in debt with Chinese soil and depleting national treasures.

These were some facts backed by data which directs towards Chinese neo-colonialism, however, some still argue that such investments should not be viewed under the light of such 'scrutiny.' Scholars have it that in the case for Africa, it needs to depend on China for development as that's the way only through which the country would be able to attain its political and cultural identity. Backing this statement, there have been instances where Africa has ignored modernization and therefore the way to push the country towards it would only be possible if the economy opens up for new opportunities and programmes. Zambia is a classic example of understanding the African-Chinese relation, as even after repeated implantation of labour laws, the country continues to be one of the richest in the African continent. The BRI is also about to change the face of trade as economists have it, but the entire model needs slight reforms. As for Asia, particularly India the dominance is yet settling in and the aspect of neo-colonialism hasn't yet been properly channelized into view, as most of the countries in Asia are still undergoing major changes in 'state structures.' The blame cannot be put to Beijing as these channels help in the internal movement of goods and trade, a positive for any developing country. Moreover, the point of national treasures is tackled as many thinkers have pointed out that the countries aren't forced to sign up for these projects which include massive funds. There has to be a two-way benefit and that's how trade happens in the 21st-century globalised world.

The whole debate goes on as the concept of neo-colonialism is a new subfield of study, demanding more experiments backed by facts and value.

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