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Sino-Ghana bilateral relations and Chinese migrants' illegal gold mining in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the participation of some Chinese migrants in illegal gold mining (known as galamsey) in Ghana, and how the Government's policy to address the issue created diplomatic tension between China and Ghana. Drawing on primary data from in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 250 respondents and supplementary information from archival sources and personal observation, the study found that small-scale gold mining is an area legally reserved for Ghanaian indigenes, who faced stern competition from some Chinese migrants' miners. Their ability to mobilize resources and machinery to execute galamsey virtually displaced the indigenes from their source of livelihood and caused environmental catastrophes. The Ghana Government's policy response to the Chinese migrants' galamsey, which led to arrests, sentencing and deportations of some Chinese miners, angered Beijing and fractured Ghana–China diplomatic ties. But the dispute could not collapse the entrenched bilateral relations between the two nations because the calculated mutual benefit derived from the relations was thought to be higher than the Chinese galamsey issue. Policy reforms which legally integrate Chinese migrants' miners into the small-scale mining sector would stop galamsey and strengthen Sino-Ghana relations.

KEYWORDS

Chinese Migrants; Illegal Gold Mining/Galamsey; Bilateral/Diplomatic Relations; South–South Cooperation; Ghana

Introduction

China has always had constructive diplomatic and economic relations with Ghana. Post-independence ties between the two nations have evolved from a political ideological one to economic cooperation (Aidoo, 2016). The beginning of China–Ghana friendship was constructed on the Socialist framework forged by the first-generation leaders of China and Ghana – Zhou Enlai and Kwame Nkrumah, respectively. In the search for the Socialist solution to his grandiose development programmes, Nkrumah embarked on a momentous state visit to China in 1961, which was reciprocated by Zhou in 1964. Ghana was one of the countries that rallied support for China's bid to join the United Nations. Inspired by the South–South cooperation agenda, China offered a \$20 million interest-free loan repayable in Ghanaian exports to support Nkrumah's statist development agenda (Thompson, 2012). Since the end of the Cold War, Ghana has benefited from Chinese's direct investments. For instance, in 2012, China granted a whopping \$3 billion low-

interest loan to Ghana, which the Ghana Government described as a gesture of friendship (Aidoo, 2016; Sanderson & Forsyth, 2013). Bilateral trade between the two nations as of 2012 stood at \$5.4 billion. Of this, Ghana's exports to China were 77.2% (Jianzhong, 2013). Chinese's investments have led to the successful implementation of key projects such as the Cape Coast Sports Stadium, the Bui Hydro-electric Dam, the Kpong Water Supply Expansion Project, the Gas Pipeline Project and the Sunon-Asogli Power Plant (Idun-Arkhurst, 2008).

While recognizing that the encouraging efforts made by Chinese companies to direct equity into some businesses in Ghana have propelled relative economic growth based on a win-win paradigm, some critics of Sino-Africa relations have raised concerns about China's economic activities on the continent such as the 'appetizing' loans that are perceived as potential recipes for deepening the debt burdens of poor countries (Bräutigam, 2011) and the fact that most Chinese investments are small to medium-sized (Aidoo, 2016; *The Guardian*, 2017). Also, there is the perception that the large Chinese businesses and small-scale private actors interacting with Ghanaian business counterparts and population at various levels diversely serve as agents or actors of Beijing's foreign policy agenda (Aidoo, 2016). Others have argued that, when examined closely, the benefits from complementary economic contributions by Beijing have been largely supplanted by the competition with local businesses for the capture of the indigenous retail market (Baah & Jauch, 2009). However, it must be emphasized that the focus of this article is not directed at claims about whether China is in Ghana to exploit its rich natural resources and Western media stereotypes such as land grabbing and empire building (Bräutigam, 2011); neither is it about the role of Chinese's migrants in the agri-food sector – agricultural aid (Cook, Lu, Tugendhat, & Alemu, 2016), nor the rising Chinese trade and aid flows to the continent. It also gazes beyond anecdotal studies on the galamsey – unregulated artisanal gold mining crisis in Ghana that vaguely put the blame on the role of local actors and the persecutions of Chinese migrant miners (Aidoo, 2016; Asante, 2018). On the contrary, this article examines the Ghana government's policy intervention to halt activities of some Chinese migrants involved in galamsey, which created a diplomatic rumpus between the two nations and its ramification on Sino-Ghana diplomatic and economic relations. It contends that the targeted anti-galamsey policy could not destroy Sino-Ghana relations that are deeply anchored on mutual trust, respect and South-South and win-win economic cooperation. Against this backdrop, the article addresses these empirical questions: (i) to what extent have some Chinese migrants participated in illegal gold mining in Ghana? What policy measures did the Government of Ghana adopt to halt the galamsey menace? How did the reaction by the Chinese Government to Ghana's anti-galamsey policy affect relations between the two countries? Why has China-Ghana friendship endured, and what hat lessons have been learnt from galamsey and China's economic activities in Africa?

The paper is structured as follows: this introduction is followed by an examination of the theoretical foundation of bilateral relations and the historical trajectories, legal regime and the actors in order to comprehend how galamsey has evolved. It analyses the Government's policy intervention to halt the galamsey menace, China's response to the policy and its effects on the two nations' relations, and explains why Sino-Ghana bilateral relations remained consolidated despite the diplomatic roar. It concludes by drawing lessons for the rest of Africa.

The theoretical and empirical literature on Sino-Africa relations

The literature on Sino-Africa relations is replete with competing perspectives on why China has increased its presence in Africa. Each of these strands sheds light on the question of why foreign actors such as China tend to influence other nations through investments and other forms of economic activities and forge bilateral relations. For instance, according to the Realists, governments are not charitable institutions but rather strategic-minded entities that act in line with their national interests. Realism argues that national interests dominate decision-making in countries and foreign aid, for instance, is dependent on donor interests (Morgenthau, 1962). The Realists believe that the international system is largely characterized by stern competition, and states act out of the desire for power and security. Neo-realists would even argue that states' economic conditions in the global balance are just as important as traditional security arenas. Therefore, neo-realists regard foreign assistance/aid, for instance, as a tool to ensure the longevity of donors' influence. For instance, they contend that all types of humanitarian aid are political because it provides channels for donor countries to gain political advantage over the recipient ones. Liska (1960) has suggested that foreign investment can advance the donor country's position by consolidating a friendly regime's legitimacy, increase the donor's access to resources and expand the donor's influence over recipient countries. On the basis of this, dependency theorists contend that countries such as Ghana are unable to exert influence over their own economic decisions because the system dictates that they export natural resources to the powerful countries such as China (Krasner, 1985). Therefore, Chinese investments and trade deals in Africa are often regarded as being detrimental to the continent's growth and development (French, 2014). China's trade deals are perceived as forms of 'neocolonialism', and China is the new 'imperial power' in Africa. Hence, the expression, the 'Chinese are coming' has become a derogatory remark to describe Chinese investments in Africa (*The Economist*, 2011, p. 1).

However, when China's role in Ghana is closely examined, it might not fit into the ideological debates enumerated above. A more optimistic view that is often cited to justify foreign assistance and formation of bilateral relations is the 'technique of statecraft' paradigm (Baldwin, 1966, p. 3). This means that wealthy nations administer assistance to needy countries to promote their foreign policy objectives: Thus Chinese's investment model in Ghana may be rooted in 'South-South', 'win-win' and 'mutually beneficial' development deals fostering self-reliant development among low-income countries (Asante, 2018). Therefore, it is the case that China is helping Africa to develop through their aid project. For instance, between 1956 and 2006, China gave more than \$5 billion for 800 aid projects in Africa (Burgis & Wallis, 2010; Thompson, 2012). This perspective holds that Chinese investments and trade deals with Africa have contributed to economic development. Jayaram, Kassiri, and Yuan Sun (2017) indicated that Chinese investments in Africa have led to job creation, skills development, and the transfer of new technologies – albeit inadequate – and practices generally associated with Western business norms. Also, the Idealist School views foreign aid as humanitarian service – based on ethical concerns. Therefore, cooperation among nations such as China and Ghana (China-Ghana) is devoid of competition, conflict and the 'we or they' structure (Zafar, 2007). Cook et al. (2016), for instance, believe that China's support system has contributed to 'creative peace'. For instance, a growing feature of China-Africa relation is the

phenomenal holding of political consultations between Chinese and African leaders at the United Nations. Indeed, China has recently not only completed the construction of the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa but also increased its troop contributions to United Nation peacekeeping forces in Africa. Therefore China–Ghana bilateral relations may be one of the ways of promoting mutually beneficial development initiatives.

The methodological imperative

Data for this study depended largely on in-depth interviews and information gathered from 10 communities in six regions of Ghana from June 2016 to December 2018. The regions and communities were: Eastern (Kyebi & Anyinam), Central (Dunkwa-on-Offin & Beposo), Western (Tarkwa-Nsuaem & Prestea Huni-Valley), Ashanti (Obuasi & Konongo) and Brong Ahafo (Kenyase & Hweddiem). These communities are well-known mining hubs where large companies have extracted gold for many years and where fairly recently both locals and foreigners including some Chinese migrants have mined gold. The study deployed this qualitative method in order to deal with the interactions among the different actors whose interests and perspectives have shaped the galamsey phenomenon and impacted Sino-Ghana relations. The method allowed the researchers to witness the arrests, trials and deportations of some Chinese illegal miners and engage the illegal miners and state officials in close conversations to gain insight into the Chinese migrants involved in illegal mining.

The primary information was obtained through face-to-face interviews using unstructured questions on 250 participants chosen through the purposive and snowballing approaches as well as the direct observation of events and processes involving some Chinese migrants' galamsey activities, and Ghana Government and Chinese officials' respective responses to the issue. There were two principal groups of respondents. The first key informants comprised officers from some state institutions and other individuals, namely 10 each from Immigration, Police, Armed Forces, Attorney-General's Department (AGD), Members of Parliament (MPs), Ministers, District Chief Executives (DCEs), Assembly Members, civil society activists, media anchors, and chiefs or their representatives, as well as five Chinese officials at the Accra Embassy. This group of interviewees were chosen through the purposive method because of their comprehensive knowledge, understanding and association with the galamsey issue, while the MPs/Ministers participated in anti-galamsey policy-making, the Police, Army, AGD and Immigration officers were in charge of its enforcement/implementation (arrest, prosecutions and deportations of the Chinese illegal gold miners), the media anchors and civil society activists who mobilized public opinion against galamsey, the DCEs/Assembly Members are responsible for local government administration of the study areas and chiefs are the rulers and custodians of lands in the mining communities.

The second group of informants included 75 indigenes who have been operating small-scale gold mining for many years and 60 Chinese illegal miners whose galamsey activities peaked in 2016 and drew government and public resentment. These respondents were reached through a snowball sampling technique that involved making contacts with key respondents who, in turn, provided lead information about next contacts. This method was extremely helpful given the sensitive nature of illegal gold mining, the political controversies associated with it and the general public reaction to it. The application of this

technique ensured that the respondents' anonymity was safeguarded by holding their identity confidential. In particular, the Chinese were more concerned about possible arrests if their real identities were divulged to the state operatives involved in clamping down on their galamsey activities. Even some state officials and chiefs expressed concern about their safety in the communities if it was discovered by the local illegal miners that they had disclosed information about their activities to outsiders.

The primary information gathered through interviews and observation was complemented with secondary sources from a review of the literature retrieved from books, published/unpublished reports, journal articles, newspapers and internet publications on the salient subject of Sino-Africa relations, and some Chinese migrants' galamsey activities. These secondary data were triangulated with transcripts and notes collected from the field (through interviews and observation) and subjected to content and thematic analysis. This approach allowed for data structuring for clarity of the ideas and examination of participants' perspectives and insight of the hidden similarities and differences in their opinions (Nowell, Norris, White, & Deborah, 2017).

History and regulatory framework of gold mining in Ghana

This section examines the trajectories and the legal regime of the gold mining industry in order to understand the nature and dynamics of the galamsey issue. It notes that legitimate gold mining has been executed on two fronts, namely indigenous small-scale mining and mechanized mining on large scale by foreign companies. Evidence from interviews attests to the fact that gold mining has been one of the most important economic activities in Ghana since time immemorial even though the extraction of the mineral on large commercial scale is fairly recent. Early scholars observed that 'gold mining had been carried out by the natives for thousands of years long before the Phoenicians landed on the Guinea Coast of West Africa' (Arhin, 1970; Balkema & Junner, 1973; Kesse, 1985). Scholarly accounts indicate that throughout the history of mining, small-scale gold mining has been reserved for the indigenes (Aidoo, 2016; Arhin, 1970). For a long time, Ghanaians have legitimately mined gold and other minerals on their farmlands and compounds (Interview, Chiefs, Obuasi & Kyebi, July 2017). They had also procured gold from streams, rivers and coastal gravel and sand, and dredged and dived riverbeds to extract gold before pit-mining was introduced (Taylor, 2006). Arhin (1970) has observed that pre-colonial gold mining was controlled by chiefs – the spiritual and political heads of the communities. The indigenes mined and used gold for ceremonial and ornamental purposes. Chiefs and family heads that controlled gold mines used slave labour. However, when it became a valuable means of exchange, wealth accumulation and a source of power, other non-family members contracted on the 'abusa' system were brought into it (LaTorre, 1978). Dumett (1998) reported that in the Asante kingdom, the Asantehene granted permission to private persons to undertake gold production. He ensured that a certain size of gold-nuggets found on any part of his empire was first sent to the monarch who retained a proportion and then returned some to the sub-chief and miner who discovered them (LaTorre, 1978, p. 63). However, the arrival of the Portuguese around the fifteenth century changed the nature and playing field of gold mining in the then Gold Coast. After discovering a large gold deposit between the Ankobra and Volta rivers, which they named Mina (mine), an effort was made to organize gold into a lucrative

business. Trade forts and castles, which were built on the coasts to establish permanent trading links with Europe, also aimed to exploit gold in the Gold Coast. For instance, the building of the Elmina, Komenda and Axim castles and forts by the Portuguese, Dutch, Danes and later the British to trade in slaves also helped consolidate the gold business. Profits from gold and other merchandise from West Africa flew to Europe for their state-building projects, which also created the economic foundation for colonial rule in the nineteenth century (Balkema & Junner, 1973).

Thus the indigenous gold business which was largely sustained through rudimentary technology organized under the tutelage of the paramount chief of a locality was to be supplanted by British concessioners who trooped to the land of gold.

By 1874, when it became evident to the British colonial government that a more direct access to gold mining areas was a possibility, it gave official backing to gold exploration in the Gold Coast. This led to the gold rush in the Gold Coast. While the initial 'Jungle Boom' was modest because dense forests and local chiefs' unwillingness to open their areas to a deluge of foreign fortune hunters impeded easy access, British newspapers, industrial and geographical journals reporting about the potential of gold in Gold Coast brought large companies into the mining sector. Between 1878 and 1883 close to 25 companies were formed to mine gold in the Gold Coast (Rosenblum, 1973). The colonial government initiated regulations to govern mining in the country through the granting of concession permits. One of the earliest companies to mine gold in the colony was Ashanti Goldfields Company (AGC), which was incorporated in London on 25 May 1897. It began underground mining in 1907 at Obuasi. When Lonrho assumed ownership of AGC in 1969 after acquiring majority equity share in the company, it launched a capital-intensive mechanisation programme to increase production targets to about 650,000 oz per year. However, it later faced operational difficulties that compelled it to reduce its staffing from approximately 10,000 to less than 6600 in 2003. This led the company to switch from surface to underground operation (Taylor, 2006). In April 2004, it merged with AngloGold to form AngloGold Ashanti. Newmont-Ghana joined the gold mining fraternity in 2006, and operated surface gold mining in nine communities in the Brong Ahafo Region until 2016 when it shifted to underground mineralization.

Ghana's mining sector is bifurcated into formal and informal components. While the former is duly regulated by legislation, the latter is largely unregulated and has become susceptible to both indigenous and foreigners' predatory activities. Yet, over the years, Ghana's mining sector has undergone legislative restructuring as part of the institutional renewal programme of post-structural adjustment economic reforms to promote sustainable environment, value for money, and more importantly, to discourage illegal mining activities (Interviews, MPs, Accra, May 2017). To this end, the Minerals and Mining Law 1986 (PNDCL.153); Small Scale Gold Mining Law, 1989 PNDCL.218 and Minerals and Mining (Amendment) Act 1994 (Act 475) were replaced by the Minerals and Mining Act of 2006 (Act 703). This Act mandated licensed miners to adopt effective and efficient methods that are compatible with good mining practices (safety rules) and protection of the environment such as refilling of degraded lands (Republic of Ghana, 2006). Despite these efforts, some large companies with permits to mine gold have not wholly complied with environmental safety measures, and their negligence has led to sporadic spillages of harmful chemicals and pollution of water bodies. In many instances, chiefs and opinion leaders in the mining communities have raised red flags about

environmental challenges from the activities of big and licensed mining companies such as AngloGold Ashanti and Newmont-Ghana. These notwithstanding, it is the activities of small-scale illegal gold miners (the informal side) that have received the most media/public and government condemnation (Interviews, Anonymous illegal gold miner, Study Area, June 2017).

Actors and the rationale for engaging in illegal gold mining

This section identifies the actors involved in gamamsey and examines their *raison d'être* for engaging in it. It is now clear that the actors involved in illegal gold mining in Ghana are complex even though, generally, the two distinguishable perpetrators are indigenes and foreigners. It is estimated that a significant proportion of Ghanaians in the mining enclaves engage in gamamsey. In the mining communities, some indigenes with connection to the local governance system have either engaged directly in illegal gold mining or colluded with others to partake in it. For instance, Aidoo (2016) noted that the gamamsey discourse has overlooked the preponderant role played by local and traditional political forces and actors such as the constitutionally non-partisan local chiefs, district assembly members and community leaders that have served as conduits between the 'corridors of power' and local people. Also, evidence gathered from the study areas indicates that the local youth age between 18 and 35 years have found illegal gold mining a lucrative venture – it is the principal source of livelihood for them (Interview, Chiefs and Youth, Tarkwa-Nsuaem, May 2017).

A salient factor that has stimulated the surge in gamamsey by the local people is the lack of formal employment opportunities in the country. According to some local opinion leaders, 'the absence of job facilities in most towns, cities and villages in Ghana has forced a large number of the idled youths into gamamsey' (Interviews, Chiefs and Assembly Members, Study Communities, November 2018). Thus, in several mining communities, 'a large number of unemployed youths who feel betrayed by the state's inability to provide them with jobs in the formal sector have thronged to the small-scale illegal gold mining arena' (Interview, Chiefs and Local Illegal Miners, Study Communities, August 2017). The lack of employment for the youth, in particular, has been linked to the implementation of Western-led economic reforms in the early 1990s – public sector restructuring – downsizing of the state job market, which led to loss of employment, thereby driving many of the jobless local population to the unregulated small-scale illegal gold mining sector. The view of one prominent chief captured the situation more succinctly, 'in the name of economic reforms, people were thrown out of jobs ... and frustrated by the sudden loss of jobs, these people who needed to survive the economic hardships have turned to gamamsey' (Interview, Chiefs, September 2017). For instance, since Ghana signed on to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) recapitalization facility in 2016, the corridors to employment in state institutions were closed to most educated youths and young adults – a move that triggered a rise in gamamsey activities (Interview, MPs Accra, June, 2017).

Another factor closely connected to the unemployment issue is poverty. The World Bank (2005, p. 2) admits that 'small-scale mining is largely a poverty-driven activity, typically practiced in the poorest and most remote rural areas of a country by a largely itinerant, poorly educated populace with few employment alternatives'. In a country where

poverty levels are moderately high, those who find themselves below the poverty line have turned to the unregulated small-scale mining arena to look for livelihoods (Interviews, Youths, Study Area, October 2017). Poor economic conditions in the country such as high inflation and prices of goods that have compounded the plight of both low-income public and private sector workers has contributed to the rise of illegal mining activities. Unable to pay their medical, water and electricity bills, the low-income earners have supplemented their meager salaries through *galamsey* operations (Interview, MPs, Youths and Chiefs, Accra, June 2017). Given that a significant proportion of the local miners operate without the requisite legal permit, their activities have partly contributed to the destruction of the natural environment (Interview, Member of Parliament and DCE, Study Area, January 2017). This is because, according to some respondents, 'the local miners have shifted from the use of rudimentary tools such as pickaxes, pans and shovels to carry out surface mining to applications of modern technologies including gold extraction with mercury in rivers' (Interview, MP and DCE, Study Area, January 2017).

Even though small-scale gold mining is an area reserved for indigenes, the sector has been invaded by other foreign nationals. Over the past decades, the involvement of foreign miners operating *galamsey* has surged due to three inter-related factors: first, the passage of the Small-Scale Mining Law, PNDC Law 218 which opened up the mining space for private participation; second, the high value and price of gold on the world market particularly from 2008; and third, the absence of a definite and well-thought-out policy on how, where and when to mine the phenomenally large gold deposits in the country – that stretch from the coastal regions to northern Ghana – in other words, a weak regulatory framework and enforcement regime (Interviews, Study Areas, June–December 2017). According to Aidoo (2016, p. 50), 'He Wenping, the Director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences believes that, low-level Ghanaian officials and businessmen have contributed to the nebulous nature of the legal perceptions of *galamsey*' ... Many miners (Chinese miners) are not clear about Ghana laws since there are middlemen who bring them over and help them sign contracts to do *galamsey*' (Bloomberg News, 2015, p. 1). The latter factor, in particular, has aided the entry of foreigners from neighbouring and far-away countries to engage in *galamsey*. Two categories of foreigners have participated in *galamsey*: first, a Ghana Chamber of Mines report established the prevalence of foreigners from diverse nationalities such as Togolese, Malians and Burkinabe, and those of Middle East, Europe and North African origin. For instance, among the 29 foreigners arrested on *galamsey* offences in the Eastern Region were Togolese, Burkinabe, Malian, Russian and Ukrainian nationals (Myjoyonline, 2017).

Second, recent studies on foreigners' participation in *galamsey* have uncovered the active role of some Chinese migrants – they have been found to be the dominant non-indigenous group involved in *galamsey* (Aidoo, 2016; Asante, 2018; Sanderson & Forsyth, 2013). The researchers found that some Chinese migrants, largely from Shanglin County in Guangxi Province, have settled in predominantly gold mining communities (the study areas). Also, Burrows and Bird's (2017, p. 3) earlier study revealed how some Chinese's migrants have integrated into the host (mining) communities to the extent that television advertisements, signposts and soap operas in the restaurants are in Chinese language because a number of Ghanaians in the area have become proficient in Mandarin. The participation of some of the Chinese migrants in *galamsey* is complex:

first, Burrows and Bird (2017, p. 3) reported that some of them are ‘highly organized with one Chinese illegal gold miner kingpin employing over 300 Chinese migrants. Second, some Chinese companies would register with Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) in order to obtain a license to do business, usually in the construction sector and then connive with some Ghanaians to divert to the small-scale illegal mining area (Interview, Immigration Officers, Accra, July 2017). Funds from China are then applied to strengthen the capacity of the illegal gold miners (Aidoo, 2016). There is a widespread belief among Ghanaian illegal gold miners that the ability of some Chinese migrants to mobilize funds to procure sophisticated mining machinery has enhanced their deep penetration and domination of the galamsey (Interview, Youth, Study Area, March 2017).

But not all are involved in galamsey: in other words, a number of Chinese migrants are genuine business operatives legally admitted into the country. For instance, ‘the execution of the numerous contracts granted to Chinese companies necessitated the recruitment of Chinese artisans and technicians into the country with work permits’ (Interview, Immigration Officers and MPs, Accra, June 2017). According to Baah and Jauch (2009), 150 of the 230 workforce employed on the Esipong stadium at Sekondi-Takoradi, and a majority of the workers for the Bui hydroelectric project were brought from China and given work permits. Also, a handful of Chinese are engaged in the formal sector as academic instructors, diplomats and businessmen in the telecommunication industry (Idun-Arkhurst, 2008). The Ghanaian media has estimated that there are over 40,000 Chinese resident migrants in the country even though the data on the number of Chinese migrants in Ghana are often in dispute – for instance, Marfaing and Thiel (2011) put the figure in the range of 10,000–16,000 and Mohan, Lampert, Tan-Mullins, and Chang (2014, pp. 20–21) quoted between 7000 and 20,000 but the Chinese media estimates the ‘Shanglin gang’ working in the mining industry in Ghana to be 50,000 (South China Morning Post, 2013, p. 1). These studies indicated that out of the estimated 40,000 Chinese migrants in the country, 30,000 are engaged in galamsey (Aidoo, 2016; Crawford, Agyeyomah, Botchwey, & Mba, 2016; Sanderson & Forsyth, 2013). However, the continuing arrests of more illegal Chinese gold miners from March 2013 to February 2019 are suggestive of relatively high number of Chinese migrants’ presence at galamsey sites (Interviews, MPs, Accra, October 2017).

The effects of some Chinese migrants’ galamsey activities

Despite its illegality, galamsey is a flourishing business, which constitutes a significant part of the informal sector of the Ghanaian economy. The general opinion indicates that it makes a contribution to the overall growth in the gross national product of the economy (Interview, MPs, Accra, June 2016). Also, of the estimated 7000 direct and 3.1 million indirect jobs the mining sector creates, galamsey sustains over 2.9 million employments (Interview, Civil Society Activists, Accra, February 2017). However, there is a growing concern that the illegal small-scale gold mining perpetrated by some Chinese migrants, which peaked in 2016, has caused environmental catastrophes in the mining communities even though activities of some licensed mining companies and locals have also caused havocs. Some respondents indicated that ‘the introduction of sophisticated mining equipment such as excavators, crushing machines/changfa, water platforms and suction for mining in rivers by some Chinese illegal miners has hurried the destruction

of the environment' (Interview, Civil Society Activists, Media Anchors, Study Areas, March 2017). The adoption of new mining methods by some of the Chinese migrants such as the use of excavators for dredging and the application of mercury and cyanide have polluted such rivers as the Ankobra, Pra, Offin and Birim that have served as main sources of drinking water for communities in the study area. Some interviewees believed that 'the contamination of water bodies with harmful chemicals may be directly or indirectly linked to the many deaths and other injuries from collapsed pits in the affected communities even though this claim is not supported by authentic medical data' (Interview, Media Anchors & Chiefs, February 2017). The destruction of forests and vegetation by some Chinese illegal miners has obstructed rural farming; the fear of slipping into a mining pit has driven many subsistence farmers from their cherished profession, thereby causing frequent shortages of food stuffs and general disappointment for the loss of livelihoods in the mining communities' (Interview, Chief & Farmer, February 2017).

The social cost of galamsey aside, its economic risk has proven to be detrimental to the country's nascent economy, which relies on foreign exchange from gold. Disclosure by some state officials shows that 'galamsey has led to revenue losses because the business is concealed in secrecy due to its illegality' (Interview, MPs, Accra, March 2017). For instance, the government reported that 'in 2016 alone, about \$2.3 billion worth of gold was smuggled out of Ghana, mostly to China and India without payment of the required taxes' (Interview, MPs, Accra, March 2017). Thus many foreign actors in the galamsey sub-sector, notably Chinese illegal miners, have repatriated their accumulated profits outside the country thereby deepening capital flight (South China Morning Post, 2013) – one of the factors hurting the economy even though some Chinese migrants' investments in galamsey have produced spillover effects for other business-related activities such as petty-trading, socialization and cultural integration (Interview, MPs & Chief, Study Area, February 2017).

A corollary to some Chinese migrants' galamsey activities was the spontaneous rise in anti-Chinese sentiments in some of the mining communities. Two factors precipitated the hiked hatred against them. First, 'the local youth face excessive competition from some Chinese migrants over galamsey rush – the charge widely circulated in the mining communities is that some Chinese migrants with more resourced have displaced the indigenes/locals from their traditional galamsey business' (Interview, Chiefs and local Youth, Study Areas, June 2017). Second, some local miners had become 'jealous of the relatively rich Chinese migrants involved in galamsey' and accused them of exploiting their resources, even though the charge could not be corroborated by evidence from the field (Interview, Chinese Miners, Study Areas, June 2017). The anti-Chinese hatred became intense to the extent that 'organized local gangsters fomented criminal attacks on the Chinese migrants in the mining communities, which provoked self-defence actions by the latter' (Interview, Chinese Officials & Illegal Miners, Police Officer, Study Areas, August 2017).

Government's policy intervention against galamsey

What policy measures did the Ghana government adopt to deal with galamsey? How did they affect the Chinese illegal miners? Successive governments have devised varying

methods to tackle illegal gold mining. The earliest attempt was an appeal to legislation (Interview, MPs, Accra, July 2016). The thinking at the time was that ‘there were loopholes in the mineral laws that ought to be sealed through legislative amendments’ (Interview, MP, Accra, August 2016). Consequently, in 2015, the government introduced the Minerals and Mining (Amendment) Act 900 that altered the Minerals and Mining Act 703, 2006, based on the assumption that ‘the change would sharpen the punitive sections of the Act’ (Interview, MP, Accra, July 2016). The new law criminalized all illegal small-scale mining. It also made foreigners’ engagements in galamsey as well as Ghanaians who collude with non-citizens to participate in artisanal mining a criminal offence. The law empowered the courts to impose fines, confiscate assets, machinery and any mineral extracted by foreign nationals through illegal means. Under Act 900, Ghanaians found guilty of carrying out galamsey would receive a sentence of a fine ranging between ||GH¢ 2,000/(\$442)–GH¢ 20,000/(\$4420) or imprisonment up to 10 years, and GH¢30,000/(\$6,630)–GH¢300,000/(\$66,297) or imprisonment for a period of 20 years in the case of foreigners (Republic of Ghana, 2015, p. 4). The fines derived from the prosecutions of illegal miners were to be appropriated to offset the cost of restoring the environment (Interview, Minister, Accra, July 2016). Evidence gathered from the police and AGD revealed a series of prosecutions of many Chinese illegal gold miners (see [Table 1](#)): for instance, in April 2017, a High Court at Sekondi ordered the seizure of ‘water-homes’ and other equipment on the River Ankobra built and used by Chinese illegal miners. The prosecutor told the court that the well-built ‘water-homes’ also referred to as ‘Chinese FPSO’ by the local people, was a ‘floating structure with toilet facility, tent for sleeping, and mosquito nets to protect the miners from insects. In the preliminary trial, the court remanded five Chinese illegal miners in police custody’ (Daily Guide, 2017, p. 1). Despite this, the legal penalty was not enough of a deterrent to halt their galamsey: for instance, in September 2017, ‘four Chinese nationals who were granted bail by a Cape Coast Court appeared before the same court three days later for the same offence because they paid the fines with little difficulty’ (Interview, Media Anchors, Accra, December 2017) even though the combined effects of the legislation and judicial actions lowered the intensity of galamsey.

The taskforce strategy

Despite ‘invoking the law and judiciary/courts to create restore sanity in the mining sector such as the creation of “fear and panic” among galamsey operators, the measure used could not yield the desired outcome – some of the Chinese migrants persisted in their illegal gold mining business’ (Interview, MP/Minister, Accra, March 2017). A taskforce approach was therefore hailed as ‘a bold step towards the fight against some Chinese migrants’ galamsey aggression’ (Interviews, DCEs & Assembly Members, Study Area, February 2017). Two sets of taskforce were inaugurated: the first was a five-member high-powered Inter-Ministerial Taskforce created in March 2013 by President John Mahama with a charge to end galamsey. This taskforce had the power of arrest and prosecution of illegal miners, seizure of mining equipment, and revocation of licenses of Ghanaian miners who had colluded with some Chinese migrants to carry out galamsey. The Taskforce conducted sporadic swoops on mining sites and arrested several Chinese illegal miners and their Ghanaian associates. For instance, between April and June 2017 about 5234 Chinese migrants’ illegal miners were arrested and deported (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 1. Prosecutions of some Chinese illegal miners.

Region	Year (period)	
	2013–2016	2016–2017
Eastern	147	78
Central	231	122
Western	342	136
Brong Ahafo	251	131
Ashanti	434	234

Source: Ghana Police Service & Judicial Service, Accra, February 2018.

However, the Taskforce method failed to stop the Chinese illegal miners due to collusion and corruption, and a lack of transparency in their operations with regards to their arrests and release: in many instances, some seized equipment found their way back to the owners, and prosecutions of some arrested Chinese illegal miners were halted without sound justifications (Interview, Civil Society Activists, Accra, July 2017).

Some interviewees believed that political and diplomatic undercurrents were among the reasons that weakened the fight against galamsey. For instance, according to an interviewee, 'President Mahama faced a political dilemma of invoking Ghanaian laws to decimate some Chinese migrants' galamsey infrastructure and lose the appetizing Chinese low-interest loans, which his administration so much needed to resuscitate the economy (Interview, MP, Accra, August 2017). Aidoo (2016, p. 61) expressed similar sentiments:

For diplomatic reasons that included the promise of accessing Chinese financial resources for development projects in Ghana, the then newly elected John Mahama and the NDC administration faced a tough balancing act between domestic concerns and relations with China.

As it became evident that the political/inter-ministerial taskforce approach had failed to deliver the dividend, the second technique, a military solution, gained popular approval (the media and civil society/environmental advocacy groups, e.g. clamoured for it). But the military approach was propagated through the political process. For instance, a key aspect of 2016 election campaign exchanges revolved around the question of how to halt the growing illegal mining activities by some Chinese migrants. The opposition New Patriotic Party's presidential candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo, contended that the worsened galamsey situation was due largely to the unprecedented influx of some Chinese migrants into the country during the Mahama administration (Graphic.com, May 22 2017). The opposition candidate told voters at Obuasi (one of the heart-beats of some Chinese migrants' galamsey activities) of 'a plan to regularize and streamline the operations of galamsey across the country by transforming it into a small-scale mining industry so that the youth in the mining communities could find work to do' (Ghanaweb, July 15 2016). The campaign message implied a revolutionary policy to overturn the preeminence of some Chinese migrants over the artisanal gold mining business in favour of indigenous people – something the incumbent President Mahama had failed to achieve (Interview,

Table 2. Deportations of Chinese Illegal Gold Miners.

Country of origin	Year (period)		Total
	2010–2013	2014–2017	
China	4500	734	5234

Source: Ghana Immigration Service, Accra, August 2018.

MPs, August 2017). In the aftermath of the election, the victorious opposition candidate declared Zero Tolerance for Chinese migrants' illegal gold mining activities in the country. The government took radical actions against illegal mining including a 21-day ultimatum to galamsey operators to disengage from their activities; a six-month moratorium on all forms of small-scale mining – this was extended; a halt to the issuance of new licenses to small-scale miners; and an evacuation of equipment from the mining sites' (Interview, MP/Minister, Study Area, December 2017).

These administrative orders did little to awe some of the Chinese migrant's illegal miners into terminating their activities, thereby forcing the 'deployment of security personnel to drive the illegal miners from the mining strongholds' (Interview, Army Officers, December 2017). The early security operatives dispatched to patrol the forest and water bodies were drawn from the Police, Navy and Army Engineering units of the Ghana's Armed Forces. The dreaded taskforce, which was codenamed 'Operation Vanguard', was 'to pull down the Chinese migrants' illegal mining infrastructure and end the activities of the recalcitrant miners in water bodies' (Interview, MPs & Army Officers, Study Area, December 2017). The Taskforce conducted military operations in the mining communities, destroyed equipment and drove away significant number of Chinese migrants engaged in illegal mining (see [Table 3](#)).

Soliciting the media support

The media in Ghana has always been a key ally of the government's policy education process (they have played a leading role in disseminating information on important policy issues). Therefore, the decision to bring the media on board to fight the entrenched Chinese illegal gold miners was a move of major importance. On April 2017, a Media Coalition Against Illegal Mining (MCAIM) comprising News Times Corporation (NTC), Graphic Communications Group Limited (GCGL), Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), Private Newspaper Publishers Association (PRINPAG), Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA), Ghana Community Radio Network and the Christian Council of Ghana was formed to use advocacy to mobilize mass support for the government's anti-galamsey policy. A key objective of MCAIM was 'to provide advocacy platform where citizens could be mobilized to put positive pressure on government so that it will not relent in its efforts to uproot illegal miners from artisanal gold mining' (Interview, Media Anchors, Accra, December 2017). The MCAIM used drama shows, town hall meetings and 'naming and shaming' strategies to 'humiliate' perpetrators of galamsey. The intensified media reports on television and in

Table 3. Items seized from arrested Chinese Illegal Miners.

Region	Type of equipment seized					
	Excavator	Water pump	Vehicle	Motor bike	Changfans	Weapons
Eastern	370	910	60	54	3368	83
Western	267	567	31	65	2430	129
Central	231	325	45	73	1422	67
Brong-Ahafo	345	529	36	109	1098	79
Ashanti	621	789	70	237	4861	123

Source: Compiled from dailyguideafrica.com. 2018. 'New chapter for Operation Vanguard by Col. Michael Amoah Ayisi, National Commander of Operation Vanguard', p. 1.

newspapers heightened public awareness, and engendered continuous public debates on the negative effects of galamsey. Specifically, the vociferous media anchors raised public consciousness about the dangers that loomed on health, environmental and human safety (Interview, Media Anchors, Accra, December 2017). The media force introduced into the anti-galamsey campaign hit the Chinese illegal miners very hard by reinforcing the already charged public ill-feelings against them (Interview, Chinese illegal miners, November 2017) – it weakened the miners' ability to defile the government's anti-galamsey policy, albeit minimally (Interview, Civil Society Activists & Media Anchors, Accra, December 2017).

Overall, the implementation of the anti-galamsey policy proved to be effective. The ban order and the security severance deterred many Chinese illegal miners. Many of the Chinese migrants involved in galamsey voluntarily left the mining communities for their country (Interview Chiefs and Immigration Officers, Study Area, December 2018). Rarely were the few arrested for violating the rules Chinese nationals. Indeed, during the period the ban was in force, less than eight Chinese were arrested, and between May and August 2018 when the implementation of the anti-galamsey policy ended, only one Chinese illegal miner (Xu Yonghui age 36), had been arrested by the taskforce at Nsabrekwa Number '4' in the Wassa Amenfi West Municipality in the West Region (The Chronicle, 2018). The decision by the government to lift the long ban on galamsey in August 2018 is suggestive of the virtual withdrawal of the Chinese nationals from galamsey engagements (Interview, Chinese Official & Immigration Officers, Accra, November 2018).

China's reaction to the government's anti-galamsey initiative

China has always insisted that its foreign policy objective towards Africa is to 'promote friendship and therefore, non-interference in the affairs of developing countries' (Interview, Chinese Official, Accra, November 2017). The question, then, is how did China react to the handling of the Chinese illegal miners' issue? In what ways did it affect China–Ghana bilateral relations? The Chinese's reaction to the implementation of the anti-galamsey policy was one of frustration and disappointment. China had expected a more humane approach to the galamsey affair. According to one informant, 'Beijing was offended by the arrests, prosecutions and deportations of some Chinese illegal miners by the Government of Ghana as well as the distorted or biased media reports on Chinese people, especially cartoons that defamed Chinese leaders and senior officials' (Interview, Chinese Officials, Accra, August 2017). One of the strongest Chinese challenges to the policy was in respect to the legislative framework for the mining sector. Beijing believed that loopholes in the Minerals and Mining Act opened it for abuse by the mining actors, which trapped some Chinese migrants into it' (Daily Graphic, May 10 2017). China contended that 'had the government taken appropriate measures to regulate the conduct and procedures for legitimate mining, fewer people would risk doing illegal mining' (Interview, Chinese Official, Accra, August 2017). Again, China criticized the government for the imposition of heavy fines on Chinese illegal miners' (Interview, Chinese Officials, Accra, August 2017) even though the MCAIM observed that low fines was responsible for the persistence of galamsey (Myjoyonline, December 2 2017).

China also accused the government of implementing an anti-galamsey policy which lacked transparency. In one of the official correspondences to the Ghana Government, Chinese officials demanded a 'full disclosure of the identity of all Chinese illegal miners including those repatriated in order to elevate the mutual trust on both sides' (Citifmon-line, April 8 2017) but the 'government did not comply with the Chinese's directive' (Interview, MP/Minister, Accra, November 2017). Beijing further demanded a levelled playing field that gave Chinese migrants the opportunity to obtain/secure legitimate permits to participate in the mining business (Interview, Chinese Officials, Accra, August 2017). As a further step towards preventing the government from humiliating some Chinese migrants involved in illegal mining, 'China requested the transfer of arrested Chinese nationals to face prosecution under Chinese due process in its Accra Embassy' (Interview, Immigration & Police Officers, Accra, November 2017). In an effort to diffuse public hate against Chinese migrants, the Chinese Embassy repudiated the local accomplices, particularly chiefs, security personnel and politicians whose dubious actions 'misled some Chinese nationals to undertake illegal mining in the communities' (Interview, Chinese Officials, Accra, August 2016). According to some respondents, 'some Ghanaian businessmen's strategy involved 'enticing' some innocent Chinese investors into the illegal mining sector and later deserted them when faced with illegality charges' (Interview, Chinese Officials and Illegal Miners, Study Area, March, 2017). China's frustration was particularly directed at some leading politicians and security personnel for allegedly 'extorting money from Chinese nationals with promises of mining job offers' (Interview, Chinese Officials & Illegal Miners, Study Areas, August 2017). An earlier account by Aidoo (2016, p. 60) captured the corrupt behaviour of Ghanaian officers in respect of Chinese illegal gold mining activities:

The activities of Chinese illegal miners through the help of the local and traditional leaders are sustained by the existing frailties in the relationship between government monitoring institutions and the local/traditional structures in Ghana. These existing weaknesses that played out at both the national and sub-national levels, aided by other given factors, resulted in complicated outcomes for governments in Beijing and Accra ... during the Chinese galamsey crisis in Ghana.

One strategy Beijing adopted to handle the galamsey issue was to lean on its diplomatic relations with Ghana. The Chinese Embassy in Accra reminded the Government of Ghana to deal with the Chinese illegal miners within the spirit of Sino-Ghana relations. China reminded Ghana of 'an extremely harmful bilateral relations ... if the handling of Chinese illegal miners resulted in avoidable casualties' (Citifm.com, April 11 2017). At the height of the attacks against the Chinese illegal miners, China was compelled to adopt a cold attitude towards the disbursement of the remaining \$2.4 billion out of the \$3 billion loan support facility earmarked for Ghana and the hope of receiving the rest of the loan hit a rock. Beijing presented a fresh proposal for a renegotiation of the terms of the loan on the excuse that Ghana had become an oil-exporting country even though extraction of oil in commercial quantities preceded the loan' (Interview, MPs, August 2017). China also decided to alter the ground rules for granting future loans to Ghana by including a soft condition that enjoins the Government of Ghana to resolve Chinese illegal miners' issue within Sino-Ghana diplomatic rules of engagement (Interview, Chinese Officials, November 2017).

On its part, ‘the Government of Ghana felt that China was only interested in the well-being of its citizens without regard to the effect some of the Chinese migrants’ galamsey activities had on Ghanaians’ (Interview, MP/Minister, Study Area, September 2017). Therefore, the Ghanaian Government’s anti-galamsey action was thought to be in the best interest of its citizens:

The Chinese threat or whatever does not bother me. ... if the tables are turned, the Chinese will not want someone to be in their country working to the detriment of China’s future. The letter and the issues raised in it have no consequence whatsoever on the government’s programme to fight the canker. We are going to do it irrespective of whoever says what. There will be “no sacred cows”. This is our country and we have to enforce our laws to sanitize the country and guarantee the future of our citizens. (Myjoyonline.com, April 11 2017, p. 1)

The tug-of-war over galamsey underscored the relative tension between the two nations in their search for amicable solutions to the issue. While Ghana regarded the Chinese’s ‘protectionist’ approach as ‘a mark of disrespect to the laws and sovereignty of the country’ (Interview, MP, November 2017), ‘the Chinese disapproved of the former’s method to punish its citizens’ (Interview, Chinese Official, Accra, August 2017). President Akufo-Addo’s remarks at a durbar of chiefs at Kibi that ‘we all know the laws of Ghana have no sympathy for nationality whatsoever. It does not give permit to visitors or anybody to engage in illegal mining. Whosoever is caught will be made to face the full rigour of the law’ (Citifm, April 16 2017, p. 1) revealed the undercurrent rancor that characterized China-Ghana negotiations over some Chinese migrants’ galamsey.

Why have China–Ghana bilateral relations endured?

In the end, the war of words did little to destroy the relations between the two countries (Interview, MPs, March 2017). Even at the height of the ‘persecutions’ of some Chinese illegal miners, ‘China showed some level of cooperation’ (Interview, Chinese Officials, Accra, August 2017). ‘China understood the reality of the galamsey menace and thought that it would be in its own interest to support the government to implement the measures intended to tackle it’ (Interview, Chinese Embassy Officials, Accra, August 2017). The Chinese assured the government of the importance China attached to the fight against illegal mining:

The Chinese side is firmly opposed to the involvement of Chinese citizens in illegal mining in Ghana, and supports the efforts taken by the Ghanaian government to tackle the issue within the legal framework. The Chinese side has made its position clear to both the former NDC and current NPP governments. Illegal mining issues have been on top of my (Chinese Ambassador) agenda since I assumed office and I have been communicating with the relevant authorities in Ghana over the issue and how to find amicable solutions to the menace. (Daily Graphic, May 10 2017, p. 1)

Determined to consolidate this cooperation, the Chinese government in Beijing sent two separate high-level delegations to hold bilateral discussions with the Ghana Government on the vexed issue of some Chinese nationals’ involvement in galamsey. After the consultations, ‘the Chinese government established a Working Committee to examine the factors that had triggered the ‘invasion’ of some Chinese migrants’ miners to Ghana, and develop a roadmap to address the problem’ (Interview, Chinese Officials, Accra, August 2017). China further announced a policy action aimed to persuade many

Chinese migrants doing galamsey to return to their homeland, and months after these engagements, ‘about 4000 Chinese migrants voluntarily returned’ (Interview, Chinese Officials, Accra, August 2018).

Within the spirit of friendship (South-South fraternity), the Chinese Embassy in Accra continued with its donations to support some state institutions. The ‘donations of GH¢ 10,000 and assorted office equipment to the Attorney General’s office to support the organization of consultative workshops for the Office of the Special Prosecutor Bill and a Sumto vehicle to the Ghana police by the Ghana Association of Chinese Society’ (Citifmonline, June 9 2017), ‘formed part of the ongoing Chinese’s support to the government’s capacity building programmes’ (Interview, Chinese Officials, Accra, August 2017). Upon the request of the Ghana Government, China pledged to offer \$15 billion loan to Ghana to implement its industrialization (One-District-One-Factory) programme – this demonstrates the two nation’s continued commitments to a cordial bilateral relation’ (Interview, MP & Chinese Official, Accra, February 2018). Also, according to Akufo-Addo, ‘the anti-galamsey policy did not mean we (Ghanaians) have any qualms with the Chinese government or we hate the Chinese nationals’ (Citifm, April 16 2017).

President Akufo-Addo’s statement reflects the deep and unshakable bilateral cooperation between the two countries, which dates back to the 1960s when their political elites joined forces to promote their common interests. Since Ghana returned to democratic rule in 1992, Sino-Ghana relations have grown alongside market-oriented exchanges, and witnessed high FDI’s inflows from China to Ghana (see Table 4). The visits of Chinese politicians such as Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao to Ghana in 2003 and 2007 respectively with reciprocated visits to Beijing by Jerry Rawlings, John Kufour, John Mahama, and the current Vice-President and First Lady, Rebecca Akufo-Addo and President Akufo-Addo have yielded bilateral dividends: along with these diplomatic visits came economic benefits in the form of array of infrastructure loans and grants to facilitate Ghana’s development (see Table 5).

Even when the implementation of anti-galamsey policy generated some form of discord between China and Ghana, diplomatic ties seemed to deepen. ‘Recent developments and exchanges attest to the well-cemented bond between the two nations’ (Interview, MPs, Accra, February 2018). In contrast to the perception of broken relations, President Akuffo-Addo conferred the Order of the Star of Ghana (the highest national honour) on the Chinese Ambassador, Madam Baohong in April 2018. The citation acknowledged China as a reliable partner/friend in Ghana’s development:

The award is in recognition of Madam Baohong’s distinguished conduct as a diplomat, and exceptional contribution to Ghana’s socio-economic development and for the increased economic cooperation and development front between China and Ghana during her period of stay in the country. (Ghana News Agency, 2018, p. 1)

Table 4. USA versus China FDI inflow to Africa.

Country	Year (period)									
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
USA	5.8	4.2	4.0	6.7	11	2	0.1	5.7	6.4	0.1
China	0.3	1.9	4.9	1.8	2.1	3.2	2.3	3.8	3.7	3.2

Source: www.sais.cari-ori.org/data-chinese-and-america-fdi-to-africa/.

Table 5: Some of China's Financial Assistance to Ghana.

Sector	Projects	Funds inflows
Energy	Bui hydro-electric power dam project; continuous support for rural electrification	\$562 million
Transport	Reconstruction of the 17 km Ofankor–Nsawam road	\$28 million interest-free loan \$50 million for rehabilitating James Town fishing port
Education	Scholarships and training programs for Ghanaian students and public officials	Grants; enhanced soft power through positive international image for sharing development experience; \$16 million loan for developing University of Health and Allied Science
Health, water & sanitation	The construction of a 100-bed capacity general hospital for malaria treatment at Teshie, construction of the 60-bed Dangme East District Kpong water supply extension project	Grant
Defence	Construction of an office complex for the Ministry of Defence	\$9 million with \$7.5 million grant from the Chinese government

Source: Idun-Arkhurst, Isaac. 2008. *Ghana's Relations with China*. The South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). Johannesburg, South Africa: SAIIA.

The Chinese's response was reciprocal of Ghana's good relations with China – an affirmation of the growing cordial relations between the two nations:

It demonstrated the President's strong commitment to promoting China–Ghana friendship and further development of our relations ... This supreme glory belongs to the great country I represent and the great leader who has nominated me as Chinese Ambassador to Ghana ... It belongs to the people of China and the whole Chinese Community in Ghana, I came to Ghana with hopes and dreams, and I leave the country with friendship and honour. (Ghana News Agency, 2018, p. 1)

Conclusion and lessons

This article has shown that the anti-galamsey policy was an initiative that sought to avert an environmental catastrophe and protect indigenous business from falling into the hands of some Chinese illegal miners. The implementation of the policy, which led to the arrest, sentencing and deportation of some Chinese galamsey miners, angered Beijing because diplomacy rather than arrests and prosecutions was thought to be the most viable alternative to addressing the issue. Despite the resultant tension, the two nations prioritized their six-decade long bilateral relationship over the implementation of the unpleasant anti-galamsey policy. The article has established that the sustained bilateral relationship was largely predicated on Beijing's willingness to cooperate with the Government of Ghana. This makes it trite to say that the gesture of cooperation exhibited by China during the implementation of the anti-galamsey policy is an affirmation of its non-interference policy in the politics of developing countries such as Ghana. Indeed, the involvement of some Chinese migrants in illegal gold mining in Ghana could not be a clandestine move by China to exploit the natural resources. This is because the nature of the involvement of Chinese migrant miners in the illegal gold mining business reveals an individually motivated activity rather than a state-sponsored endeavour. This done, the next task is to establish the salient lessons that could be learnt from the study.

First, cordial states' bilateral relations largely depend on mutual respect for their nationals. Because states enter into pacts based on their prior determined benefits,

situational changes with potential risks to their interests – security and safety of their citizens, may correspondingly alter the mood of their relations. The observed activities of some Chinese illegal miners in several parts of the country, which caused considerable damage to the environment, were seen by the Government of Ghana to be injurious to the survival of Ghanaians. Ghana felt that the invasion of some Chinese migrants in the artisanal mining sector was unacceptable because it is a reserved area for indigenes. The anti-galamsey initiative was, therefore necessary to protect the indigenous population from losing their source of livelihoods – small-scale mining – to foreigners. China's responses – diplomatic protest and subtle retaliation – were also an attempt to secure the safety and liberty of its citizens (protect them from arrests and humiliation) even if they are involved in some form of economic illegality in a friend's country.

Second, China's diplomatic and economic relations with Ghana are based on mutual trust, respect and win-win cooperation. Thus, during the implementation of the anti-galamsey policy, China recognized that the only way to guarantee a healthy relation with Ghana was to collaborate with Ghana Government to deal with the galamsey challenge. China's decision to engage the Ghanaian government through diplomatic dialogue led to an understanding and mutually acceptable solution to the Chinese galamsey issue. By cooperating to resolve the issue, China has shown that it respects Ghana's sovereign decision to implement the anti-galamsey policy to guarantee the security of its citizens. Therefore, the claim that China is in Ghana to exploit its resources is far-fetched. China is in Ghana to lend support for its economic development. Within the spirit of South-South cooperation, Beijing has provided technical assistance in terms of engineers and other professionals to reconstruct Ghana's development.

Third, mutual economic benefits/gains define the survival of nations' bilateral relations. When the Sino-Ghana relationship was strained by the implementation of the anti-galamsey policy, it was salvaged by the respective country's appeal to their deep-rooted bilateral relations. Both nations recognized that a weakened bilateral relationship triggered by implementation of an anti-galamsey policy would not auger well for their common economic interests. Ghana's quest to attract FDIs to fix its economy that needs oxygen of funds would have to lean on China. Ghana risks losing China's sympathy for the continuing grant of softloans. Beijing may act to truncate future grants of financial and technical assistance to Ghana under the pretext of aid fatigue – the new policy mantra of some European countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands. Economic punishment from China could affect the implementation of Ghana's development programmes such as grants of scholarships and support for institutional capacity building. Similarly, retaliation by Ghana could hurt Chinese economy, albeit only marginally. Given that Ghana's retail market is under siege by cheap goods from China which have badly affected the survival of many local retailers, a reaction by Ghanaian authorities would dislocate Chinese small-scale businesses and possibly reduce the volume of imports from China. Ghana loses much from smuggling of gold through galamsey to China. Also, China has always counted on its African allies, particularly Ghana, to propagate its interest in the United Nations – the galvanized moral and political support for each other at major international forums has advanced their common interests and aspirations.

Fourth, sustaining Sino-Ghana relations is a balancing act. Ghana Government needs to reciprocate China's investment gesture and also act within the South-South interest and reform the small-scale mining regime to broaden the scope of participation to non-

Ghanaian players. This requires innovative measures to streamline the regulatory framework to provide space and permits for the Chinese migrants' miners to undertake legitimate and sustainable small-scale mining rather than tearing their illegal mining infrastructure through arrests and deportations.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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