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URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/103032/>

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.21954/ou.ro.00103032>

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Chinese Non-Profit Engagement in Wildlife
Conservation in Kenya: New Dynamics in China-
Africa Relations and African Conservation?

By Francesca Masciaga

*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

Development Policy and Practice
Faculty of Art and Social Sciences
The Open University

September 2024

Declaration

I, Francesca Masciaga, declare that *Chinese Non-Profit Engagement in Wildlife Conservation in Kenya: New Dynamics in China-Africa Relations and African Conservation?* is my own original work and has never been submitted either in part or in totality for examination at any institution for any other qualification. I further declare that all the sources that I have consulted have been duly acknowledged throughout the text and by means of complete list of references.

Abstract

Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation has risen in prominence over the past decade, constituting a 'new' arena in both international cooperation in conservation and China-Africa relations. Focusing on a case-study of Kenya, this research represents the first in-depth examination of this emergent field and seeks to better understand the nature and dynamics of the engagement and its implications for African conservation and China's renewed links with Africa. It draws on semi-structured interviews with participants involved in or affected by Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation, as well as NGO and government documentary sources, and Chinese and African media reporting.

Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation involves a diverse set of actors and often hybrid forms of activity. This highlights a significant blurring of boundaries in the types of Chinese engagement and between Chinese and non-Chinese actors. The entanglement with and, to some extent, reliance on, Chinese state and for-profit actors and international NGOs is significant for understanding the extent to which this engagement is distinctly 'Chinese' or represents a novel dynamic in China-Africa relations.

Kenyan perceptions of Chinese conservation actors and activities are also diverse, bringing more nuance to the discussion of Chinese engagement in Africa. An important perspective is that Chinese conservation engagement is introducing a more humble and 'mutual' dynamic that somewhat disrupts 'Western authority' in conservation and demonstrates a greater role for Kenyan agency. While this speaks to the ideals of 'South-South cooperation', Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation is also linked to key Chinese state visions and wider diplomacy associated with China-Africa relations. In this context, such engagement is seen as a channel for Chinese 'soft power', particularly in the form of what is framed as 'conservation diplomacy'.

Acknowledgements

The journey of completing this thesis has been both one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my life and has only been made possible through the support of others. I would like to extend my great thanks to all the research participants who shared with me their stories, experiences and understandings connected to Chinese engagement in African conservation.

A huge thank you to my brilliant team of supervisors, Dr. Ben Lampert, Dr. Charlotte Cross and Prof. Shonil Bhagwat. My deepest gratitude for your continued guidance, support, kindness and great patience over the past seven years, and for inspiring confidence in me during the challenging times. I have learned so much from you and feel truly privileged to have had you as my mentors.

Finally, a thank you to my home team. To my husband Sam, my mum and dad Kerry and Diego, and my sister Bella. You always listened. You brought me the strength and stamina I needed, and provided unfaltering love and support to keep me going to the end. Thank you for being there, always.

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List of acronyms

AWF	African Wildlife Foundation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CBCGDF	China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation
CCTV	China Central Television
CGCF	China Global Conservation Fund
CGTV	China Global Television Network
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ENGO	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GONGO	Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisation
HSI	Humane Society International
IFAW	International Fund for Animal Welfare
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SPWFE	Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
WCS	World Conservation Society
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Chapter 1: Introduction

The biggest threats to Africa's wildlife and wildlands are habitat destruction and wildlife trade. Both are mostly driven by poorly planned and unbalanced economic development. China being the biggest partner in Africa's economic development, there is no better partner in addressing these conservation threats.

Many people and organisations view China only in terms of wildlife demand reduction. But it is an important conservation player in all aspects of species protection — stopping the killing, trafficking and demand, as well as achieving the longer-term goal of protecting and conserving Africa's great wildlife landscapes.

(Kaddu Sebunya, CEO of African Wildlife Foundation, September 9th 2018)

Posted on LinkedIn in 2018, this statement from Kaddu Sebunya, a prominent African conservationist, encompasses some of the central debates about the dynamics of China-Africa relations in the context of Kenyan and wider African conservation. Chinese engagement in this field is a relatively recent phenomenon. It has risen in prominence over the past decade, both through the efforts of international NGOs (INGOs) and, increasingly, Chinese-led activity, forming a 'new' arena of international engagement in conservation. Over the last ten to fifteen years there has been significant public, media and policy attention afforded to the illegal wildlife trade and its impact on African and global wildlife populations. 'Asian' consumer demand, and specifically that from China, for products of the illegal wildlife trade has been at the forefront of international media and INGO narratives and wider policy and academic debate (Margulies, Wong, and Duffy 2019; Wong 2019; Jiao and Lee 2022). Hailed as a landmark moment for Chinese engagement in African conservation, in December 2016 the Chinese government announced it was introducing a ban for the domestic ivory trade and processing by the end of 2017. Alongside this, efforts to address the illegal wildlife trade and growing interest in African conservation have drawn wider engagement from an array of Chinese actors, including non-profit activity. It is the emergence of Chinese activity in response to the illegal wildlife trade and in connection to conservation, and specifically the growing phenomenon of Chinese non-profit engagement, that is at the centre of this research.

The nature and implications of Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation has received very limited attention in the extensive literature on 'foreign' and international involvement in African conservation. With non-profit actors becoming increasingly prominent in emergent Chinese engagement in African conservation, there is a need to better understand the nature of the Chinese actors involved, the activities that are being undertaken, and the drivers and dynamics that shape the engagement and its outcomes. The examination of the nature and implications of 'new' Chinese actors in Kenyan and wider African conservation is significant. This is because much existing public, media and academic debate around African conservation has focused on the negative implications of Chinese demand for products of the illegal wildlife trade. Furthermore, discussion of international engagement in African conservation has overwhelmingly focused on the influence of 'Western' thinking and practice, and its colonial legacies. Thus, examining the increasing involvement of Chinese actors in African conservation opens-up important new dimensions to the existing debates in the field.

Alongside this, the exploration of Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation is significant as an emerging area of China-Africa relations. The noisy landscape of China-Africa relations has roused immense interest and debate over the past couple of decades. This interest has spurred significant public, media, policy and academic interrogation of, and speculation about, the nature of the engagement and its drivers, motivations, and implications (Ampiah and Naidu 2008; Naidu and Mbazima 2008; Bräutigam 2009, 2015; Mohan and Power 2009; Moyo 2010; Carmody 2011; Chan 2013; Mohan 2013, 2015; Mohan and Lampert 2013; French 2014). In this time, attention has focused overwhelmingly on political and economic activities in connection to the Chinese state and Chinese businesses, with very little consideration of Chinese non-profit activity and the field of conservation. Consequently, this thesis examines the dynamics of Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation in relation to broader trajectories and understanding of China-Africa relations. Focusing on an emerging area of China-Africa relations, the research seeks to add a new dimension to current debates on the role and implications of Chinese engagement in Africa. The thesis explores the potential for Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation to reconfigure understandings of both African conservation and China-Africa relations.

1. The emergence of Chinese engagement in African conservation and the connection to the illegal wildlife trade

Chinese engagement in African conservation is an emergent phenomenon that gained pace

in the decade up to the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This engagement was punctuated by the announcement of the Chinese government ban on the ivory trade in 2016, acting as a further catalyst for activity. Much of the media and policy attention has been focused on state-level initiatives and engagements, international forums of engagement such as FOCAC (Forum on China and Africa Cooperation) and high-profile, often celebrity-endorsed campaigns and activities led by INGOs such as WildAid, WWF (World Wildlife Fund), IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare) or the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF). Alongside this high-profile state and INGO activity, broader Chinese-led non-profit activities in African conservation have also begun to emerge. Such activity is comprised of smaller-scale initiatives, largely focused on education, volunteering and research engagement. These forms of activity are often connected to advocacy and conservation work on the ground that focus on addressing and raising awareness of the illegal wildlife trade, as well as channelling efforts through education and engagement opportunities in broader wildlife advocacy. Formerly operating as an NGO based in Kenya, China House is one of the most established and recognised organisations in the field of Chinese-led non-profit activity in Kenyan and African conservation. The initiatives of such non-profit actors also intersect with conservation INGOs, and with Chinese state and for-profit involvement in conservation, meaning that the boundaries between Chinese and international conservation engagement, and between Chinese conservation activities, and are often blurred or hybrid in practice.

It is the illegal wildlife trade that has been at the centre of many of the initiatives of Chinese conservation engagement. Chinese consumer appetite for products of the illegal wildlife trade has been widely discussed in global conservation narratives and was further magnified following the global COVID-19 outbreak and its suspected links to zoonotic sources. Western media, NGOs and international forums such as CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) have in the past pointed the finger at China for driving extensive exploitation and loss of certain endangered species (Kelly 2019; Margulies, Wong, and Duffy 2019). The link to African wildlife has been the most prominent, specifically elephants, rhinos, pangolins and big cats. At the turn of the century up until the early 2010s, Chinese demand for ivory was cited as contributing to the annual loss of 10-15,000 African elephants to poaching (Hauenstein *et al.* 2019). In Chinese society, and particularly amongst older generations, ivory has been considered a prized commodity and symbol of wealth. Ivory is still used in traditional Chinese medicine, along with other illegally traded animal parts from rhino horn, to pangolin scales, tiger bone and bear bile. However, scholars have argued that Chinese consumers should not be considered homogenous in thinking and values (Gao, Zhang, and Huang 2017), and that many Chinese consumers have in the past been unaware

of how commodities, such as ivory, are obtained (Olander 2016; Kelly 2019; Tsavo Trust 2020).

Over the past two decades, Chinese demand for products of the illegal wildlife trade has been placed under the international spotlight, raising awareness and putting pressure on China, and in particular the state, to respond as the protection of wildlife increasingly becomes the 'transnational norm' (Mak and Song 2018). In response, there has been increasing interest in and effort to address the illegal wildlife trade and consumption in China. This has, in part, been driven by the international and Chinese non-profit sector pushing wildlife concern further up the political agenda, focusing on engaging and raising the awareness of Chinese consumers (China Global South Project 2015a; Olander 2016). Alongside this, there has been growing focus on the environment from the Chinese state, with recognition that environmental issues must be addressed for China to be prosperous and strong (Zhu 2022). Being seen to respond to environmental concerns also helps the Chinese state to secure legitimacy both domestically and internationally (ibid.), particularly as China's rising international status has opened up the Chinese 'image' to global scrutiny. Under escalating pressure, in December 2016 the Chinese government introduced a ban on the domestic ivory trade and processing by the end of 2017. INGOs and Chinese NGOs, alongside diplomatic pressure, were seen as pivotal in the lead up to the Chinese government announcement of the ivory ban, launching campaigns to shift local opinion and drive international and domestic pressure (Haas 2017; Stephens and Southerland 2018; Gamso 2019). This move was hailed a 'game-changer' for elephants by activists (BBC 2016).

Thus, the past ten to fifteen years have seen increasing Chinese interest and engagement in African conservation through non-profit, state and for-profit activity. The 2016 Chinese government announcement for a ban on the ivory trade by the end of 2017 was a key moment for China-Africa relations in the realm of African wildlife conservation. It signalled the realisation of a commitment by the Chinese state to address the trade. Whilst the formalisation in policy is an important milestone in Chinese engagement in addressing the illegal wildlife trade, such state action forms part of a much wider landscape of Chinese interest and engagement in Africa.

2. Chinese non-profit engagement in the African conservation landscape

There exists significant interchange in the use of the terms 'non-profit organisation', 'non-profit actor' and 'NGO' when it comes to describing Chinese non-profit activity. This research adopts the framing of Chinese 'non-profit' engagement to discuss the nature of the activity as this best captures the breadth and hybrid nature of interactions taking shape as part of such engagement.

Over the past 15 years there has been increasing organisational reporting and academic and policy analysis that has started to examine the nature of wider Chinese non-profit engagement in Africa. Such non-profit engagement includes NGOs and government-organised NGOs (GONGOs), through to grassroots organisations, philanthropic activity and volunteering. Tracing this emergence of Chinese non-profit actors in Africa links to the broader overseas expansion of Chinese NGOs (Deng 2013; Huang 2015; Lu 2015; Hsu, Hildebrandt and Hasmath 2016; Li and Dong 2018) and the 'internationalisation' of Chinese NGOs that mirrored China's wider state-led and commercial economic integration into the global economy through the process of 'Going Out' in the 1980s (Hsu, Hildebrandt and Hasmath 2016; Li and Dong 2018).

Whilst a literature on Chinese non-profit engagement in Africa continues to grow, the emergence of Chinese non-profit activity in African conservation has received very little attention. In contrast, the role and influence of foreign actors, namely the 'West' and INGOs, has received extensive academic interrogation in the literature on African conservation (Brockington and Scholfield 2010; Büscher 2016). A key argument in this literature focuses on the highly influential and visible role of INGOs, their association with colonial legacies, and how they act as key vehicles for continuing Western influence and norm-setting (Igoe and Brockington 2007; Rodríguez *et al.* 2007; Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008; Brockington and Duffy 2010; Brockington and Scholfield 2010; Duffy 2010; Mbaria and Ogada 2016). As key scholars on conservation in Kenya, Mbaria and Ogada (2016) argue that wildlife conservation continues to be for the benefit of foreigners and remains significantly influenced and driven specifically by Western foreign actors, such as private investors and INGOs. As such, the legacies of foreign influence, the implications for 'ownership' and 'custodianship' in conservation, and what this means for Kenyan agency, have continued to be central topics of academic debate relating to Kenyan and wider African conservation (Garland 2008; Waithaka 2012; Mbaria and Ogada 2016; Cockerill and Hagerman 2020).

This thesis is concerned with the emergence of Chinese non-profit actors and activity within this context of African conservation. The discussions of existing foreign influence and colonial legacies will be key in framing Chinese engagement in African conservation, and for understanding Kenyan perspectives on and responses to this engagement. This in turn prompts the question as to how 'Chinese' engagement might differ from that of the 'West', and with what implications for Kenyan and African conservation thinking and practice. The research is also pertinent given the evolving nature of China-Africa relations, specifically the emergence of Chinese non-profit actors and activity, and how this might reshape the power dynamics and outcomes currently associated with this engagement. Consequently, it is necessary to also look at the nature and implications of Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation in the wider context of the trajectories and understandings of China-Africa relations as a whole.

3. The broader trajectories and understandings of China-Africa relations

The rise of China and its transformation of global power relations has generated one of the leading geopolitical debates of the twenty-first century. As observed by Layne (2018, p.89), "a power transition is taking place in the early twenty-first century: US power is in relative decline and China is rising quickly". A global shift in power is seemingly leading the way towards a "multipolar world" (Wade 2011). Economically and politically, China competes globally, in trade, investment, aid and global governance forums. Exciting a range of often strongly contrasting views, China's rise has been framed as a "terrifying threat" or a "tantalizing opportunity" (Naidu and Mbazima 2008, p.748).

China's rise has been shaped by its 'Going Out' strategy. At the turn of the century, China's 'Going Out' strategy was introduced to encourage Chinese businesses to invest and operate overseas (Gu *et al.* 2016; Wang 2016). For the Chinese this meant moving away from the mantra "Tao Guang Yang Hui" (hide capabilities and keep a low profile) to "Fen Fa You Wei" (striving for achievement). These ideas are further captured in Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' for Chinese foreign policy (Sørensen 2015, p.53). The continuing expansion of China's globalising efforts have been consolidated into China's most significant global initiative to date, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Liu and Dunford 2016; Ohashi 2018; Johnston 2019). The BRI is a vision of Chinese state conception promoting economic development and deepened connections and cooperation across Asia, Europe and Africa, following the path of the historic Maritime and Silk Roads. China has dedicated substantial effort to promote the image of a

“peaceful rise”, advancing its public diplomacy efforts to endorse the BRI and to counter the “China threat” narrative (Burcu and Boni 2023).

The global rise of China is reflected in China’s striking intensification of economic and political relations with Africa (Large 2008; Power and Mohan 2010; Grimm 2011), which in turn has been emblematic of China’s renewed and explicit identification with, and engagement of, the ‘Global South’. China is one of a number of resurgent international state actors in Africa, framed as competing with established global powers long seen to be the dominant players on the continent. The intensification of China-Africa relations has fuelled significant academic and policy debate about the drivers and outcomes, sparking the now familiar debates about whether China represents to African countries a friend or foe, partner or neo-imperial power (Botha 2006; BBC 2007; Melber 2008; Zwanbin 2020).

Over the past twenty years China-Africa debates have focused heavily on economic and political dynamics. Much research and popular discussion of Chinese engagement in Africa has centred on matters such as trade, investment, aid and diplomacy, and on state and business actors and activity. In more recent years, attention has started to be given to a more diverse range of issues in policy, media reporting and academic research, including wildlife as part of increased global and Chinese focus on the environment (Aklilu 2014; Burgess 2020). A report published by TRAFFIC, a leading INGO in wildlife and conservation, reports on how the 2021 FOCAC conference marked an important step in “collaborative efforts” to develop solutions for tackling climate change, supporting an “African green economy” and addressing the illegal wildlife trade (TRAFFIC 2021). Over the past 3-5 years, and especially since the global pandemic, broader debates relating to China-Africa relations have also shifted. China’s slowing economy and decreasing investment in Africa has sparked suggestions that the BRI in Africa is losing momentum (Freeman and Tugendhat 2023). On the other hand, it is argued that the vision for the BRI is evolving. ‘BRI 2.0’, as it is often termed, is argued to place greater emphasis on long-term success and ‘sustainability’ (Cao 2019; Wang *et al.* 2023), avoiding large-scale risky projects, and prioritising “small and beautiful” initiatives (Yu 2022).

A critical focus and contribution of this research will be in examining how Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation might mediate, shape and respond to broader trajectories and understandings of China-Africa relations. In terms of the theoretical underpinning, the research engages with international relations thinking. As part of international relations debates, the intensification of China-Africa relations has often been seen in relation to the idea of ‘South-South cooperation’ as a framework for assessing the nature and outcomes of engagement (DeHart 2012; Khoday and Perch 2012; Shelton, April and Anshan 2015; Okolo

and Akwu 2016; Asante 2018). 'South-South cooperation' for development is described by the United Nations as a framework of collaboration for developing countries to share knowledge, skills, expertise and resources (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2023). 'South-South cooperation' has been critically interrogated by academics, resulting in interpretations that can be categorised into pessimist, optimist and pragmatic schools of thought. 'South-South cooperation' is very often and purposely framed as an alternative to 'North-South' relationships, prompting comparison of 'Chinese' versus 'Western' cooperation. These dynamics link to discussions about the implications of colonial and contemporary Western influence in Africa and how Chinese engagement might introduce new ideas and different power dynamics, with potential implications for African agency. Thus, the rise of China might in some ways create more room for African agency in international relations by disrupting dynamics of Western influence. At the same time, there is lively debate relating to the power dynamics within China-Africa relations and the concern that China is the main driver and beneficiary in China-Africa relations (Brookes and Shin 2007; Adisu, Sharkey and Okoroafo 2010; De Grauwe, Houssa and Picillo 2012). Therefore, there is the potential that it might also undermine African agency by being more dominant versus African actors.

Building yet further on ideas in international relations, China-Africa relations have been seen in terms of China's wider diplomatic interests and an arena in which these are expressed. Recent debates around China-Africa relations as 'South-South cooperation' demonstrate the growing focus on more 'pragmatic' relations. These 'pragmatic' relations can be seen partly as a function of self-interested Chinese global diplomacy in which soft power has been highlighted as a key tool (Corkin 2014; Wagner 2017; Asante 2018; Mawdsley 2019; Banik and Mawdsley 2023). In this context, Nye (2011, p.20-21) defines soft power as "the ability to affect others through co-optive means of framing agendas, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes". As such, soft power is an important foreign policy tool (Huang 2013; Arif 2017) and an instrument of diplomacy. In its simplest form, diplomacy is the engagement in interstate relations (Aksoy and Çiçek 2018). Soft power and diplomacy would seem particularly relevant lenses for examining the motivations, nature and outcomes of Chinese engagement in African conservation. Some literature has started to consider the role of soft power and diplomacy in China's international engagement around the environment more broadly (Gamso 2019; Xie 2022) and there has been some discussion of how Chinese NGOs have become part of China's 'Going Out' strategy and a vehicle for Chinese soft power (Farid and Li 2021). However, the drawing together of Chinese soft power and diplomacy in African conservation, as well as the role of non-profit actors as part of this, has yet to be considered in the literature. Therefore, there is great opportunity to explore how

Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation intersects with and potentially adds new dimensions to wider Chinese soft power, and in turn, diplomacy initiatives.

4. Key research objectives and questions

The main objectives of this research are to explore the nature of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation and its influences and implications for both Kenyan conservation and for wider China-Africa relations. This translates into four core research questions.

- **How and to what extent are Chinese non-profit actors engaging in Kenyan conservation?**
- **What factors are driving Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation?**
- **What are the implications of Chinese non-profit engagement for Kenyan conservation?**
- **How is Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation shaped by and potentially re-shaping wider China-Africa relations?**

In addressing these questions, this thesis seeks to better understand the role of Chinese non-profit actors in Kenyan conservation. In turn, it makes important contributions to debates on African conservation and China-Africa relations. Firstly, the research contributes to the nascent literature on Chinese non-profit actors and engagement in Africa, focusing in on Chinese non-profit actors as a 'new' set of Chinese partners and options for Kenyan conservation. Additionally, it builds on existing debates around 'South-South cooperation', the nature of power dynamics in China-Africa cooperation and the scope for Kenyan agency as part of such engagement. Furthermore, the research contributes to debates on the evolving nature of China-Africa relations, specifically the intensification and diversification of engagement as part of China-Africa relations and the importance of Chinese diplomacy. This research shares new knowledge on the underexplored subject matter of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation, and in doing so, highlights new perspectives and further builds on existing debate on China's evolving engagement in Africa. In turn, this contributes

to a more nuanced understanding of, and more critical engagement with, China in Africa. Together, the nuanced understanding and the critical engagement inform existing debates, but also raise new questions for further research.

5. Structure of thesis

This thesis is divided into three main parts – **Part 1** is formed of the literature review (Chapter 2 and 3) and methodology (Chapter 4), **Part 2** is the empirical analysis chapters (Chapter 5, 6 and 7) and **Part 3** is the conclusion (Chapter 8).

In **Part 1**, the literature review is comprised of two chapters that set out the context and scope of this thesis - the state of knowledge in relevant fields, how the research will contribute to these, and the ideas and contentions that will be examined in the research. **Chapter 2** focuses specifically on the literature and context surrounding China-Africa relations and Chinese non-profit engagement. The chapter sets up the question as to whether Chinese engagement in conservation, particularly through non-profit activity, might involve new dynamics of engagement and outcomes in the context of the wider set of China-Africa relations. To do this, it examines the academic literature on the intensification of China-Africa relations and the key policies that drive them. It highlights how China's 'Going Out' strategy, as a key policy driver, and the BRI, as the current leading manifestation of China's international expansion, are significant in understanding the drivers and shape of Chinese engagement in Africa, which in turn provides an important framework for this research. The chapter explains how scholars have attempted to classify interpretations of China-Africa relations into optimist, pessimist or pragmatic schools of thought – a plurality of interpretation which will be important in understanding Kenyan perceptions and responses to Chinese engagement in conservation. As part of this, 'South-South cooperation' has been a key concept for both framing and assessing these relations, and thus a useful notion for examining the nature and outcomes of China-Africa relations, and in turn, Chinese conservation engagement. It is further shown how China-Africa relations has been understood in terms of Chinese wider diplomatic interests, specifically as demonstrations of soft power, which in turn serves as a tool of diplomacy. Whilst discussion of Chinese soft power and diplomacy has started to recognise the actors and arenas of tourism, top-down wildlife conservation, and NGOs as connected to soft power and diplomacy, there exists a key gap around the intersection between non-profit activity and conservation engagement. It is argued that the underexplored concept of 'conservation diplomacy' usefully highlights how conservation engagement can serve as a tool of diplomacy,

not only in relations between Chinese and Kenyan and wider African actors, but also more generally on the international stage, signifying China as a responsible global actor. As such, conservation diplomacy may be especially relevant in explaining and better understanding Chinese non-profit and wider engagement in Kenyan and African conservation. Employing the concept in this way develops understandings of conservation diplomacy in arguing that engagement in conservation (in this case Chinese engagement) can be linked to state efforts in building 'soft power' and winning favour amongst local actors (in this case African actors) and on the international stage, whilst also exerting influence to support wider strategic ambitions (in this case China's economic and political ambitions). The research provides a new lens on conservation diplomacy through the example of China-Kenya conservation engagement, but also in demonstrating conservation diplomacy between nations of the 'Global South'. Furthermore, the specific focus on non-profit activity contributes to understandings of the key role of a broader set of actors, and as such the multi-scalar nature, of conservation diplomacy. The final part of the chapter examines literature on Chinese non-profit actors, exploring the different types of non-profit actors and their emergence in China-Africa relations. It shows how the relationship between Chinese NGOs and the state, and Chinese non-profit activity and INGOs, are key discussion points within the literature and present important dynamics for consideration in this research.

Chapter 3 progresses to focus on the nature and dynamics of Kenyan and Chinese conservation. Its key purpose is to understand the contexts that Chinese actors are engaging with in both Kenya and China. These understandings are critical in addressing the question of whether Chinese non-profit and wider engagement might present new dynamics of engagement and outcomes for both African conservation and China-Africa relations. There exists extensive academic interrogation of the emergence and complex nature of the Kenyan and African conservation landscapes. As part of the literature on the emergence and nature of 'conservation' in Africa, significant emphasis is placed on the influence of colonial and present day Western actors in relation to ideology and practice. The influence of Western actors and INGOs is important to consider in the research, specifically in examining how 'Chinese' engagement might differ to that of the 'West', and with what implications for Kenyan and African conservation thinking and practice. The chapter critically examines the literature on the history, range of actors involved and challenges in Kenyan conservation, and in particular the illegal wildlife trade, which very much frames the implications of Chinese engagement. The chapter continues to argue that understanding the evolving conceptions of and approaches to nature and conservation in China is also important for framing Chinese engagement in conservation. It contends that understanding the role of the Chinese state in advocating policy, visions and strategy on wildlife and environment is significant for furthering

understanding of how Chinese conservation engagement has emerged and is taking shape in Africa. Thus, the key gap this study seeks to address is how Chinese conservation engagement and approaches manifest in Kenya, and the implications of such activity against a backdrop of wider 'foreign' engagement. Collectively, developing understandings of the state of knowledge and key debates within the relevant fields of China-Africa relations and African conservation are essential for framing the research, identifying gaps in knowledge, and drawing out the ideas that will be critically engaged with in the research.

Chapter 4 sets out the methodological approach and processes adopted in this research and explains how they support the objectives and address the key research questions. It details the research context, approach, design and process, as well as challenges and limitations. A constructivist approach is underpinned by qualitative methodologies. The methods employed are interviews with predominantly Kenyan and Chinese participants engaged in conservation, as well as documentary analysis of online materials published by non-profit organisations, along with African and Chinese media reporting. The chapter argues that adopting a constructivist approach enables a better understanding of actors' own experiences and perspectives in relation to the activities and relations within this area of research. This is essential for understanding the complexity of Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, how engagement manifests and why, as well as how understandings and attitudes towards engagement are constructed. It is demonstrated how ethical considerations have been built into the research and the importance of my positionality as a white, female researcher from the 'Global North' conducting research on 'Southern' relations and processes, and the ethics of knowledge production around this. It further argues that whilst challenges and limitations were encountered, this methodological approach and research process were critical in exploring how Chinese non-profit engagement manifests and the implications it holds for both Kenyan conservation and wider China-Africa relations.

Part 2 is comprised of three empirical analysis chapters. These empirical chapters reveal that Chinese non-profit engagement is hybrid in nature, connecting to a diverse set of Chinese and non-Chinese actors and activity. It is shown that Chinese non-profit and wider engagement in African conservation is not monolithic and that engagement means many things to many people. Moreover, whilst Chinese engagement is marginal in comparison with more mainstream Western influences on African conservation, of Chinese-led non-profit engagement that does exist, it is found to be more humble and 'mutual' in nature, demonstrating a greater role for Kenyan agency. **Chapter 5** argues that it is necessary to approach Chinese non-profit conservation engagement in Kenya as involving a diverse set of actors and often hybrid forms of activity, revealing a significant blurring of boundaries in types

of Chinese engagement and between Chinese and non-Chinese actors. It sets out the argument that Chinese-led non-profit engagement is growing in Kenya and Africa but remains limited. It also shows that Chinese conservation engagement as non-profit activity is largely initiated or led by INGOs. Furthermore, much Chinese non-profit engagement is, to some degree, shaped by or linked to for-profit and/or state activity and interests. These dynamics are significant for understanding the extent to which Chinese conservation engagement might be distinctly 'Chinese' and how far it might represent a novel dynamic in China-Africa relations more broadly.

Chapter 6 explores Kenyan interview participant perceptions of Chinese engagement and its implications for conservation. The chapter contends that perceptions and attitudes are diverse, bringing more nuance to the discussion of Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, that has often been addressed and interpreted negatively in Western media reporting and by INGOs (Kelly 2019; Margulies, Wong, and Duffy 2019; Li 2020; Luo and Gao 2022). These attitudes towards Chinese engagement can be broadly divided into those that see Chinese engagement as limited, those that see it as problematic, and those that see it as positive. The perception that Chinese engagement is limited or has limited implications is largely attributed to the fact that Chinese engagement in conservation remains limited in comparison to wider foreign, and specifically Western, engagement. Perceptions that Chinese engagement is problematic captures Kenyan attitudes of wariness and questioning of activities, through to hostility towards Chinese engagement and actors in relation to conservation and wider spheres of interaction. In turn, perceptions that Chinese engagement is positive represent openness through to active encouragement of engagement, and the understanding that interactions with Chinese actors can have positive impacts on Kenyan conservation, whilst also affording a greater degree of Kenyan agency within conservation. It is argued that Chinese intervention in conservation engagement could be introducing a new more humble and 'mutual' dynamic to conservation, a dynamic that somewhat disrupts 'Western' 'authority' in the field. Nevertheless, given the scale and nature of broader dynamics of Chinese engagement in African conservation, it is also argued that there is limited evidence that such engagement is significantly changing established dynamics of foreign influence in Kenyan conservation thinking and practice.

The final empirical analysis chapter, **Chapter 7**, turns to discuss how Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation, and Kenyan perceptions of this activity, have been shaped by and in turn can shape wider understandings of China-Africa relations. It contends that the examination of Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation builds on and presents a new angle to existing debates on Chinese diplomacy and further develops understandings of what

can be termed 'conservation diplomacy'. The chapter begins by using the idealised framework of 'South-South cooperation' to examine the dynamics and outcomes of engagement. As part of this, a first line of argument is that Chinese-led engagement in conservation might be more cooperative than suggested by much work and debate on wider China-Africa relations, characterised by reciprocal learning and more 'mutual' engagement, with an important role for Kenyan agency. The ideals of 'South-South cooperation' are found to be disrupted by the involvement of INGOs, prompting the question that there might exist a 'triangulation' of cooperation between partners of the 'North' and 'South'. From one angle, INGOs as 'Western' actors are framed as inserting themselves in Chinese engagement in conservation, or otherwise 'letting Chinese actors in' to 'Western' modes of engagement. From an alternative perspective, Western actors are seen to be 'invited', 'let in', or relied upon to deliver Chinese actor engagement, with the added intention that INGOs can help advance Chinese strategic interests and diplomacy. In this way, Chinese engagement via INGOs presents a multi-polar dimension to China's 'Going Out' and 'South-South cooperation', potentially demonstrating less Chinese agency, and in turn, making engagement less distinctly 'Chinese'. The chapter progresses to argue that Chinese engagement or 'cooperation' in conservation can in part be explained by and linked to key state visions and wider diplomacy associated with China-Africa relations. It contends that there is a case for understanding Chinese engagement as Chinese conservation diplomacy, where Chinese conservation diplomacy may also be a means of activating soft power and improving the image of Chinese engagement, but where Kenyan actors are still able to assert their agency.

Part 3, the concluding **Chapter 8**, contends that by operating at the intersection of knowledge and debate on China-Africa relations, wildlife conservation and Chinese non-profit activity, the thesis contributes important understanding on the nature and implications of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation. It contends that Chinese-led non-profit activity in Kenya, specifically in the conservation context, remains small-scale. However, its key focus on the education and engagement of Chinese audiences in wildlife advocacy potential differentiates itself from more mainstream 'Western' engagement in Africa. Its entanglement with other Chinese and international actors connects it to more complex dynamics of Chinese diplomatic interest and international engagement and agendas. Whilst Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement in conservation are diverse and often linked to wider dynamics of Chinese and 'foreign' engagement, it is the emergence of more balanced and 'mutual' relations that has potentially significant implications for conservation. In many ways, Chinese engagement in conservation has come to be connected to and shaped by wider dynamics of China-Africa relations, whereby ideas of 'South-South cooperation', Kenyan agency, as well as Chinese soft power and diplomacy, become important ways of framing or interrogating such

engagement to better understand Chinese conservation activity. It concludes by proposing how the contributions of this study provide a clear direction for future research, both in examining the dynamics of Chinese engagement in Africa, and for assessing Chinese engagement in other parts of the world.

Chapter 2: China-Africa relations and the emergence of Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation

The purpose of this chapter is to better understand the emergence of and motivations for Chinese engagement in African conservation by exploring the literature on China-Africa relations and Chinese non-profit actors. In doing this, the chapter also examines the literature on Chinese non-profit activity and its broader emergence in Africa. Ultimately, this is a key foundation for addressing the question as to whether Chinese non-profit and wider engagement might present new dynamics and outcomes for both African conservation and China-Africa relations.

The chapter begins by focusing on the intensification of China-Africa relations, the key policies that drive this - specifically China's 'Going Out' strategy - and how this intensification has manifested in Kenya. As will emerge in the analysis, these high-level strategies are important factors in the emergence and nature of Chinese engagement in African conservation. The chapter progresses to discuss how the idea of 'South-South cooperation' has been used as a frame for assessing the nature and outcomes of China-Africa relations and is potentially useful in better understanding Chinese conservation engagement. The exploration then moves to how scholars have attempted to classify interpretations of China-Africa relations into optimist, pessimist or pragmatic schools of thought. This plurality in interpretation is important and, as will be clear in the empirical chapters that follow, is strongly reflected in the analysis that shows the diversity of Kenyan perceptions and experiences of Chinese engagement. Optimist arguments emphasise how 'Chinese' engagement might differ from and be more beneficial than 'Western' engagement. As part of this, discussion of African agency is key given the focus of 'South-South cooperation' on working through more balanced power relations. At the same time, the idea of 'South-South cooperation' as a frame for China-Africa relations is complicated by the recognition of the involvement of 'Northern' actors, and this is particularly significant when considering the role of INGOs in conservation. Furthermore, the growing focus on more 'pragmatic' relations, where engagement is more practical and serves greater 'mutual' benefit and self-interest, prompts discussion of Chinese soft power and its utility as a tool of diplomacy. As will emerge in the analysis, Chinese diplomatic interests are of key importance in seeking to understand Chinese conservation engagement. The underexplored idea of 'conservation diplomacy' usefully highlights how conservation engagement can serve as a tool of diplomacy, deployed to enhance relations between Chinese and Kenyan and wider

African actors, as well as to improve China's image on the international stage.

The emergence and drivers of Chinese engagement in African conservation are then set in the context of the literature on Chinese non-profit actors. Key themes that are useful in this analysis are the relations between Chinese NGOs and the Chinese state and how these shape the nature of activity, as well as how the wider process of China 'Going Out' has been an important catalyst for Chinese non-profit engagement. In the analysis of the data in this thesis, the role and influence of INGOs in Chinese non-profit activity, as well as the significance of volunteering, emerge as important factors and the literature that engages with these themes is also examined below. This chapter provides important insights for understanding the emergence and role of Chinese non-profit actors in African conservation, and setting this in the wider contexts of China-Africa relations and the international politics of conservation.

1. The intensification of China-Africa relations

The intensification of China-Africa relations has garnered extensive analysis across disciplines over the past two decades (Duggan 2023). This increase in interest corresponded with the first FOCAC in 2000 - a uni-multilateral partnership between China and 53 African states. With eight summits to date, FOCAC has been elevated to an all-encompassing framework spanning matters of economy to the environment and has been described as a key component of China's strategy for the 'Global South' (Ze Yu 2022).

This intensification of China-Africa relations needs to be seen in the context of China's wider 'Going Out' strategy. As a framework for increasing China's economic integration into the global economy, 'Going Out' initially encouraged Chinese state-owned companies to expand and invest in foreign markets (Shambaugh 2013; Yeh and Wharton 2016; Gewirtz 2017; Lee 2017; Li and Cheong 2018; Farid and Li 2021). The types of actors 'Going Out' have increasingly diversified, extending to private businesses and NGOs (Farid and Li 2021), but to a degree remaining under the umbrella of state direction. In the context of China's engagement with Africa specifically, scholars have used 'Going Out' to explain the intensification of commercial and infrastructural investment (Grimm 2011), diplomacy (Wang and Zou 2014) and the expansion of Chinese NGOs in Africa (Hsu, Hildebrandt and Hasmath 2016).

The continuing expansion of China's globalising efforts have consolidated into China's most significant global initiative to date, the BRI (Liu and Dunford 2016; Ohashi 2018; Johnston

2019). The significance of Africa in these plans has consolidated and intensified Chinese engagement in Africa, encouraging further Chinese investment, trade, aid and debt relief, as well as Chinese businesses and migrants to its shores.

As a result of this continued intensification of China-Africa relations, China is seen to have become a resurgent player in African affairs (Large 2008; Power and Mohan 2010; Mohan and Lampert 2013), 'rivalling' 'established' powers such as the US and former European colonial powers. In figures published by Statista in 2023 (Statista 2023), an international provider of market and consumer data, it is reported that China is a leading trade partner and the largest source of foreign investment in Africa, with Chinese immigrants to Africa doubling between 2000 to 2019. As one of the leading academic research centres on China-Africa relations, the SAIS-CARI research group based at John Hopkins University reports that China's annual trade flows with Africa have been steadily increasing over the past 20 years (SAIS-CARI 2023a), with FDI flows to Africa increasing in parallel, and exceeding those of the US since the early 2010s (SAIS-CARI 2023b).

The literature on the motivations behind the BRI and its implications in Africa are extensive. Whilst it is argued that greater cooperation and investment from China as part of the BRI brings economic and development opportunity to Africa (Dollar 2019; Risberg 2019; Edeh and Han 2023), there are doubts over motivations, including being perceived as an effort to export China's authoritarian model, and critiques of 'debt-trap diplomacy' (Dollar 2019; Risberg 2019; Adeniran *et al.* 2021). Most recently, there has been increasing suggestion, particularly from Western sources, that the engagement and investments associated with the BRI are losing momentum across the international sphere (China Global South Project 2023). At the same time, it is contended that Chinese engagements linked to the BRI are evolving, with increasing investment related to privately owned Chinese companies and greater focus on areas such as green technology, renewables and telecoms (*ibid.*).

As the key focus of this study, Kenya is a strategic gateway for the BRI given its geographical positioning on the Eastern coastline of Africa and with Mombasa port as a significant entry point into the continent (Johnston, Morgan and Wang 2014). Kenya has become a central economic and diplomatic partner for China on the continent, and a core trade partner and recipient of Chinese infrastructure investment in Africa (Onjala 2008; Eickhoff 2022). Kenya is a regional economic and international business hub with a large domestic market (International Trade Administration 2022; BCIU 2023). According to SAIS-CARI, Kenya was one of the top five African recipient countries for Chinese foreign direct investment in 2021 (SAIS-CARI 2023b). It was in the early 2000's that China-Kenya relations intensified, with the

confluence of China's 'Going Out' policy and Kenya's 'Look East' policy (Eickhoff 2022), the latter of which was largely underpinned by economic factors such as the need for investment and reducing dependence on the West (Maweu 2016; Kelly 2017). These policies were a catalyst in further intensifying China-Kenya relations, with bilateral cooperation agreements on trade and investment, infrastructure development, energy projects and socio-cultural exchange (Waweru 2020).

Much like wider China-Africa relations, the relationship between China and Kenya has been characterised as "economics-driven diplomacy" (Makinda 2020, p.602), shaped by economic interests and cooperation between both countries. Chinese state-owned enterprises and private businesses have worked on major infrastructure projects in the country, including the provision of power lines for the Kenya Electricity and Energy Transmission Company, construction of Nairobi shopping mall (Kenya's tallest real estate project), the deep-water port at Lamu, upgrading the port at Mombasa and building the Standard Gauge Railway (Farooq *et al.* 2018; Okumu and Fee 2019). Built by the China Road and Bridge Corporation, the Standard Gauge Railway is a 'flagship' project and demonstration of Chinese engagement in Kenya and, indeed, Africa as a whole – a railway line opening-up East and Central Africa for international trade and investment (Wissenbach and Wang 2017). Aside from construction, Chinese businesses operate across numerous sectors in Kenya, from media (Farooq *et al.* 2018; Wasserman and Madrid-Morales 2018) to enterprises in retail, wholesale trade, hospitality, tourism services and other entrepreneurial activities (Waweru 2020).

This intensification of Chinese involvement in Kenya and Africa has encouraged much academic debate comparing 'Chinese' with 'Western' approaches to engagement. As will emerge, this comparison of 'Chinese' and 'Western' is important in better understanding the responses to and implications of Chinese engagement. In the academic literature, 'Western' approaches are often framed in relation to the Washington Consensus - the plan for 'reforming' and 'developing' the economies of 'Third World' countries as established by the US (Ramo 2004) - based on neoliberal mechanisms for minimising the role of the state that are tied up in conditionality (Babb 2012). In contrast, the 'China model' of development has been synonymous with a 'no strings attached' approach (Taylor 2008; Mohan and Power 2009) that delivers more tangible outputs in terms of infrastructure or services (Gallagher 2011). More recent debate suggests, however, that this Chinese mode of engagement is evolving and, in some cases, moving away from non-interventionism (Verhoeven 2014; Hodzi 2019) or 'switching on' or 'off' its non-interference stance to align with its wider political and economic interests (Osondu-Oti 2013). In many ways, Chinese engagement in Kenya and Africa has often been framed in relation to the West by Kenyan politicians, media and public opinion.

Furthermore, academic debate also suggests that more negative narratives of Chinese engagement may in part be constructed or at least bolstered by Western observers who have their own interests at stake (Deng 2006; Luo 2007; Corkin 2014). As such, these debates of China-Africa relations become a key area of focus in better understanding Chinese engagement in African conservation.

2. Framing and examining China-Africa relations

The intensification of China-Africa relations has sparked extensive academic and policy debate about the drivers and outcomes, arousing the now familiar debates about whether China represents to African countries a friend or foe (Botha 2006; BBC 2007; Zwanbin 2020). Some scholars have attempted to classify interpretations of China-Africa relations into different schools of thought, which highlights greater nuance in the debate. These are broadly pessimist, optimist and pragmatic or accommodative interpretations (Adem 2013; Asongu 2016; Waweru 2020). The idea of 'South-South cooperation' has been used (DeHart 2012; Khoday and Perch 2012; Shelton, April and Anshan 2015; Okolo and Akwu 2016; Asante 2018) to assess the nature and outcomes of China-Africa relations. This follows attempts by the Chinese state and some African actors to laud increased China-Africa relations as a clear form of 'South-South cooperation', sparking much debate about the extent to which these relations really fulfil the principles and practices of idealised 'South-South cooperation'.

2.1 'South-South cooperation' as a framework for assessing engagement

The idea of the 'Global South' is not merely a geographical term, but a metaphorical concept (DeHart 2012), used to avoid the dichotomy of 'developed' and 'developing', which can imply a hierarchy between countries. The construct of 'South-South cooperation' as a framework for collaboration is generally deployed by governments and global institutions such as the United Nations to suggest a more cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship between developing countries (United Nations Development Programme 2016; 2017) and is used analytically in academic research to assess the nature and outcomes of these relations. The idea of 'South-South cooperation' is differentiated from 'North-South cooperation' in that partnership is based on common historical trajectories and shared experience of being under colonial rule or neo-colonial influence (DeHart 2012). As a framework, it was established at the 1955 Bandung Conference and has been understood to encompass three key principles:

mutual respect, equality and win-win outcomes (Grimm 2014). 'South-South cooperation' should promote a harmonious world, mutual benefit, nation-state sovereignty (DeHart 2012) and an ethos of self-reliance and self-help (Grimm 2014). In academia, 'South-South cooperation' as a framework for assessing engagement has largely been applied in connection to government level interactions or top-down agendas and activities, with limited analysis of non-profit activity and indeed conservation.

As indicated above, the idea of 'South-South cooperation' has been used to critically interrogate Chinese engagement in Africa (DeHart 2012; Khoday and Perch 2012; Shelton, April and Anshan 2015; Okolo and Akwu 2016; Asante 2018). The interpretations that have resulted from this can be categorised into pessimist, optimist and pragmatic schools of thought.

2.1.1 Optimism in China-Africa relations

Optimist interpretations see great opportunities for African countries in China-Africa relations, drawing on arguments favourably comparing 'Chinese' to 'Western' engagement, and highlighting greater African agency in shaping relations and deriving benefits. Optimists have argued that the emergence of China is a 'golden opportunity' to transform Africa's political and economic position (Moyo 2010), achieved through increased opportunities from trade and investment in infrastructure to support African development (Wang 2007; Moyo 2010). Further to this, Adem (2016) argues that support for Chinese investment and engagement exists at different levels of society, from political leaders to 'ordinary' citizens. In the case of Kenya, it has been argued that Chinese engagement retains support from the Kenyan government and the general public, especially amongst those who have benefitted from Chinese interventions (Waweru 2020). Indeed, China is widely seen as a partner for development, specifically infrastructure, that is valued by ordinary people (Sautman and Hairong 2009; Waweru 2020). Surveys conducted in 2019 and 2021 by Afrobarometer (an African non-profit research network) found that 72% of Kenyans perceived China as being both economically and politically influential (Appiah-Nyamekye, Sanny and Selormey 2021). Over half of participants reflected positively on China's influence. However, these sentiments had shifted slightly from the results in 2016 which indicated that more than 60% of locals approved of Chinese engagement linked to influence in infrastructure and business investment, whilst 75% viewed China as a positive influencer in Kenyan development aspirations (Lekorwe *et al.* 2016).

The framing of 'Chinese' versus 'Western' cooperation forms a further key argument from optimists. Scholars have discussed how Beijing has tended to advocate an orthodox understanding of sovereignty and an insistence on non-interference (Grimm 2014; Mohan 2015). It is contended that recognition of sovereignty, non-interference and a focus on creating partnerships of 'equality' and 'mutual respect' are more relevant to local needs and welcome alternatives to the more exploitative, restrictive and patronising approach of the West (Grimm 2014; Shelton, April and Anshan 2015; Asante 2018). As part of this, there is the view that incoming investment from the Chinese is more useful than any colonial, neo-colonial or 'developmental' intervention from traditional Western investors and aid-donors (Sautman and Hairong 2007; Lekorwe *et al.* 2016; Rønning 2016).

In connection to the argument that China-Africa relations have been and can continue to be mutually beneficial (Ancharaz 2009; Menell 2010; Power and Mohan 2010), there has been much debate on how African agency has played a key role in shaping relations (Mohan and Lampert 2013, 2015; Gadzala 2015; Lopes 2016). 'Agency', in its simplest form, is where actors have accountability, intentionality and subjectivity in relations (Wight 1999). Up until relatively recently, there had been a tendency to emphasise Chinese over African agency (Corkin 2013; Mohan and Lampert 2013, 2015). However, over the past decade there has been significant scholarship on recognising and seeking to better understand the nature and implications of African agency in China-Africa relations. This has challenged the idea that engagement is driven solely by Chinese interests and actors, and that the benefits accrue primarily on the Chinese side (Mohan and Lampert 2013, 2015; Gadzala 2015; Lopes 2016; Links 2021). As part of these debates, African agency has been recognised in the range of African actors being able to derive benefit from and even shape and drive engagement in China-Africa relations in a way that supports positive outcomes for African interests.

2.1.2 Pessimism in China-Africa relations

Whilst some scholars are optimistic, others highlight the tensions and dilemmas of China-Africa engagement as 'South-South cooperation'. Key arguments focus on the remaining economic and power imbalances, specifically patterns of trade and economic exchanges (Asante 2018), as well as questioning of wider Chinese motives, including ambitions of resource extraction, accessing new markets and political influence (Bülow and Widenborg 2013). In connection to the latter, pessimist views are concerned with the nature and speed of China's 'rise', seeing it as constituting a 're-colonisation' or part of a 'second scramble' for Africa (Carmody 2011; Chan 2013; French 2014). Such narratives echo claims of Chinese

'land grabbing' for agricultural production and resource extraction as portrayed by Western NGOs or in Western media (GRAIN 2008; Bräutigam and Tang 2009). At the same time these narratives are challenged with arguments that Chinese 'land grabbing' is a myth with limited evidence to prove it (Bräutigam 2011, 2015; Hofman and Ho 2012; Bräutigam and Zhang 2013). Sceptics on the delivery of Chinese aid accuse China of providing funds to African regimes marked by corruption, oppression and human rights abuses, undermining good governance (Manning 2006; Tull 2006; Naim 2009). Other sceptics contend that China's engagement in Africa is exploitative, perpetuating Africa's underdevelopment (Ampiah and Naidu 2008). In response, Grimm (2014) argues that the Chinese do not claim to be altruistic with regard to 'South-South cooperation', and in the case of Africa, they claim that benefits are to be ensured by the African partner, backed by an ethos of 'we don't owe you'.

In the case of Kenya, it is contended that some areas of Chinese engagement come as a double-edged sword (Kalu and Aniche 2020). Chinese trade is said to be driving losses for local businesses manufacturing or selling the same products, whilst imported Chinese products are often deemed to be of low quality (Farooq *et al.* 2018). Negativity also exists among sections of Kenya's intelligentsia and political elite who question the viability of Chinese built infrastructure in terms of sustainability and value for money (Ndii 2014; Manyora 2017; Waweru 2020). Issues pertaining to unethical business practice, corruption, Chinese workplace conditions, as well as racism have also garnered academic discussion (Rounds and Huang 2017; Okumu and Fee 2019; Wang and Li 2023) and media attention in the Kenyan context (Goldstein 2018; BBC 2018). Furthermore, Okumu and Fee (2019) contend that negative sentiment towards Chinese engagement is often reflected in attitudes towards Kenya's own government, which is seen as the enabler of Chinese activity and the beneficiary of Chinese engagement at the expense of civil society.

2.1.3 Towards pragmatism in China-Africa relations

The idea and practice of 'South-South cooperation' has evolved over time, with scholars arguing that it has become more complex and multidimensional, varying across countries, sectors and activities (Fejerskov, Lundsgaarde, and Cold-Ravnkilde 2016; Mawdsley 2019). In particular, it has been suggested that 'South-South cooperation' is now characterised by greater pragmatism focused on more concrete results and less 'symbolism' in cooperation, as well as greater caution (Mawdsley 2019). In the China-Africa context, it has become apparent that it is increasingly difficult for China to maintain the principle of non-interference in practice given the complexities of growing investment and deepening relations drawing China more

directly into other countries' domestic affairs (Verhoeven 2014; Aidoo and Hess 2015). For a number of analysts, these more 'pragmatic' or 'accommodationist' developments are part of an unavoidable process of globalisation and economic integration (Asongu 2016). Some scholars contend that China's vision of cooperation, partnership and 'development' can still help to narrow the development gap between Africa and parts of the 'Global South'. At the same time, engagement in Africa is equally enabling the pursuit of China's own economic and political goals (Tull 2006; Mohan and Power 2009). Relatedly, others argue that China's engagements and motivations in Africa are ultimately not dissimilar to those of Western businesses and governments. As such, Chinese engagement resembles the free-market competition approach as advocated by the Washington Consensus (Tull 2006; Drogendijk and Blomkvist 2013; Lin and Farrell 2013; Asongu 2016).

The evolution of 'South-South cooperation' and China-Africa relations as more complex and multidimensional is further reflected in how scholars recognise the diversity of Chinese and African actors, experiences and interactions (Schoeman 2008; Mohan and Power 2009; Asongu and Aminkeng 2013; Farooq *et al.* 2018; Xu 2018; Abiodun 2023). Additionally, scholars have started to argue that we should not see China-Africa relations as binary in the sense of involving only two sets of actors. This specifically relates to the presence and role of 'Northern' actors in 'South-South cooperation' and how, in some cases, there exists a potential 'triangulation' of cooperation within the frame of global development (Abdenur and Da Fonseca 2013; Piefer 2014; Farid and Li 2021). The United Nations defines 'triangular' cooperation as, "Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries supported by a developed country(ies)/or multilateral organisation(s) to implement development cooperation programmes and projects" (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2023). A key perceived benefit of 'Northern' engagement in development cooperation is that 'Southern' partners may require expertise and financial and technical support that 'Northern' partners can provide (*ibid.*). These arguments relating to the non-binary nature of 'South-South cooperation' are important in this research because INGOs remain key in the conservation sector and mediate, shape and respond to China-Africa relations in this field.

3. Chinese soft power and diplomacy

As noted above, recent debates around China-Africa relations as 'South-South cooperation' demonstrate the growing focus on more 'pragmatic' relations. These 'pragmatic' relations can

be seen partly as a function of Chinese global diplomacy in which soft power has been highlighted as a key tool (Corkin 2014; Wagner 2017; Asante 2018; Mawdsley 2019; Banik and Mawdsley 2023). There is a vast literature that explores debates on both Chinese 'soft power' and 'diplomacy', and the interplay between the two, in the context of the 'Global South' and China-Africa relations. The drawing together of Chinese soft power and diplomacy in African conservation, as well as the role of non-profit actors as part of this, has yet to be considered in the literature. As such, soft power and diplomacy would seem particularly relevant lenses for examining the motivations, nature and outcomes of Chinese engagement in African conservation.

Soft power can be understood as, "the ability to affect others through co-optive means of framing agendas, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes" (Nye 2011, p.20-21). As such, soft power is increasingly framed as an important foreign policy tool (Huang 2013; Arif 2017). A key component of soft power is utilising non-government forces and building citizen diplomacy, therefore enlisting the power of 'society' as opposed to the state (Li and Rønning 2013). As such, soft power could be seen to be associated with driving attraction and appeal through means of engagement in 'softer' issues or channels, such as conservation or through non-profit activity.

There are many vehicles through which China has attempted to exercise soft power in connection to the 'Global South' and Africa. Of particular relevance to better understanding conservation engagement is the pursuit of soft power through people-to-people exchanges, principally through Chinese tourism (Li and Rønning 2013; Wekesa 2013; Chen and Duggan 2016), specific 'environmental' interventions (Gamso 2019; Xie 2022) and INGOs (Farid and Li 2021). In the case of Chinese tourism, Chen and Duggan (2016) discuss how the Chinese state uses tourism as a soft power tool to establish 'harmonious ties' through the economic incentives and cultural people-to-people exchange they deliver. Dynon (2013) goes further to explain that Chinese tourists can be seen to act as 'ambassadors' for China, therefore projecting Chinese culture, political values and foreign policy. Similarly, international relations scholars argue that Chinese action on biodiversity is an environmental focus through which China can demonstrate its soft power and influence on a world stage (Xie 2022). Rodenbiker (2023) articulates this as China's 'green soft power' and discusses this in the context of China's green development and conservation initiatives in the 'Global South', and in particular the 'greening' of the BRI. In the case of the illegal wildlife trade, Gamso (2019) suggests that the Chinese ivory ban was a contribution to China's environmental diplomacy effort. In return, this provided the opportunity to exercise soft power through presenting an image of China as a responsible global citizen, giving China legitimacy in wider negotiations on environmental

engagement. Additionally, when it comes to INGOs, Farid and Li (2021) argue that INGOs operating in China have become intermediaries in China's outbound efforts and 'Going Out' by presenting a certain image and advancing narratives of development and cooperation that are considered important by the state. A key example being the BRI. As such, INGOs are playing a facilitating role in showcasing 'Chinese' engagement to the world and thereby contributing to Chinese soft power.

In many ways, soft power is a tool of much wider ambitions in Chinese diplomacy. 'Diplomacy' itself can be interpreted in different ways. At its core, Leguey-Feilleux (2009, p.1) explains that, "diplomacy is the idea of communicating, interacting, maintaining contact, and negotiating with states and other international actors". It is also "a mode of behaviour, a way of doing business" (ibid., p.2). Chinese diplomacy has largely been discussed in connection to government-level interactions and top-down agendas and activities, but with increasing recognition that diplomacy can incorporate the actions of a diverse set of actors (Farid and Li 2021; Boni 2023). The Chinese diplomacy debate is extensive in the context of the 'Global South' and China-Africa relations, with analysis of Chinese engagement in Africa in areas such as public, cultural, resource, health and stadium diplomacy (Liu 2008; Power, Mohan and Tan-Mullins 2012; Wekesa 2013; Wheeler 2014; Winter 2016; Wu 2016; Killeen *et al.* 2018; Dubinsky 2021; Papachristou 2021; Čeginskas and Lähdesmäki 2023).

There currently exists limited analysis of China's engagement in wildlife conservation as part of Chinese diplomacy. The most relevant discussions have been focused on China's environmental and 'Panda' diplomacy, the former of which could be seen as especially relevant in the context of China's engagements in African conservation. Environmental diplomacy has been important in framing China's overseas engagements and influence in relation to the environment and climate change (McBeath and Wang 2008; Yu 2008; Jackson 2020; Yu and Zhu 2020; Yasmin 2021). In the case of wildlife, international relations scholars have argued that action on biodiversity is an environmental focus through which China can exercise its soft power and influence on a world stage (Xie 2022). With key relevance to this research, Gamso (2019) argues that the Chinese ivory ban was a contribution to China's environmental diplomacy effort that in return delivered an opportunity to enhance Chinese soft power. These understandings in relation to action on biodiversity and the ivory ban, are particularly relevant to China's engagement in the context of Kenyan and wider African wildlife conservation. From another angle, Yang and Lin (2022) discuss 'Panda diplomacy' – the practice of sending pandas from China to other countries as an instrument of diplomacy and goodwill - and argue that China's association with wildlife conservation may contribute to positively influencing non-Chinese attitudes towards China. In a similar way, China's

involvement in the conservation of Kenyan and African wildlife could be seen as a means of positively influencing African attitudes towards China and in turn improving relations.

To further build on understandings of Chinese diplomacy in the context of wildlife conservation and to help understand and explain what is driving Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation, the idea of 'conservation diplomacy' is especially useful in highlighting the role of Chinese diplomatic interests and strategy, and how Chinese non-profit engagement may also be a vehicle for state interests and diplomacy. Conservation diplomacy itself has received limited academic interrogation to date. Whilst no clear definition exists, scholars have used the term primarily to frame negotiations between nation-states on biodiversity conservation efforts and governance. Some scholars have discussed conservation diplomacy as a field of diplomacy, where conservation is the subject of diplomacy. Dorsey's (1998) and Lewis' (2008) conceptualisations of conservation diplomacy focus on international wildlife treaties that have defined legal obligations and responsibility for wildlife, specifically in the Western hemisphere. Other scholars have discussed conservation engagement as tool of diplomacy. The work of Yeh *et al.* (2021) also focuses on collaborative nation-state conservation efforts, but instead explores more recent dynamics of sea turtle conservation in the South China Sea as a means and opportunity for U.S.-China diplomacy. The framing presented by Yeh *et al.* of conservation engagement and diplomacy is perhaps the most useful in the context of understanding Chinese engagement in Africa conservation:

Transnational communications to coordinate conservation efforts across borders provide a positive agenda of cooperation to build trust, creating a politically neutral platform to facilitate opportunities for diplomacy to reset and improve foreign relations. (ibid., p.1)

Yeh *et al.* explain that since sea turtles are migratory animals that nest on beaches under jurisdiction of multiple nation states in the South China Sea, "the species is an ideal ambassador to raise public support for international collaborations" (ibid., p.1). The work focuses on the formation a U.S.-China EcoPartnership between the U.S. Department of State and China's National Development and Reform Commission, which was led by Hawaii-based U.S. non-profit organisation Sea Turtles 911 and Hainan Normal University in China. In partnership, a series of grassroots initiatives were implemented, including establishing a sea turtle rescue centre and activities to empower local communities to save sea turtles. Whilst the initiatives are seemingly developed and led by a non-profit and educational institution, the activities are framed and brought together under a U.S.-China state-level partnership. It is the involvement of a multiplicity of actors, including non-profits, in shared diplomatic efforts, that

is of key interest to this research and can be further examined and developed in the context of China-Kenya conservation engagement.

The distinction between conservation diplomacy as a field of diplomacy, where conservation is simply the subject of diplomacy (Dorsey 1998; Lewis 2008), and conservation engagement as an active tool of diplomacy (Yeh *et al.* 2021) is important for understanding the theoretical contribution of this research. It is the latter understanding of conservation diplomacy as a tool that is of specific analytical utility in this research, whereby it is deployed in pursuit of diplomatic interests in general, rather than simply an arena in which conservation is discussed. Linked to this, it is the idea that Chinese engagement in conservation provides a positive agenda for cooperation, building trust and improving relations that may prove to be particularly relevant in better understanding engagement in the case of Kenya. This opportunity to improve relations is not just between Chinese and Kenyan and African actors, but it is also about enhancing relations and China's image on the international stage, signifying that China is a responsible global actor. As such, and in a similar way to ideas related to China's environmental and 'Panda' diplomacy (Gamso 2019; Xie 2022; Yang and Lin 2022), this research will explore how Chinese engagement in conservation could be seen to be linked to Chinese state efforts in building 'soft power' and winning favour amongst African actors and on the international stage.

In seeking to contribute to understandings of conservation diplomacy as a diplomatic tool, this research examines its deployment in new arenas of international engagement. Through the example of China-Kenya conservation engagement, the research offers a new lens on conservation diplomacy. This application contributes novel insight by examining the dynamics of conservation engagement between China and Kenya, and more broadly between China and Africa. In doing this, it also pioneers insight on conservation diplomacy between nations of the 'Global South'. Moreover, the specific focus on non-profit engagement (both through Chinese and non-Chinese actors) evolves understandings of conservation diplomacy. It highlights the key role of a broader set of Chinese actors - specifically Chinese non-profit actors, but also the Chinese state and Chinese for-profit sectors – as well as the role of non-Chinese actors as vehicles of diplomatic engagement in conservation and, in turn, enhancing relations between China and Africa, and improving China's image on the international stage. Therefore, in employing the idea of conservation diplomacy in these contexts, this research seeks to demonstrate the analytical utility of Yeh *et al.*'s (2021) framing of conservation diplomacy as a diplomatic tool, both as part of China-Africa engagements and wider international relations.

4. The role of non-profit actors within China-Africa relations

Chinese non-profit actors and activity form the central focus of this research. The literature on non-profit actors in China-Africa relations remains limited. As such, the wider literature on Chinese non-profit activity, and specifically NGOs, in China provides useful context to better understand the emergence and nature of Chinese non-profit actors engaging in Africa. Whilst this research is framed in terms of 'non-profit' actors, the discussion and understanding of Chinese non-profit actors is often overlapping with Chinese 'NGOs' in the literature, and what might be termed the 'non-profit sector' in China is often focused on NGOs. There are a number of themes within such analyses that are particularly relevant and will be examined in the sections that follow. These include: the framing of 'non-profit' organisations in China, the process of emergence of NGOs (and specifically Environmental NGOs or ENGOs) in China and their relationship to the Chinese state; challenges NGOs face in terms of their operations; and the connection between overseas engagement and China's wider 'Going Out' strategy.

4.1 Understanding 'non-profit' actors in China

The definitions and understandings of 'non-profit' organisations in the context of China are complex and ever-evolving. Wang and Jia (2003) have attempted to define Chinese non-profit organisations as non-profit making, formally organised and not part of a government institution (Guo and Zhang 2013). At the same time, non-profit organisations are also described as inherently entangled with politics, as well as culture and business (Han 2019; Zheng, Ni and Crilly 2019). Zheng, Ni and Crilly (2019) argue that the frequent intervention from political actors in non-profit organisations in China (as in other emerging markets) demonstrates political embeddedness – which Michelson (2007, p.352) describes as the “bureaucratic, instrumental, or affective ties to the state and its actors”. The direct and indirect connection of non-profit actors to the state is further compounded by the latest legal frameworks on non-profit law in China. According to a resource prepared by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (a global organisation focused on providing expertise on the legal environment of the civic space) and accessed through the Council on Foundations (a US-based non-profit membership association that collates the latest legal frameworks for non-profit law from countries across the world), the law in China recognises four primary legally-registered forms of non-profit organisations (Council on Foundations 2024). 'Social Associations' include social groups and membership associations; 'Social Service Organisations' which are similar to 'service providers'; 'Foundations'; and 'Public Institutions'. The first three are non-government

entities and collectively known as 'Social Organisations', the fourth is a quasi-government non-profit organisation. In addition to the 'legal' non-profit organisations, there are also unregistered non-profit organisations (ibid.). The resource itself outlines that its function is to describe "the legal framework for nonprofit organizations (also known as non-governmental organizations or NGOs) in China" (ibid., p.1). This acknowledgement of 'non-profit' organisation and 'non-governmental' organisation as the same thing signals the potential overlap in understanding and use of these terminologies when it comes to describing non-profit organisations and NGOs in China.

To a great extent, the overlap and interchange of the terms non-profit organisation, non-profit actors and NGO as a way of talking about Chinese activity in the third sector is seen across the literature, as well as when describing international non-profit actors, and INGOs. As will emerge in the analysis, this interchange of terminology to describe actors is apparent in relation to Chinese engagement in African conservation identified as part of this research. In many ways, the term 'non-profit' captures the different actors (from formal organisations to looser groups of individuals) discussed as part of this thesis. This largely encompasses organisations that self-identify as Chinese NGOs or non-profit organisations, but can also include INGOs, Chinese philanthropic organisations and individuals, 'think tanks', as well as individual and informal groups of Chinese volunteers.

Most of the literature on what might be termed the 'non-profit sector' in China, and especially activities focused on the environmental and conservation, is focused on NGOs specifically. Thus, the literature on NGOs is especially useful in better understanding the emergence, nature and dynamics of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation. The following sections will examine in greater detail the literature on the emergence and role of Chinese NGOs, philanthropy and volunteering as part of Chinese non-profit activity.

4.2 The emergence and nature of Chinese NGOs

Akin to understandings of 'non-profit' organisations, the term 'NGO' itself is complex and has been given different definitions, often overlapping with the terms 'non-profit', 'voluntary' and 'civil society' (Lewis 2010). The various framings are a reflection of the diverse histories and cultures in which understandings of NGOs have been developed (ibid.). Martens' (2002, p. 282) definition of an NGO captures a widely acknowledged understanding that observes both sociological and juridical factors: "NGOs are formal (professionalised) independent social organisations to promote common goals at the national or international level". However, in the

Chinese context (and arguably in many others) the idea of classifying NGOs as completely 'independent' of the state is flawed. Ma (2002) and Lu (2007) argue that Chinese NGOs cannot be viewed or understood under the same definitions and criteria as applied to Western interpretation. Ma (2002) contends that Western theories and concepts of civil society or the third sector limits the ability to see the 'uniqueness' of China's state-society relationship and NGOs. As such, there is great debate around the classification of NGOs in China. Scholars have suggested various terms, with 'Government NGOs' (GONGOs – organisations set up or sponsored by government) and 'Environmental NGOs' (ENGOS) being the most common (Knup 1997; Yang 2005; Cooper 2006). Yang (2005) segments Chinese NGOs even further, including the likes of registered NGOs, non-profit enterprises, web-based groups and philanthropic organisations. As will emerge in the analysis, these categories of actors are especially relevant to what has been identified in the context of Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation.

The emergence of NGOs in China has been widely documented in English language literature (Yang 2005; Chen 2006; Hsu 2014). From the 1980s onwards, China's move towards a market-led economy facilitated the growth of NGOs by encouraging a separation of state and society, resulting in an opportunity for the growth of social organisations (Yang 2005). The decentralisation of the state, guided by Deng Xiaoping's reforms, resulted in the loosening of central state control and the delegation of social responsibilities to local government (Caulfield 2006). The transition to a market economy, alongside decentralisation and delegation, also provided an opportunity for the state to co-opt new actors and further its own goals (Hsu 2014). At the same time, economic transition brought to the fore social challenges, such as in healthcare and education provision, that the Chinese state was failing to address (Hsu 2014; Hasmath and Hsu 2015). As such, NGOs emerged as important stakeholders in the delivery of social services (Hsu, Hildebrandt and Hasmath 2016) and as unofficial research and development offices (Teets and Hsu 2016). These social organisations centred on poverty, health and education provision, gradually expanding to other causes including the environment and conservation. To this point, it can be argued that the function and operations of NGOs have emerged with a distinct blurring of boundaries between NGO and public or government institution, with the former acting as an extended arm of the state.

ENGOS are of specific interest to this research given the connection to wildlife and conservation activities. The literature on Chinese ENGOS is flourishing, with many scholars recognising their growth and role in society. As argued by Thumm (2014), influence from abroad has significantly shaped environmental NGO development and operations in China. Thumm also argues that a key reason for the rise in ENGOS is their relative neutrality and

'political safety' in China (ibid.), unlike NGOs that might focus on issues deemed more politically sensitive such as democratisation. Issues such as pollution are highly visible in China and have been acknowledged internationally and by the Chinese state. As a result, the government is willing to increase 'political space' for environmental protection and ENGOS (Schwartz 2004). ENGO activism itself has a relatively short history in China; in 1994, Friends of Nature (FON) was the first Chinese-founded ENGO in China (Hildebrandt and Turner 2009). Its goals were promoting environmental education, advocating 'green-minded' culture amongst citizens, and facilitating citizen engagement in environmental protection (Liu 2019). According to Yang (2005), the presence of INGOs in China has been a key factor in the ensuing growth of ENGOS in the country because of the experience, funding and networks they provide.

The role of INGOs as 'Northern' actors in Chinese non-profit engagement is significant in the context of Chinese conservation engagement in Africa. It was from the 1980s that the Chinese government started to invite environmental officials and experts from abroad (Fei 2016). Key conservation INGOs operating in China include the WWF, WildAid, IFAW, WCS and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). It is argued that Chinese ENGOS are in a symbiotic relationship with INGOs (Yang 2005). For Chinese ENGOS, INGOs provide expertise and prestige (Yang 2005), tend to have significant funds at their disposal and vast networks with the international community (Volpe 2017). Moreover, INGO networks provide influence that aids in legitimising the values and norms of domestic ENGOS and increase their capacity and resources (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Yang 2005).

As noted above, an important argument in the literature on NGOs in China is the emphasis on the role of the state in shaping NGOs and their activity. This literature affords much attention to the NGO-state relationship and questions of NGO autonomy (Schwartz 2004; Lu 2007; Hsu 2014; Salmenkari 2014; Teets and Hsu 2016). Scholars contend that it is difficult to separate state from society in China (Howell 2007; Hildebrandt 2013; Hsu 2014). It is argued that the more independent an NGO is from the state, the less it can achieve in its activities and that NGOs must be cautious of standing in opposition to the state (Lu 2007; Fei 2016). Consequently, increased distance from the state is not always an advantage (Lu 2007). Larsen (2016) argues that working around state control is part and parcel of smooth NGO operations at a global scale. As such, NGOs often adopt strategies to work more closely with the state (Lu 2007; Salmenkari 2014), resulting in a deliberate blurring of lines between themselves and the state in order to influence state policy from within (Baogang 2003), and promote mutually beneficial activities (Tang and Zhan 2008; Grano 2012; Hsu 2012). At the same time, the state imposes legal and financial restrictions on NGOs, whereby they are less able to exploit

strategies, resources and organisational schemes available to Western NGOs operating in China (Sullivan and Xie 2009).

In addition to the dynamics of the NGO-state relationship, the literature identifies wider economic, resource and administrative challenges encountered by Chinese non-profit actors and NGOs operating in and outside of China. For example, it is argued that there has been a lack of specialisation in NGO activities and a shortage of available professional staff required to run an NGO that is successfully impactful (Yang 2005; Fei 2016). The state-imposed limits on fundraising activity also mean that NGOs are heavily reliant on volunteers (Ho 2002; Hasmath and Hsu 2020). The challenges faced by Chinese NGOs are likely to have implications for how Chinese non-profit activity takes shape overseas, and are therefore important considerations in better understanding the nature and outcomes of Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation.

4.3 The emergence and nature of Chinese philanthropy

As will become apparent in the analysis, philanthropy (through organisations or as individual giving) also plays an important role in Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation. Philanthropy itself is the allocation of money, goods, property or services by individuals or non-profit groups for altruistic or public service purposes (Smith *et al.* 2006, p.172). Chinese philanthropy on any significant scale remains an emerging phenomenon (Liu 2015). Its rising prominence comes as a direct result of a growing population with increasing wealth and disposable income, but also because of the liberalization of the regulatory environment around charitable giving (Chang 2019). In a study conducted by Johnson and Saich (2016), they summarise that key philanthropic motivation comes from the desire to contribute to a 'harmonious society' and fulfil the Chinese traditional values of harmony and helping others. It is also attributed to the desire to give back and the practice of gratitude (*ibid.*), and be seen to exercise characteristics of a more 'ethically-driven' consciousness. In addition, they found that there are also external motivations driving Chinese people to participate in philanthropy, including the influence of the global rise in philanthropic practice and the ambition for Chinese state to demonstrate its soft power through philanthropy (*ibid.*). As such, it can be argued that philanthropy is also a tool for image and brand enhancement for China.

Philanthropy can also be seen to connect to for-profit business and in particular CSR. CSR has been interpreted as a form of corporate philanthropy (Liu 2015) and is widely regarded as a means of supporting companies to operate in socially and environmentally sustainable ways.

In the China context, CSR has been framed as a vehicle of brand enhancement as elsewhere in the world, but also as a means of supporting 'South-South cooperation' and exercising soft power (Hanlon 2012; Harper Ho 2017; Mihić *et al.* 2019). The Chinese state has been a key driver of CSR, encouraging businesses to address negative externalities resulting from their economic activity (Tan-Mullins and Mohan 2013). As will come to emerge in this research, the blurring of boundaries between Chinese non-profit engagement with Chinese for-profit activity is significant, as is the connection to Chinese state strategies as part of China-Africa relations and wider diplomatic interests.

4.4 The emergence and nature of Chinese overseas volunteering

As noted above, volunteering is an important component of Chinese non-profit activity, both in China and overseas (Alden 2007; Ceccagno and Graziani 2016; Baillie Smith, Laurie and Griffiths 2018). Xu (2014) differentiates between Chinese spontaneous volunteer participation (where the participant engages without being influenced by the state), which has grown rapidly over the past two decades in China, and top-down volunteering linked to government organisations that is still prevalent. The emergence of volunteering programmes resulted from two main government concerns, unemployment and the perceived need to improve moral and ideological education (Ceccagno and Graziani 2016), in addition to the imperatives of major events including the 2008 Olympics (Zhuang 2010) and the 2008 Sichuan earthquake (Shieh and Deng 2011).

Since the 1960s, China has been sending teams of medical, teaching or engineering experts to Africa as part of developing China-Africa relations and diplomacy (Thompson 2005). However, it was in the early 2000s that China began to officially send teams as 'volunteers' through government-sponsored programmes (Ceccagno and Graziani 2016). China's government-sponsored international voluntary service is especially targeted at youth and the well-educated (Hustinx, Handy and Cnaan 2012), and was constructed by the state as a means of serving the motherland and supporting the 'realisation of self' (Ceccagno and Graziani 2016). The process of sending volunteers abroad has been linked to China's wider 'Going Out' strategy and ambitions in soft power politics (Bräutigam 2009; Ceccagno and Graziani 2016). As such, Chinese volunteers have become 'goodwill ambassadors' and tools for enhancing China's public appeal (Alden 2007, p.27). According to a 2016 report published by the world's largest youth-run organisation (AIESEC 2016), China has become one of the biggest exporters of volunteer tourism. Relatedly, there has been a rise in what has been identified as 'South-South' volunteering (Baillie Smith, Laurie and Griffiths 2018), whereby

Chinese individuals are paying to take short volunteering trips abroad, with a focus on developing countries of the 'Global South'. Africa is now the leading destination for overseas Chinese volunteers (Ceccagno and Graziani 2016), hence the importance of volunteering in discussions of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenya and African conservation.

4.5 The emergence of Chinese-led non-profit engagement in Africa

Over the past 15 years there has been increasing organisational reporting and academic and policy analysis that has started to discuss the nature of Chinese non-profit engagement in Africa. This engagement includes NGOs and GONGOs, through to grassroots organisations, philanthropic activity and volunteering.

Tracing the emergence of Chinese non-profit actors in Africa links back to the broader overseas expansion of Chinese NGOs (Deng 2013; Huang 2015; Lu 2015; Hsu, Hildebrandt and Hasmath 2016; Li and Dong 2018). The 'internationalisation' of Chinese NGOs mirrored China's wider state-led and commercial process of China 'Going Out' in the 1990s (Hsu, Hildebrandt and Hasmath 2016; Li and Dong 2018). Indeed, it has been claimed that where there is Chinese non-profit activity, there is also Chinese state-led and commercial presence (Brenner 2012). Brenner (2012) notes that, at the turn of the century, African NGOs started to express concern about the negative impacts of China's presence and growth in relation to such things as labour rights, local markets for production and the environment. The Chinese government acknowledged that if it wanted to advance its long-term business goals it needed to effectively engage with African NGOs. In response, the government has used Chinese GONGOs as a liaison for African NGOs (*ibid.*). Hsu, Hildebrandt and Hasmath (2016) argue that, for the Chinese state, NGOs are seen as facilitators of friendlier relations with African nations and a means of softening China's image abroad. They also contend that a key role of Chinese NGOs in Africa is to supplement the CSR of Chinese companies operating there. At the same time, Hsu, Hildebrandt and Hasmath (*ibid.*) observe that such social organisations continue to be government-organised NGOs, rather than grassroots driven, and, in parallel, that Chinese engagement through such NGOs continues to support temporary, one-off projects, rather than long-term development plans. Consequently, it might be suggested that Chinese NGO activity in Africa is distinct from Western NGOs, with state control or direction remaining important and building China-Africa relations being a key focus of NGO activity.

Through this study's examination of online media and organisational reporting, it is found that much Chinese NGO activity in Africa has been focused on humanitarian aid and supporting

development projects linked to health or education, although this is increasingly diversifying. As examples, The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (registered under the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs) has worked on projects in hospitals and school canteens, and delivered care packages and women's professional training in colleges (Luo 2019). Claimed to be a grassroots project, The Dreaming Building Service Association has worked to promote youth empowerment in vulnerable areas in East Africa (Zhong 2020). In terms of philanthropic activity, Jack Ma, co-founder and former executive chairman of the Alibaba Group (a multinational technology conglomerate in China and one of the world's largest e-commerce businesses) and founder of the philanthropic arm of Alibaba, the Jack Ma Foundation, has been engaged in many activities. In Africa, the foundation has supported the 'Africa Netpreneur Prize' initiative (Doebele 2019) and, specific to conservation, the 'African Ranger Awards' via The Paradise Foundation, a China-based NGO (The Paradise Foundation 2023). Interpretations of the ambitions of the Jack Ma Foundation in Africa are manifold. A report published by The Africa Report (a leading news organisation on the continent) points to the Foundation's support for entrepreneurship and commercial experimentation, as well as seeing it as a vehicle for China's 'soft power' (Velleut 2020). Although there is increasing Chinese non-profit activity in Kenya and Africa generally, the Kenyan NGO Bureau website for NGO registry indicates that there remain very few Chinese NGOs officially registered in Kenya (NGO Bureau 2023).

It can be summarised that whilst there has been some academic interrogation of Chinese non-profit engagement in Africa, specifically detailing the function of NGOs and their role in China-Africa relations, the literature is minimal. Online media and organisational reporting are thus useful in providing further insight into the types of non-profit actors involved and the activities they support. However, no academic studies have yet to be identified that relate specifically to Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan and African conservation. As such, there is significant opportunity to examine this highly understudied area of China-Africa relations and further contribute to the developing literature of Chinese non-profit engagement in Africa.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has examined key areas of literature on China-Africa relations and Chinese non-profit actors to help contextualise and understand what is found in the research. Moreover, it has helped to identify ideas to critically employ and arguments to test, such as the idea that China-Africa relations have been framed in different ways, the importance of soft power and

diplomacy in relations, as well as the nature of Chinese non-profit actors and NGOs, and in particular their relationship to the state. In doing this, the chapter has also helped to identify gaps in existing knowledge. To date, academic interrogation of China-Africa relations has overwhelmingly focused on state- or commercially-led activity. As such, there is a clear need to develop understandings of the emergent engagement of Chinese non-profit actors in Africa, and specifically how this relates to wider discussions of China-Africa relations. Furthermore, there is a particular gap in understanding Chinese conservation engagement in Africa and its implications for the wider conservation sector on the continent.

The chapter first examined the academic literature on the intensification of China-Africa relations, the specific policies that drive them, the interventions they involve, and how this intensification has manifested in Kenya. China's 'Going Out' strategy was identified as a key policy driver and the BRI as the current leading manifestation of China's international expansion, which has in turn consolidated and built on important elements of the renewed China-Africa relations that have developed since the early 2000s. As will become clear in the analysis of the data collected in this study, these factors also emerge as significant in understanding the emergence, nature and outcomes of Chinese engagement in African conservation.

Following this, it was argued that the intensification of China-Africa relations has sparked substantial academic and policy debate about the drivers and impacts, especially in terms of whether they are 'good' or 'bad' for African countries and people. A key framework for both framing and assessing these relations has been 'South-South cooperation' and on this basis what have been termed optimist, pessimist and pragmatic interpretations have resulted. It was highlighted how optimist arguments have given rise to debate on how 'Chinese' engagement might differ from and be more beneficial than 'Western' engagement. Linked to this are arguments that Chinese engagement has created more space for African agency in shaping and deriving positive outcomes. Such contentions are significant given the focus of 'South-South cooperation' on promoting more equal power relations and mutual benefit between developing countries. The importance of recognising African agency in shaping China-Africa relations means that perspectives from African actors are a key part of this study's analysis of Chinese conservation engagement in Kenya.

In exploring the evolution of ideas and practices of 'South-South cooperation' it also became clear that they have come to be seen as more complex and multidimensional. This is apparent in the growing recognition of the involvement of 'Northern' actors in 'South-South cooperation' and the potential for a 'triangulation' of cooperation within the frame of global development.

Such arguments relating to the more diverse and complex nature of 'South-South cooperation' are important and resonate with the analysis in this research because INGOs remain key in the conservation sector and can mediate, shape and respond to China-Africa relations in this field.

The chapter continued to discuss the growing focus on more 'pragmatic' interpretations of China-Africa relations, highlighting the relevance of Chinese diplomatic interests in shaping these relations. Particular attention has been drawn to China's efforts to use soft power to promote a positive international image and pursue its diplomatic objectives. Whilst discussions of Chinese soft power and diplomacy through vehicles of tourism, top-down wildlife conservation and NGOs have started to emerge, there remains a key gap that links these foci together. It is around this intersection, understood in terms of conservation diplomacy, that this research seeks to make its contribution.

The final part of the chapter engaged with literature on Chinese non-profit actors and their emergence in China-Africa relations. Whilst this research is framed in terms of 'non-profit' actors, the discussion and understanding of Chinese non-profit actors is often overlapping with Chinese 'NGOs' in the literature, and what might be termed the 'non-profit' sector in China is often focused on NGOs. The relationships between Chinese non-profit actors/NGOs and the state, and with INGOs, were identified as key discussion points within the literature and present important dynamics for consideration in this research. Additionally, the role of philanthropy and volunteering in non-profit activity, and the process of China 'Going Out' as a catalyst for international engagement by Chinese NGOs, are further key dynamics that are significant in the context of Chinese engagement in African conservation.

This chapter focused specifically on the literature and context surrounding China-Africa relations and Chinese NGOs, responding to the question as to whether Chinese engagement in conservation, particularly through non-profit actors, might involve new dynamics and outcomes in the context of the wider set of China-Africa relations. The following chapter will explore the landscape of Kenyan and African conservation. This is important in understanding the socio-cultural, economic and political factors that have shaped the conservation contexts with which the Chinese actors identified in this study are engaging. This in turn facilitates a better understanding of how Chinese non-profit engagement is positioned within this conservation landscape, and with what implications for conservation and China-Africa relations.

Chapter 3: The Kenyan and Chinese conservation landscapes

This chapter focuses on the nature and dynamics of Kenyan and Chinese conservation. Its key purpose is to understand the contexts that Chinese conservation actors are engaging with in both China and Kenya and how they might be potentially re-shaping Kenyan conservation. The chapter begins by focussing on Kenyan and African conservation and argues that the role and influence of foreign actors, namely the 'West' and INGOs, remains significant in African conservation thinking and practice. It introduces the idea of 'conservation', arguing that it is widely interpreted as a Western conception linked to both colonial and neo-colonial ideology and practice. Legacies of colonialism are key in framing Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, specifically for understanding Kenyan perspectives on and responses to this engagement, as well as the wider implications for conservation and China-Africa relations. Relatedly, the chapter continues to discuss the highly influential and visible role of INGOs in African conservation, how INGOs can be associated with a colonial legacy and how they remain vehicles of Western influence and norm-setting. As will emerge in the analysis, the presence of INGOs is important in the context of Chinese non-profit activity in Kenyan and African conservation, and is therefore significant in understanding the emergence of Chinese engagement in conservation. The chapter proceeds to look more specifically at the literature on the landscape of and challenges in Kenyan conservation, including the illegal wildlife trade, which very much frames the implications of Chinese engagement.

Building on this, the chapter traces the evolving conceptions of and approaches to nature and conservation in China. Whilst formalised, wide-scale conservation practice is more recent in China than in Africa, it has accelerated rapidly since the mid-20th century. It is argued that, while debates on conservation approaches in China reflect 'globalised norms' of conservation (in which INGOs have been pivotal), the Chinese state plays an important role in further elevating and advancing approaches to the environment and nature. Understanding the role of the Chinese state in advocating policy, visions and strategy on wildlife and environment, including rhetoric of 'harmonious society', 'harmonious world' and 'ecological civilisation', is significant for understandings of how Chinese conservation engagement has emerged and is taking shape in Africa.

1. The African conservation landscape

The central focus of this research is to better understand how Chinese non-profit engagement manifests in Kenyan conservation, and with what implications for the sector. Therefore, specific interest is afforded to discussions on foreign influence and engagement in African conservation. As part of this, the literature on colonial histories and legacies is highly relevant because of how such histories have shaped modern day conservation. In addition, the role of INGOs, both historically and at present, is crucial given the very visible and influential position of INGOs in conservation narratives, thinking and practice. Further to this, it is important to consider the current challenges specific to Kenyan conservation and the narratives around the illegal wildlife trade. The illegal wildlife trade is key in the context of Chinese engagement in conservation given the perceived link between Chinese consumption and the trade, but also because addressing the illegal trade has been a central focus of Chinese activity. Collectively, these debates on the histories and legacies of colonialism and the enduring influence of Western INGOs are key for understanding how Kenyans perceive more recent Chinese engagement in conservation.

1.1 The emergence and nature of conservation in Africa

Conservation ideology and practice has received enormous scholarly attention and critique. Definitions of conservation are diverse and there is great complexity in understandings of what it constitutes. In relation to wildlife, some definitions emphasise species and habitats, others are more concerned with genetic diversity (Sandbrook 2015). As a further build, conservation has also been understood as a concept of capitalist production – facilitated by INGOs who translate wildlife into ‘images’ and ‘commodities’ and incorporate it into the capitalist system (Garland 2008; Brockington and Scholfield 2010; Igoe, Neves and Brockington 2010). For the purpose of this research, it will be primarily understood as the “actions that are intended to establish, improve or maintain good relations with nature” (Sandbrook 2015, p.565). This definition addresses the intended positive engagement with nature, albeit recognising that good intentions are not always realised or successful. Traditional ‘conservation’ practice has existed for thousands of years and revolved around fulfilling human needs rather than altruist concern for wildlife (Western, Wright and Strum 1994). The term ‘conservation’ emerged as a concept in the nineteenth century connected both to the planned use of natural systems (Adams 1997) and the desire to conserve natural resources (Sheail 1984).

The link between 'conservation' and the colonial era in Africa is important for understanding the impact of foreign actors on conservation ideology and practice. Brockington and Scholfield (2010) explain that critics see conservation in Africa as a 'white man's burden' enforced by both colonial and neocolonial powers. This 'white man's burden' is a euphemism for colonialism where 'white' colonialists or imperialists assert how 'non-white' people should manage wildlife. The act of 'conserving' wildlife itself has ancient roots, evidenced across many cultures (Holdgate 2010). However, the modern 'conservation movement' is very much a notion of European and North American origin (ibid.). These ideas of conservation are linked to Western conceptions of an historically imagined 'pristine wilderness' (Adams and McShane 1997; Büscher 2016), a socially-constructed notion born in the USA and endorsed by romantic idealists and colonial rule (Neumann 1998; Nash 2001). This pristine landscape ideal has been critiqued by scholars for creating an inaccurate dichotomy between people and nature (Adams and McShane 1997; Bender Shelter 2007; Meskell 2012). In Africa specifically, after decades of colonial hunting and depletion of wildlife, colonialists and aristocratic European hunters came to view the wildlife-rich landscape as a 'lost Eden' in need of protection (MacKenzie 1987; Neumann 1995; Munro 2021). Edward North Buxton - a hunter and leading figure in the British Commons Preservation Society, who was concerned about loss of wildlife and the ability to hunt in Africa - was pivotal in advancing the formalisation of colonial wildlife conservation (Prendergast and Adams 2003). Buxton's arguments presented at an international conference attended by the African colonial powers (including Great Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, Belgium and Italy) in London paved the way for the 1900 Convention for the Preservation of Animals, Birds and Fish in Africa. The convention and the establishment of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire (SPWFE) in London in 1903 are seen as a point of consolidation for wildlife conservation measures. The SPWFE would later become Fauna and Flora International, the world's first international wildlife conservation organisation (ibid.).

Together, the ideals of pristine wilderness and colonial desires to conserve wildlife served to restrict land access and hunting for African populations and paved the way for protected areas (Prendergast and Adams 2003; Büscher 2016). These 'protected areas' involved the separation and exclusion of people from nature and 'wildlands', based on the contention that people are a threat to nature (Büscher 2016; Dominguez and Luoma 2020). This top-down, centralised approach to conservation through the creation of protected areas and parks has been widely critiqued as protectionist 'fortress conservation', 'guards and guns' and 'fences and fines' (Adams and Hulme 2001; Brockington 2002; Adams 2004; Robbins 2007; Mulrennan, Mark and Scott 2012; Dominguez and Luoma 2020). This 'militarisation' has been linked to neoliberal conservation, whereby nature is regulated through commodification and

partitioning of resources and landscapes in ways that control and often exclude local communities (Igoe and Brockington 2007; Büscher *et al.* 2012; Jones 2021). Evictions have displaced communities and exclusion has been driven through laws banning everyday activities such as grazing, agriculture and hunting (Duffy 2010).

The backlash to the militarisation of conservation and the exclusion of local communities came in the 1980s, which saw the rise in new models that were developed to better incorporate the needs and interests of local people (Kumar 2006; Mulrennan, Mark and Scott 2012; Dunlap and Fairhead 2014). Preeminent among these, community-based conservation is natural resource or biodiversity protection for, with and by local communities (Western, Wright and Strum 1994). As will emerge in the analysis of the data in the present study, wildlife initiatives to support communities at the smaller-scale level have been one of the areas of engagement for Chinese non-profit actors. Whilst many African states, practitioners and INGOs have adopted and continue to promote this approach, critics contend that the effectiveness of community-based conservation is limited in practice (Mulrennan, Mark and Scott 2012; Larson *et al.* 2016), suggesting that it is difficult to simply 'include' or build frameworks around communities that deliver positive outcomes. Indeed, it is argued that community-based conservation can be inequitable in its distribution of benefits (Larson *et al.* 2016), risks the 'passive' participation of community members (Mulrennan, Mark and Scott 2012), and depends on excessive 'outsider' influence and funding (Lele *et al.* 2010).

In more recent years, a rise in poaching of species such as elephants and rhinos has prompted conservationists to review responses to protecting wildlife (Duffy *et al.* 2019). As part of this, there has been an upscaling in the 'militarisation' and 'securitisation' of conservation through the adoption of military-style approaches, development of intelligence networks and proliferation of more sophisticated technologies such as drones (Duffy *et al.* 2019; Duffy 2022a). Such militarised approaches to conservation have been expanding and are becoming institutionalised by donors and certain conservation INGOs (Duffy 2016; Duffy *et al.* 2019), in part because conservationists are under pressure to respond to species decline and extinction (Duffy *et al.* 2019). Duffy's (2022a) most recent work examines this 'securitisation' of conservation and argues that biodiversity conservation has increasingly become a matter of national and global security. The illegal wildlife trade in particular is articulated (primarily by US and European governments, but also by donors and certain INGOs) as a source of funds for armed groups, criminal and terrorist networks (*ibid.*). For donors and governments, addressing the illegal wildlife trade through securitisation is a vehicle through which they can tackle these wider security concerns (Duffy 2022a; Duffy 2022b). These security concerns advanced by governments, along with a highly competitive funding landscape, have

contributed to a context in which portraying poaching and the illegal wildlife trade as a security threat has become strategically important for (I)NGOs (Duffy 2022b).

Whilst the aim of this research is not to interrogate strategies in Kenyan conservation in and of themselves, understanding these approaches is important in assessing whether Chinese engagement might be disrupting or changing established conservation practice.

1.2 The role of INGOs in African conservation

The creation of SPWFE, later known as Flora and Fauna International, in Africa illustrates how conservation INGOs have come to be connected to histories and legacies of colonialism. The late 1980s was a critical time for INGO advancement in conservation and wider international development, in part because of Western neoliberal policy that promoted small government (Edwards and Hulme 1992). Since this time, the number and size of INGOs in African and global conservation has expanded significantly (Brockington and Scholfield 2010). Flora and Fauna International, WWF, IFAW, AWF, WCS, TNC and Humane Society International (HSI) are key examples of such actors in this space.

Within the literature, there is much debate on how INGOs have played a key role in shaping the conservation landscape (Igoe and Brockington 2007; Rodríguez *et al.* 2007; Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008; Brockington and Duffy 2010; Brockington and Scholfield 2010; Duffy 2010; Mbaria and Ogada 2016). Adams (2004, p.55) describes INGOs as being “noisy, visionary...also extremely powerful, for their grip on international thinking about conservation”. Relatedly, other scholars contend that INGOs have come to produce and legitimise knowledge of wildlife and nature, meaning that INGOs are playing a critical role in what is understood about wildlife and, thus, are pivotal in global conservation agenda setting (Rodríguez *et al.* 2007; Brockington and Scholfield 2010). This knowledge production both creates and contributes to the ‘value’ assigned to wildlife (Brockington and Scholfield 2010). This ‘value’ has been created, in part, by the incorporation of wildlife into a broader capitalist system. Although not exclusive to the influence of INGOs, it has been argued that the incorporation of wildlife into the capitalist system has been achieved by the creation of images and ‘commodities’ through INGO campaigns, safari tourism and media such as film and documentaries (Garland 2008; Brockington 2009; Cousins, Evans and Sadler 2009; Brockington and Scholfield 2010). This commodification of wildlife has been described as a “conservationist” or “capitalist” mode of production, which transforms nature into money (Garland 2008; Brockington and Scholfield 2010) and whereby nature becomes a global

resource for 'Western' consumption (Adams and McShane 1997; Garland 2008; Meskell 2012; Kelly 2019). Moreover, 'saving' wildlife is somewhat framed as a 'Northern task' led by INGOs, whilst local actors living with and supporting wildlife often become invisible in the global imaginary (Brockington and Scholfield 2010).

In addition to INGO influence in placing certain forms of 'value' on wildlife, a further relevant debate within the literature is how INGOs have contributed to creating narratives and characterisations of other actors within the frame of conservation. Some scholars contend that INGOs, alongside other Western actors, have mischaracterised Asian (including Chinese) consumers, with sensationalised narratives around poaching and the illegal wildlife trade (Kelly 2019; Margulies, Wong, and Duffy 2019). This is in part because the INGO 'business model' relies on sensational messaging or creating 'hero-villain' narratives in order to sustain interest from funders and wider audiences (Kelly 2019; Margulies, Wong, and Duffy 2019). It is argued that orientalist ideas of cruelty at the hands of Asian consumers and racist legacies of 'yellow peril' (Cardozo and Subramanian 2013) have in the past been characteristic of Western-driven campaigns, advancing a 'paternalistic moralism' that marginalises African agency and condemns Asian consumers (Kelly 2019). As will emerge in the analysis, this context is especially important in better understanding Kenyan responses to Chinese engagement in conservation.

The literature raises important debates on the role of foreign influence and engagement in African conservation. The key argument that 'Western' actors and specifically INGOs have continued to exert a powerful influence in conservation will emerge as significant in this research, specifically in the context of shaping Kenyan responses to Chinese engagement as a 'new' form of foreign involvement. This invites discussion of the extent to which 'Chinese' engagement differs to that of the 'West' and the implications of this for conservation in Kenya. The next section will continue to discuss the literature on conservation, paying specific attention to colonial dynamics and current challenges within the context of Kenyan conservation.

1.3 The Kenyan conservation landscape

Kenya's relationship with wildlife is highly complex and has been shaped by a wide range of factors over time. As recognised by Damians *et al.* (2017), the relationship that Kenya has with its wildlife can be understood as embedded in and produced by broader social, ecological and political processes. Some scholars have attempted to create periodisations of

conservation practice and history in Kenya (Mwaura 2016; Sambu 2017; Cockerill and Hagerman 2020). It has been argued that Kenyan wildlife conservation exhibits three distinct phases that, to some degree, mirror that of wider African experience – a pre-colonial phase prior to 1885, a colonial phase from 1885-1962 and an independence phase from 1963 onwards. In these phases, the custodianship of wildlife changes to some extent in terms of its governance, utilisation and protection (Mwaura 2016). Formal wildlife conservation and management arrived with British colonialists in the late 19th century (Mwaura 2016; Sambu 2017; Cockerill and Hagerman 2020). As in other parts of Africa, the colonial administration interpreted and framed traditional indigenous practice as ‘primitive’ (Barrow and Fabricius 2002) as part of an attempted excuse by European powers to enforce a new system of governance, sealing off ‘wildlands’ for conservation as national parks and preventing local people from entering and using resources (Ngure 2013; Sambu 2017). Following Kenyan independence in 1963, the land tenure system imposed by the British did not change significantly as much of the land was not returned to its original local owners (Sambu 2017). Thus, despite such ‘phasing’ in conservation, enduring legacies of colonialism exist and the extent to which periodisations in relation to colonialism are meaningful can be questioned.

The legacies of foreign influence and ‘ownership’ in conservation, and what this means for Kenyan agency, continue to be central topics of academic debate relating to Kenyan and wider African conservation (Garland 2008; Waithaka 2012; Mbaria and Ogada 2016; Cockerill and Hagerman 2020). At present, a whole network of conservation areas have been established by the Kenyan government in an attempt to protect its wildlife. In terms of official regulation, the Wildlife and Conservation and Management Act of 2013 continues to identify the state as the sole supervisor for wildlife related matters (Wightman 2019). The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) is the state agency whose mandate is to conserve and manage Kenyan wildlife, playing a key governing role in Kenyan wildlife conservation. The formation of the KWS in 1989 came at a time of changing political climate and democratic transition in Kenya. Alongside increased militarisation to target wildlife crime (Kabiri 2010), the KWS has launched programmes supporting and encouraging growth of community participation, as well as investment opportunities for landowners and driving tourism (Baskin 1994; Cockerill and Hagerman 2020). It is argued that changes in leadership in the late 1990s shifted priorities, resulting in a shrinking scope and presence for the KWS in community conservation, and thus creating a gap for NGOs to fill (Cockerill and Hagerman 2020). Thus, NGOs offered new approaches that many communities hoped would address inefficiencies and corruption in previous state governance frameworks for conservation (ibid.).

Critics of Kenyan conservation practice argue that the postcolonial state has been unable to completely detach itself from the influence of Western actors and inherited colonial perspectives on the management of nature, specifically the separation of humans and wildlife (Kabiri 2010; Mbaria and Ogada 2016; Mwaura 2016). This manifests in scenarios that have prioritised wildlife over humans, such as the ringfencing of land for conservation rather than infrastructure development (Mbaria and Ogada 2016), or evicting local communities such as the Endorois and Ogiek to create landscapes for wildlife conservation or tourist activity in Kenya (Kamau and Sluyter 2018; Kenrick 2019; Dominguez and Luoma 2020; Koech and Simiyu 2023). As prominent scholars on conservation in Kenya, Mbaria and Ogada (2016) contend that wildlife conservation continues to be for the benefit of foreigners and remains significantly influenced and driven specifically by Western foreign actors, such as private investors and INGOs. In the case of INGOs in particular, Mbaria and Ogada (ibid.) argue that Western values are being promoted through the power and wealth of INGOs, who pursue agendas against a backdrop of shrinking Kenyan authority. Mbaria and Ogada (ibid.) provide many examples of scenarios whereby the Kenyan government has enacted policies pushed by NGOs or by foreigners through INGOs, including a scheme by game ranchers who worked with the likes of the United States Agency for International Development and the International Union for Conservation of Nature to pass a wildlife law that permitted sport hunting. Along with other scholars, they explain how INGOs, and to an extent African NGOs, have assumed great influence and leading governance roles, specifically related to land acquisition, advancing conservation tourism, working with international donors and private enterprise, as well as local communities (Pellis, Lamers and van der Duim 2015; van Wijk, Lamers *et al.* 2015; Mbaria and Ogada 2016). As such, many of Kenya's conservation programmes have come to be shaped by a hybrid set of actors often working in partnership with one another.

The literature suggests that recognising the role of foreign influence is not only important in the context of understandings of 'ownership' or 'custodianship' of land or conservation outcomes, but also in understandings of dependencies that are created between conservation and foreign actors in relation to tourism. As of 2020, 8% of land in Kenya was protected for wildlife conservation (Kenya Wildlife Service 2020) and Kenya's wildlife remains a key asset and a draw for tourism. In 2017, Wildlife-based tourism contributed up to 14% of Kenya's GDP (Kalua 2017), the third largest contributor after agriculture and manufacturing (Mwaura 2016), with one in every ten Kenyans in formal employment being employed in this sector (Kalua 2017). In the Kenyan Maasai Mara specifically (one of the largest conservation areas in Kenya), 90% of conservancies are reliant on income from international tourism (Chakrabarti and Ekblom 2023). Historically, and to some extent it remains, that international tourism has been Western dominated (Embassy of Kenya in Germany 2024). At the same time, emerging

markets such as China, India and the rest of Africa are gaining significance (Embassy of Kenya in Germany 2024; Statista 2024). In 2022, visitors from the US took top position in tourist volumes, the UK was third and Germany sixth, bearing in mind that the world was still opening up to international travel and tourism post the global pandemic (Statista 2024). With wildlife tourism as an important contributor to GDP and foreign exchange, this reinforces a reliance on foreign actors in the shaping of and outcomes for conservation. Collectively, these understandings of the legacies and continued influence of foreign actors in Kenyan conservation are especially important in assessing the extent to which 'Chinese' engagement might be distinct from other foreign actors and forms of international engagement.

In order to better understand how Chinese actors are engaging, what matters they are engaging in and the implications of Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation, it is important to examine the priorities in Kenyan conservation as identified by scholars, INGOs, the Kenyan government and citizens. Key issues raised in the academic literature, policy documents and by INGOs include human-wildlife conflict, land use change, increased urbanisation, infrastructural development and climate change. Other factors highlighted include weak law enforcement, poor governance, poverty-driven poaching activity, and of course, the illegal wildlife trade (Mbaria and Ogada 2016; Ogutu *et al.* 2016; Weru 2016). To a great extent, human-wildlife conflict, and the relationship between humans and wildlife, is frequently highlighted as one of the most significant concerns in literature, policy and practice. The Kenyan government recognises that over the past three decades Kenya has experienced significant land use change, driven by population growth, urbanisation and expansion of land for residential or commercial use (Ministry of Lands and Physical Planning 2017). Scholars have explained that this has encouraged encroachment on to wild lands and wildlife, driving up the chance of human-wildlife conflict (Galaty 2013; Mukeka *et al.* 2019), thus generating irreconcilable tensions between conservation, tourism, pastoralists and land developers (Serneels and Lambin 2001; Kieti *et al.* 2020). Related to this, some scholars have framed wildlife as a 'resource curse' (Kabiri 2010; Douglas and Alie 2014) - where a national resource has adverse effects on a country's economy, social and political environment. This in turn links to the argument that local Kenyan landowners do not view wildlife as an asset (Kenya Wildlife Working Group 2003-2004; Kabiri 2010), which is in part because local communities have rarely been beneficiaries (Western, Wright and Strum 1994; Kothari, Camill and Brown 2013) and have disproportionately borne the costs of conservation (West and Brockington 2006).

Of particular relevance to Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation is the illegal wildlife trade. This is because the trade has been portrayed within international conservation debates amongst INGOs, international forums such as CITES and in Western media as closely

associated to Chinese consumer demand. Additionally, tackling the trade has been the focus of much Chinese conservation engagement. The scale of the challenge of the illegal wildlife trade in Kenya today is contested. The illegal wildlife trade has been, and to some extent continues to be, central to INGO messaging about African wildlife. Some scholars claim that narratives around conservation and specifically poaching have deliberately been sensationalised (Mbaria and Ogada 2016; Kelly 2019). At the same time, a leading message shared in official statistics provided by the KWS, CITES and WWF, and reported on in African and international media, is that poaching of elephants and rhinos has significantly declined in recent years (Chebet 2019; CITES 2022; WWF 2022). Whilst poaching and the illegal wildlife trade might be in decline in Kenya, a degree of urgency remains as Kenya is still considered a key transit country and gateway for illegal wildlife products and thus a key concern in terms of organised crime and networks (Amandala 2021; Bubi 2024).

Consideration of these challenges in Kenyan conservation will be important in assessing how Chinese engagement might relate to and be responding to Kenyan priorities. Recognising a range of issues in Kenyan conservation is especially important given that international reporting has tended to focus on the challenge of poaching and the illegal wildlife trade, in which Chinese demand for wildlife products has been seen both as a key driver and a major focus of Chinese engagement in African conservation.

2. The Chinese conservation landscape

The current literature on conservation in China is vast. However, English-language discussion of Chinese wildlife conservation as a formalised practice emerges only in more recent decades when compared with conservation in Africa. A key theme is that in more recent years, interest in and efforts to support wildlife conservation have picked up rapidly, with significant spikes in response to the illegal wildlife trade ban and COVID-19 (Huang *et al.* 2021a; Huang *et al.* 2021b; Du, Fathollahi-Fard and Wong 2023).

The concept of 'conservation' itself has evolved over many years in China. On the one hand scholars have argued that Chinese ideas and practices of conservation are not necessarily the same as 'Western' conceptions (Harris 2008a; Xu *et al.* 2013, 2014; Zhu 2022). Western conceptions have tended to follow a preservationist logic, involving the separation of humans from nature to preserve wildlife (Zhu 2022). In contrast, Chinese ideas and practices have been discussed in relation to 'utilitarian' or 'anthropocentric' approaches to wildlife, where the

value of environmental goods is derived by the value they have to humans (Schmidtz 1997; Coggins 2002; Harris 2008a, 2014; Swan and Conrad 2015; Xu, Mei and Lu 2021; Zhu 2022). While it can be argued that such approaches are by no means exclusive to China, they have often been used in framing Chinese consumption of wildlife and demand for commodities of the illegal wildlife trade (Thomas-Walters *et al.* 2020a; 2020b; Rock and Macmillan 2022). For example, as China began to open up to the world in the 1970s, the country embraced capitalism and the Chinese government used slogans urging “Chinese to strive for the American way of life” (Smith 1997, p.29). The sole purpose of wildlife was to fulfil human economic needs (Coggins 2002). However, with ensuing domestic environmental crises and China’s opening-up to the West, China’s environmental condition was thrust into the international spotlight (Coggins 2002; Zhang and Wen 2007). As such, the late 1970s marked the start of a rise in environmental concern and growth in the number of nature reserves (Harkness 1998; Zhang and Wen 2007). In 1988, the first wildlife protection law was passed, declaring that wildlife was the property of the nation and must be protected, researched and exploited in a ‘rational’ (or purposeful) way (Coggins 2002). What followed in this period was a slew of measures to protect wildlife including laws, legal frameworks, and the signing of international conventions and agreements (Huang *et al.* 2021a). In more recent years, scholars have argued that China is making significant progress in wildlife protection and that awareness of the need to protect is rising (Huang *et al.* 2021a; Du, Fathollahi-Fard and Wong 2023). There has been a substantial increase in regulatory activity and a crackdown on the illegal wildlife trade, with both the ivory ban in 2017 and the trade and consumption ban of terrestrial wild animals in 2020 in response to COVID-19 (Koh, Li and Lee 2021).

In many ways, the trends in conservation policy and practice in China are in no way distinct from conservation debates elsewhere. Many of the characteristics and trends discussed in government policy, by Chinese environmental institutions, Chinese NGOs, and INGOs, and in academia, focus on topics such as expanding protected areas, sustainable development, drawing on community participation and traditional knowledge, and the continued rise of conservation as part of CSR (Tang 2020; Huang *et al.* 2021a; Du, Fathollahi-Fard and Wong 2023). These areas of focus mirror those present in Western, and ‘globalised norms’ of, conservation practice (Epstein 2006). As Epstein (*ibid.*) explains, the globalisation of such norms, and specifically the protection of endangered species, has occurred through their entrenchment in Western law and practice, that has later become globally ‘institutionalised’ and ‘socialised’. To a great extent, INGOs have played a key role in the institutionalisation and socialisation of such norms in China, driving a convergence between ‘international’ and ‘Chinese’ conservation practice. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was in the 1980s that the Chinese government began to invite environmental officials and experts from abroad (Fei

2016). INGOs offered expertise, prestige, funding and vast networks with international communities (Yang 2005; Volpe 2017). It can be argued that the opening-up of China to the West was not only about China 'Going Out', but also about letting and inviting international actors in - in this case conservation INGOs and their conservation ideas and practices. Some of the key wildlife conservation INGOs with offices in China today include the WWF, IFAW, WCS and WildAid.

Whilst it can be asserted that approaches to wildlife conservation in China might reflect 'globalised norms', at the same time, there is also a line of argument that speaks to the idea of environmentalism and conservation with 'Chinese characteristics' (Gudrun and Matthis 2008; Grumbine 2010; Grumbine and Xu 2011; Zhu 2022; Arantes 2023). As a key contributor to academic understandings of China's approach to nature, Zhu (2022) argues that China's approach to the conservation of endangered species in particular provides a different vision of an ecological future. In Zhu's work on Chinese demand and consumption of Rosewood and other endangered species, it is argued that the "pillaging of the environment is misunderstood" (ibid., p.12) and that the demand for such species is approached as a problem to fix, rather than acknowledging the complex cultural significance linked to heritage and environmental sovereignty. Zhu contends that the cultural symbolism and value of endangered species will not decline in response to Western values. China's approach to endangered species conservation - with the notable exceptions of the ban on the ivory trade in 2017 and the post COVID-19 trade and consumption ban on terrestrial wild animals in 2020 - largely manifests through policies of sustainable use via legalising trades, captive breeding, and rewilding or reforestation programmes to meet future demand for certain wildlife products and to supplement the wild population. The Chinese approach to the environment and wildlife is informed by an alternative cultural context that is grounded in philosophical tradition and seeking "to redefine its modernity with strong reference to its cultural past" (ibid., p.3). Thus, the Chinese approach does not necessarily follow the Western preservationist logic of separating nature from humans and culture. Zhu argues that from a Chinese perspective, the upholding of cultural values, as well as economic development linked to building and construction, is not in conflict with looking after the environment.

A further key dimension supporting the idea of environmentalism and conservation with 'Chinese characteristics' is the role of the state in advancing Chinese vision and strategy in relation to the environment and conservation, and the subsequent link to wider Chinese ambitions and strategies in economic and societal progression. Reference to state visions of 'harmonious society/world', 'sustainable China' and 'ecological civilisation' are widely discussed in Chinese conservation literature (Gudrun and Matthis 2008; Grumbine 2010;

Wang-Kaeding 2021; Hanson 2019; Zhu 2022; Li *et al.* 2023). 'Harmonious society' has been described as the marrying of environmental protection with human development, and promoting it has been an official Chinese goal advocated by President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao since 2004 (Grumbine 2010). 'Ecological civilisation' was sanctified by the Chinese Communist Party Constitution in 2012 and is a framework under which China will lead in climate change cooperation and energy transformation (Wang-Kaeding 2021), as well as being a vision for a global future (Hansen, Li and Svarverud 2018). Scholars have described 'ecological civilisation' as a manifestation of environmentalism (and socialism) with 'Chinese characteristics' (Hanson 2019; Li *et al.* 2023) and an evolution of China's policy discourse of 'harmonious society' and 'harmonious world' (Balchindorzhieva and Tsyrendorzhieva 2016; Hanson 2019). 'Ecological civilisation' brings politics and culture into conversation with the environment, arguably presenting greater differentiation between Chinese and Western approaches to the environment (Zhu 2022). One of Zhu's key arguments is that Chinese environmentalism and conservation is indeed pushing back against international norms and approaches and that the 21st century is undergoing a "decentering of Western orthodoxy" (*ibid.*, p.5).

Whilst the rhetoric of 'harmonious society/world' and 'ecological civilisation' have been used in both policy and literature to discuss Chinese state approaches to the environment and nature, the use of such rhetoric is also part of much wider policy and academic discussion of China's engagement with the 'Global South' (Ding 2008; DeHart 2012; Geall and Ely 2018; Li *et al.* 2023). The focus on the environment and wildlife conservation as part of broader economic and societal vision and strategy (both domestically and on an international scale) is significant. This suggests that conservation and economic and societal development are perceived as connected. Thus, Chinese engagement in conservation is not an isolated area of strategy and activity, but feeds into much broader Chinese economic and societal ambitions, and international relations. In this way, the Chinese state is playing an important role in terms of advocating, driving and legitimising conservation activity domestically and in international relations. The degree of state involvement in advancing such environmental rhetoric, vision and strategy, and incorporating it into wider economic and societal ambitions, is potentially how Chinese engagement in African conservation could be considered distinct from other types of foreign engagement.

As will be highlighted in the analysis, the extent to which there is a distinctly 'Chinese' approach to engagement in African conservation is a key point of discussion. This and the previous chapter have demonstrated how Chinese non-profit actors and the state both play a role in the advancement of conservation engagement. Whilst the main focus of this research

is on non-profit actors, the literature on Chinese conservation reinforces the importance of considering Chinese state direction and influence on conservation approaches, and how this links to wider state strategies.

3. Conclusion

There has been extensive academic interrogation of the emergence and complex nature of the Kenyan and African conservation landscapes, and from this the emphasis on the role and influence of foreign actors, namely the 'West' and INGOs, is of key relevance to this research. In parallel, academic discussion on the evolution of Chinese conservation approaches and how this relates to wider Chinese state strategies is also important. The key gap this study seeks to address is how Chinese conservation engagement and approaches manifest in Kenya, and the implications of such activity against a backdrop of wider 'foreign' engagement.

The chapter began by examining the literature on the emergence and nature of 'conservation' in Africa, which emphasises the role and influence of colonial and contemporary Western actors in shaping ideology and practice. As will emerge in the analysis chapters that follow, discussions of colonial legacies are key in framing Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, in particular in Kenyan perspectives on and responses to engagement, as well as in accounts of the wider implications for conservation and China-Africa relations. In addition, the chapter discussed the highly influential and visible role of INGOs in African conservation, their association with colonial legacies, and as key vehicles for continuing Western influence and norm-setting. As will become clear in the analysis, the presence of INGOs is significant in the context of 'Chinese' non-profit engagement in Kenyan and African conservation. Understanding the degree of influence Western actors have in Chinese conservation efforts therefore becomes an important consideration in assessing how 'Chinese' conservation engagement might differ to that of the 'West', and the implications for Kenyan and African conservation thinking and practice.

The chapter then focused in on the literature specific to Kenyan conservation. Again, a key point of emphasis is the continued presence and influence of Western actors such as INGOs and the dependencies on foreign tourism. This in turn raises debates about 'ownership' and African agency in Kenyan conservation, which will emerge in the analysis as key points of discussion around the dynamics of China-Africa relations in conservation engagement. Moreover, the literature highlights how there are a whole range of conservation challenges in

Kenya beyond poaching and the illegal wildlife trade, suggesting that they are not necessarily the most important concerns as is often implied in much, particularly Western, coverage.

The final part of the chapter engaged with literature on the Chinese conservation landscape. The evolving conceptions of and approaches to nature and conservation in China, and the role of the state in advancing domestic and international vision and strategy on the environment, were key discussion points within the literature. In many ways, debates on Chinese conservation indicate that approaches in China mirror those established as 'globalised norms'. At the same time, there is an important line of argument that speaks to environmentalism and conservation with 'Chinese characteristics', which the Chinese state advances through wider development-focused state policy and visions. The role of the state in advocating policy, visions and strategy on wildlife in China will be significant for understanding how Chinese engagement has emerged and takes shape in Africa. Ultimately, these understandings contribute to assessing the extent to which there may be a distinctly 'Chinese' approach to engagement in Kenyan and African conservation.

Chapter 4: Methodology

1. Introduction

The aim of the research is to better understand Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation. The key objectives are to examine the nature of this engagement and to assess its implications for both Kenyan conservation and wider China-Africa relations. This chapter details the methodological approach and processes employed in this study and explains how they address the objectives and key research questions of the thesis. I explain how these objectives and questions shape the research in terms of the case study context and organisations selected, the methods utilised and the participants engaged. I discuss how the methodology has been informed by a constructivist theoretical approach, underpinned by qualitative methods. A constructivist approach was adopted to better understand actors' own experiences of and perspectives on the relations within this area of research, and qualitative approaches lend themselves to exploring such perspectives.

In outlining the research design, I detail how the research employed semi-structured interviews and documentary research using online materials published by non-profit organisations, along with African and Chinese media reporting. The purpose of triangulating data collection was to facilitate a more thorough and informed analysis of the landscape of Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation. I continue to explain in more detail the design and processes undertaken for each research method. The purpose of using semi-structured interviews was to understand the situated views of participants as much as possible and these were designed using key themes to help facilitate and guide discussion. Identifying key actors and potential interview participants was a multi-channel and iterative process. I explain how documentary research was fundamental in identifying organisations and potential participants to reach out to. Documentary sources further supported the identification of different types of conservation activity and what might be important themes to discuss in interviews. Additionally, such sources were used to contextualise and build-on key ideas and conversation topics raised in interviews, as well as being used as sources of data collection in their own right.

In detailing the research process, I reflect on my experience of conducting interviews and documentary research, highlighting how the onset of the global pandemic in 2020 made it impossible to travel to conduct interviews in person. The ability to use virtual channels was critical in identifying and engaging participants, and also enabled more time to deepen the

documentary research. I explain how the analysis of data collected was informed by an abductive approach, whereby I applied thematic analysis in order to understand the data. I then proceed to discuss the key ethical considerations in designing and undertaking the research, detailing the importance of the ethics of knowledge production and my positionality as a white, female researcher from the 'Global North' conducting research on 'Southern' relations and processes. In addition, I lay out the processes undertaken as part of obtaining informed consent, and ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

Despite the challenges and limitations involved in the methodological process, the approach and methods employed enabled me to better understand the nature and implications of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation. It was possible to identify an extensive range of different actors and activities involved in, and related to, Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation and to explore in considerable depth participants' situated experiences and perceptions of such engagement. In turn, this enabled me to address the research objectives and questions developed for this study.

2. Research objectives, questions and context

The key objectives of this study are to better understand the nature of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation and the implications of this for both Kenyan conservation and wider China-Africa relations. The research focuses on Kenya as the key case study location, and examines Chinese, Kenyan, African and wider groups of international actors engaging in this context in order to both understand the diversity of actors involved and the different perspectives on Chinese engagement.

This study operates at the intersection of different areas of knowledge and debate relating to China-Africa relations, wildlife conservation, and Chinese non-profit activity. Kenya represents an important country context in which to examine this intersection. Kenya itself is a regional economic and international business hub in Africa with a large domestic market (International Trade Administration 2022; BCIU 2023). The country has significant and well-documented ties with China and is an epicentre for wildlife and conservation activity in Africa. In terms of China-Africa relations, Kenya has been a central economic and diplomatic partner for China in Africa, constituting a core trade partner and a leading recipient of Chinese infrastructure investment on the continent for the past two decades (Onjala 2008; Eickhoff 2022). Much like wider China-Africa relations, the relationship between China and Kenya has been characterised as

“economics-driven diplomacy” (Makinda 2020, p.602), shaped by economic interests and cooperation between both countries. Whilst the Kenyan context provides significant opportunity to look at China-Africa relations as they are particularly intense, the China-Kenya relationship is in many ways similar to other African contexts where there exists Chinese involvement in big infrastructure projects, mining and other significant investments. Kenya has been at the forefront of how China-Africa relations have developed more generally and how conservation engagement unfolds in this context might give some indication of the kinds of actors and dynamics that could come into play in other African countries with prominent conservation sectors. The intensification of Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African affairs has encouraged much academic debate, but there remains very limited examination of Chinese engagement in conservation and specifically through non-profit activity, which in other contexts is seen as central in conservation policy and practice.

In relation to wildlife conservation, Kenya is a key focus of activity and represents a major hub for international efforts. Kenya’s wildlife is a key cultural, economic and socio-political asset. Wildlife conservation is a matter of momentous debate and importance in Kenya’s domestic and international affairs, attracting a wide range of actors to engage in conservation thinking and practice in the country. As a key part of this, wildlife is a significant draw for international tourism. In 2017, wildlife-based tourism contributed up to 14% of Kenya’s GDP (Kalua 2017), the third largest contributor after agriculture and manufacturing (Mwaura 2016), with one in every ten Kenyans in formal employment being employed in this sector (Kalua 2017). Amongst other concerns in wildlife conservation, in recent decades the impact of the illegal wildlife trade has been an important theme of Kenyan and wider African popular and policy-related conservation narratives, a theme that has been amplified in international conservation narratives beyond Africa. As part of this, the relationship between Chinese (and wider Southeast Asian) consumer demand and the illegal wildlife trade has had great prominence. This in turn has been a catalyst for increased Chinese engagement and interest in Kenyan and African conservation.

Chapters 2 and 3 discussed how non-profit actors, specifically INGOs, have long had a significant role and major influence in Kenyan conservation thinking and practice. Many INGOs such as IFAW, TNC, and the AWF have office bases in Kenya and many others operate programmes and channel funding towards initiatives in the country. The nature and implications of non-profit engagement in both the Kenyan and Chinese conservation settings have been widely examined in separate literatures focusing on each country, as discussed in Chapter 3. Beyond the context of conservation, increasing attention has been afforded to the presence of Chinese non-profit actors in Africa, but as stated, there has yet to be any

significant analysis of their engagement in conservation. In recent years, organisation and media reporting suggests that Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan and African conservation has been increasing, both by Chinese-led organisations and INGOs. It is better understanding the nature and implications of such Chinese engagement that this research focuses on.

In order to meet the objectives of this research, I aim to address the following research questions:

1) How and to what extent are Chinese non-profit actors engaging in Kenyan conservation?

In addressing this question, I aim to identify the types of Chinese non-profit actors engaging in Kenyan conservation and the nature of their activities. I investigate how such engagement takes shape and its characteristics, considering the types of actors engaging, their different approaches, areas of focus and audiences. I also take into consideration how the types of actors engaging extend beyond both 'Chinese' and 'non-profit' actors and activity. This is important in exploring how non-profit activities connect to and overlap with other types of actors and activity, such as for-profit and the state.

The question builds on the nascent literature on Chinese non-profit actors and engagement in Africa. It develops understanding of the shape of Chinese non-profit activity in Kenyan conservation and how this might be similar or different to other forms of 'foreign' engagement in African conservation. The research question also responds to wider debates on foreign engagement in conservation, the power dynamics between Kenyan and foreign actors, as well as the implications for Kenyan agency.

2) What factors are driving Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation?

As part of understanding how Chinese non-profit engagement manifests in Kenyan conservation, I explore the factors driving these interactions. I examine the ideologies, motivations, policies, events, and actors that are driving engagement. As part of tracing the networks and activities of non-profit actors, I am particularly concerned with how other actors beyond 'non-profit' as well as 'non-Chinese' actors have a contributing role and influence. In

doing so, I hope to highlight how such engagement might be connected to broader dynamics of China-Africa relations and international conservation efforts.

Examining the driving factors behind Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation contributes to the debates on the evolving nature of China-Africa relations, the foci of such engagement and the types of actors involved. It specifically responds to key literatures identified in the literature review, including the intensification of China-Africa relations through China's 'Going Out' strategy, the BRI, Chinese diplomacy, and understandings of Chinese ideology and strategy when it comes to the environment. Importantly, it considers the influence of Western actors when it comes to Chinese engagement in Africa and conservation agendas.

3) What are the implications of Chinese non-profit engagement for Kenyan conservation?

In pursuing this question, I interviewed participants to understand their perceptions of Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation and what they perceived the implications to be for Kenyan conservation. I also explored how these perceptions differ and what might inform these different interpretations.

As a result, this question opens-up debate on how the implications of Chinese engagement are viewed and can be assessed in comparison to those of wider foreign engagement in Kenyan and African conservation. In particular, I consider Kenyan perceptions of the link between Chinese demand and the illegal wildlife trade, and perceptions of Chinese engagement to address the trade. I also seek to understand the modes of engagement employed in Chinese engagement and whether new dynamics are being introduced around Kenyan agency.

4) How is Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation shaped by and potentially re-shaping wider China-Africa relations?

The findings developed from the previous research questions will help to address how Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenya relates to wider China-Africa relations and related debates. I aim to explore how both Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation and Kenyan perceptions of such activity have been shaped by and in turn can shape wider understandings of China-Africa relations. I specifically discuss how understanding Chinese engagement in

Kenyan conservation relates to and can build on existing debates around 'South-South cooperation' and power dynamics in China-Africa relations. This in turn links to debates around African agency as part of these relations. Additionally, I seek to understand Chinese conservation engagement in relation to wider Chinese diplomacy, particularly in relation to its role in the Chinese state's attempts to project 'soft power'. I go on to consider to what extent Chinese engagement in African conservation supports or disrupts established understandings of China-Africa relations.

3. Research approach

In order to best address the objectives and key questions of this thesis, the research is grounded in a constructivist methodological approach. Honebein (1996) describes constructivism as an approach that allows for people to construct their individual understandings and knowledge of the world through lived experience. As such, there is no single reality, but instead an individual's interpretation of reality (Teherani *et al.* 2015). A constructivist approach is effective in that it can help in understanding "the complexity and multiplicity of phenomena" (Adom, Yeboah and Ankrah 2016, p.9). This is important because in the context of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation, rather than seeking to measure the impact of engagement on conservation metrics such as wildlife populations, the objective is to explore interpretations and understandings of Chinese engagement, and how attitudes towards engagement are constructed. A constructivist approach is particularly important in considerations of African agency as part of this research. Constructivism allows for better understanding how Kenyan and African actors interpret the role, influence and outcomes of Chinese engagement and what this means for power dynamics in China-Africa relations.

As part of embracing a constructivist approach, qualitative methodologies were adopted in crafting the research design. A qualitative approach is focused on the 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions (Ormston *et al.* 2014). Through such methodologies, richer, in-depth and situated understandings can be developed (Bryman and Burgess 1994; Yates 2004; Denzin and Lincoln 2008), facilitating analysis that retains complexity and nuance, whilst allowing for new ideas and theories to develop through analytical interpretation (Ormston *et al.* 2014). For this research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were deployed as the primary means of gathering data, with a wide cross-section of participants engaged in this way in order to gain a range of contextual insight into the activity and relations of concern. Given the nature of the

research involving multiple types of participants, all of whom have different social positions and perspectives, such methods enable a better understanding of individual subjectivity and situated knowledge. Subjectivity is essential to the research as it facilitates the comprehension of contrasting opinion and interpretation (Gubrium and Holstein 2012), both on matters of conservation and China-Africa relations.

The constructivist qualitative approach was also applied to the documentary research. As noted by Payne and Payne (2004), documentary research is the method of analysis applied to identify and categorise physical sources in the public and private domain. Bowen's (2009, p.27) definition further builds on this in stating that documentary analysis involves the examination and interpretation of data "in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge". Documentary research involved identifying and assessing online materials on Chinese engagement in African conservation – specifically sources from the websites of African, Chinese and international non-profit organisations and government bodies, as well as reports published by African and Chinese media outlets. The purpose of conducting documentary research was to identify and provide further insight into the types of engagement and actors, to help define the types of questions asked in interview, to be able to triangulate what was understood from interviews, and to deepen understanding of different actors' perspectives on Chinese engagement in conservation. The undertaking of multiple methods of data collection can be described as 'triangulation' (Denzin and Lincoln 2008) and can help to increase scope and depth, but also to overcome the limitations of a single method (Flick 2002; Denzin and Lincoln 2017).

An important consideration in the research is language, in terms of identifying and using sources, but also in engaging participants. I was limited to both English sources and conducting interviews in English only. This was not a significant issue with Kenyan participants because English is one of two official languages in Kenya and is widely used in government institutions and the (I)NGO sector. As such, the kind of participants that were focused on - those involved in responsible positions in conservation - were more likely to be, and indeed were, proficient in English. Language was potentially a greater limitation for engaging Chinese actors, both to initiate contact and in interview, and especially so in identifying and understanding online sources. As will be explained, all the Chinese participants interviewed had good proficiency in English, in most cases because they had worked or studied in English, and/or been engaged in Kenyan conservation. At the same time, it was necessary to be mindful that English was not their first language and that this required awareness in both question wording and avoiding more complex sentences, as well as in the checking and interpretation of responses and meanings.

4. Research design and process

In order to address the objectives and research questions of the thesis, I identified key groups of actors and activities I needed to understand more about. The central focus was non-profit actors. This included Chinese-led non-profit organisations, INGOs that are engaged in Chinese engagement in African conservation, Kenyan and African conservation NGOs that have worked with Chinese actors, as well as other Chinese and Kenyan individuals that have in some way engaged in non-profit or research activity connected to Kenyan and African conservation. In order to better understand the nature of and implications of engagement, other key actors and activities included those associated with the Kenyan state, Kenyan conservation organisations, Chinese for-profit businesses, as well as Chinese researchers and students. These groups were critical to consider because of the way in which they interact with, influence or act as gatekeepers for non-profit organisations and activities.

The process of data collection lasted from January 2019 through to April 2021. Qualitative methods were adopted as part of the research design in order to address the thesis objectives and research questions in the most effective way. The primary method adopted was semi-structured interviews and the second was documentary research using online materials published by non-profit organisations and government agencies, along with African and Chinese media reporting. Documentary research was a critical component of mapping activities and relationships, identifying potential research participants and deepening understanding of multiple perspectives. This use of multiple methods of data collection facilitated a more thorough and informed analysis of the landscape of Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation. The following section details how I approached the process and employed each method in practice.

4.1 Identifying and negotiating access to participants

As part of the initial stage of online documentary research, key organisations, activities and individual actors of relevance and interest were identified. Two further channels were used to identify organisations and participants – searching the professional social networking site LinkedIn and snowballing. This process of ‘stakeholder analysis’ entailed purposively selecting people who were ‘key informants’ and could provide the kind of information required. I interviewed everyone in the population identified that was willing to participate. The primary channels then used to make contact with participants were email, WhatsApp, WeChat and

Skype. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on travel meant that these channels were critical in carrying out this research.

Internet searching – It was through internet searches that I initially identified a range of potential participants I was interested in understanding more about. Via Google search, I was readily able to identify organisations that were facilitating or supporting Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation. The search criteria included combinations of keywords - ‘Chinese (non-profit)’, ‘engagement/support/activity’, ‘Kenyan/African’ ‘conservation/wildlife’. The searches returned a number of organisations and activities, primarily associated with INGOs operating in China or Africa, but also including Chinese non-profit actors and Chinese NGOs, and other organisations such as Kenyan and Chinese state agencies. I then set about identifying contact details for the organisations and, where possible, specific individuals of interest within them. I identified generic email and postal addresses from the organisation websites. Where these were not available, I recorded the names and job titles of the individuals of interest. The individuals identified might have been linked to a Chinese conservation engagement project, or alternatively, they might have a broader manager level role such as a ‘programme’ or ‘research’ manager, where it was anticipated they may have some knowledge of projects. I then searched and sought to connect with these individuals directly via LinkedIn (which I discuss in greater detail in the next section). Whilst the majority of organisations and individuals identified through internet search were contacted as part of the initial scoping stage, the process of reaching out to organisations via internet search spanned the duration of the data collection stage as new organisations or contacts were identified. Approximately one quarter of 40+ organisations or individuals I reached out to through internet searching responded to initial contact. Of these organisations and individuals, half were INGOs, a quarter Kenyan and a quarter Chinese. Some organisations and individuals responded that they were unable to support with the research, mostly due to the volume of requests they receive. Other organisations were able to put me in direct contact with programme level or senior level individuals who would be able and willing to engage.

A limitation of using Google search and undertaking English language searches is that it may have returned fewer results for Chinese organisations with interests or pursuing engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, and been less able to identify the activities of lesser-known actors in this space. Whilst internet searches provided a good starting point for identifying organisations and actors, the scope appeared limited to INGOs and larger Chinese and African NGOs. Hence, there was a need to broaden the channels used to identify smaller organisations and other actors participating in or with knowledge of Chinese engagement in African conservation.

LinkedIn – As a professional networking site, LinkedIn was an effective way of both directly approaching individuals I had identified on organisation websites and finding new individuals and organisations to reach out to. The nature of the site meant that I could identify people based on their affiliated organisations and job titles. As argued by Davis *et al.* (2020), social media sites, such as LinkedIn, help users to develop ties with new people, provide an additional channel of communication, and allow users to browse profiles of others. As a first step, I carried out systematic searches for all the organisations I had identified with connections to my research interests, predominantly INGOs and NGOs, and then searched through the employee results list. In doing this, I identified individuals with job titles that may indicate knowledge of Chinese engagement activities – such as, ‘programme’, ‘research’ or ‘education’ managers. As a second step, I used the LinkedIn ‘People’ search function and key phrases - such as, ‘China-Africa’, ‘China conservation’, ‘Kenya conservation’ - to identify any further organisations and individuals of interest. Once I identified potential contacts, I requested the opportunity to either send a ‘Message’ or ‘Connect’, depending on the functions made available on LinkedIn for that contact.

This method of negotiating access was effective in its relative ease of initiating contact and because it enabled me to reach out to individuals directly. The advantages of this were that I was more easily able to reach contacts and that participants may have felt more comfortable speaking with me as individuals, and not in officially representing their organisation. In addition, having a professional profile meant that individuals could also better understand who I was. The process of using LinkedIn to identify potential participants took place over two years. Searches were carried out multiple times, both to use different search terms and to see if any new potential participants had appeared. Overall, the response rate was higher than via email.

Snowballing – It was through ‘snowballing’, that I was able to identify and speak with new contacts (Willis 2006). Snowballing has the benefit of reaching participants that are harder to identify and access (Parker, Scott and Geddes 2019) – whether this be for reasons such as lack of presence online or participants associated with smaller-scale activity. This method was specifically useful for identifying Chinese participants who had engaged or had awareness of smaller-scale activity linked to conservation – specifically researchers, volunteers and those engaging in smaller-scale non-profit activity who could not be identified via other channels because of lack of presence or lack of English language social media or organisation platforms. Many of the Chinese participants’ preferred means of communicating was through WeChat, China’s most popular social media messaging app. I also felt that snowballing had a

greater response rate because participants often appeared to be more willing to engage in the research because someone else in their network had. Nevertheless, the limitations of snowballing are that it can create selection bias (Parker, Scott and Geddes 2019), whereby some participant groups have more significant representation than others. Whilst I did not feel that certain groups were overrepresented, some groups were underrepresented – specifically those who are associated with larger Chinese-led non-profit organisations based in China, as it was both harder to identify these organisations and for those that were contacted, all but a couple responded.

Despite the wide range of potential interview participants it was possible to identify and engage through these channels, there were challenges and limitations in the participant recruitment process. Identifying actors via internet search or then by LinkedIn was much easier for INGOs and Kenyan NGOs for example, and more difficult for Chinese participants. There are a number of possible reasons for this, a) the inability to conduct Mandarin/Cantonese language searches in internet search engines, b) the fact that Chinese-led non-profit engagement in Africa remains limited to a smaller pool of groups and individuals, and c) in recent years, LinkedIn in China has become increasingly subject to competition and a tightening of the regulatory environment, thus potentially limiting its use in China (Olcott and Liu 2023). Further challenges in recruiting Chinese participants in particular might be attributed to language barriers and potentially greater caution towards participating in research, specifically with a Western researcher. Thus, it was important for me to acknowledge how a more socio-politically sensitive environment in China and greater caution in expressing opinions, specifically with a researcher from the West, may have prevented some potential participants from agreeing to interview. Furthermore, amongst participants who did engage in interview, it was important to consider how the socio-political context and sensitivities might shape how these participants responded and how this shapes the analysis of research.

4.2 Qualitative interviews

4.2.1 Interview design

Semi-structured interviews make effective use of the “knowledge-producing potentials of dialogue” (Brinkmann 2020, p.437). The aim was to give some structure to the interviews to ensure consistency of data and engagement with the key themes identified in the research questions, but also to allow sufficient opportunity for participants to talk more freely about the broader issues and potentially introduce themes or issues of their own (Willis 2006). The

research and interviews were designed to gather data based on individual experience and perspective, and not to represent an organisation. This was to allow participants to have some critical distance from the organisations and activities they were involved in. A number of core themes were established and formed the basis of an interview schedule to guide discussions. As articulated in **Table 1**, it was anticipated that engaging certain types of participants would enable better understanding of these different themes, which in turn would support in addressing the key research questions. The themes differed slightly depending on the type of participant interviewed and the anticipated understandings or experiences they might have.

Table 1: Interview themes

Core theme	Participant type	Justification (link to research question)
The nature and approach of Chinese non-profit and wider engagement in Kenyan and African conservation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese previous/existing employees and volunteers from Chinese-led non-profit organisations • Chinese researchers, students, volunteers, conservation experts, or businesses • Previous/existing employees of INGOs 	To understand what Chinese engagement in conservation looks like – who is involved, what activities are taking place and motivations.
The implications of Chinese engagement in the context of both China-Africa relations and wider international engagement in Kenyan conservation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese actors (as above) • Kenyan previous/existing employees from non-profit organisations, conservation experts, or the Kenyan state • Previous/existing employees of INGOs 	To understand how participants understand Chinese engagement and what this means for African conservation and China-Africa relations.
Current dynamics and concerns in Kenyan conservation, including the relative importance of the illegal wildlife trade.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kenyan previous/existing employees from non-profit organisations, conservation experts, or the Kenyan state 	To understand how Chinese engagement is connected to or relates to the Kenyan conservation landscape as a whole.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous/existing employees of INGOs 	
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The logic in **Table 1** was applied to constructing interview schedules. As initial guides, I developed two different schedules, one for Chinese participants in or connected to non-profit organisations (that could be amended for Chinese actors more generally) and one for Kenyan participants (see **appendix A**). Prior to interview, I made adjustments to questions based on my perceived understanding of specific participants and what their knowledge and experience might be, drawing on what I had learnt about them, and/or any relevant organisation or activity in which they were involved, from documentary research and initial communication. To illustrate, in the case of Chinese actors I slightly amended the schedule to make it more relevant to the participant - for example, reflecting whether they were a conservation expert, a researcher or worked for a Chinese business - to better understand different activities.

As part of adopting a constructivist approach, the objective was to understand the situated perspectives of participants as much as possible. The nature of semi-structured interviews in using key themes and a schedule for discussion inevitably involves some degree of guiding conversation with participants. Sumner and Tribe (2008) state that, as far as possible, subjective or normative positionality should be made explicit, with allowance being made in the data collection, analysis and interpretation. Thus, conscious effort was made to avoid leading questions that could represent interviewer bias and shape responses delivered.

The initial plan was that interviewing would take place face-to-face in Kenya and China. However, as a result of the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on international travel throughout 2020 and 2021, all interviews (except one) were conducted as a virtual exchange. While these circumstances had a limited impact on the types of participants identified, selected and initially contacted for interview, the travel restrictions changed how the interviews were conducted, forcing a switch from in-person to online interaction. Whilst virtual channels were not the primary choice of interview channel prior to the pandemic, platforms such as Skype have the advantage of addressing the challenges of location and enabling greater geographical and individual reach (Nind, Coverdale and Meckin 2021; Cin *et al.* 2023). As such, the advantage was that I was able to speak with participants over a wider spatial field given that I was no longer constrained by the limits of physical travel; I could reach participants wherever they were in Kenya, China or elsewhere. While this might have afforded less opportunity for developing a local face-to-face network and place-based depth of insight, it did enable a broader range of actors to be engaged.

4.2.2 Interview process

Interviews were conducted between March 2019 and March 2021. All participants were provided with a research information sheet and consent form (see **appendices B and C**). In total, I interviewed 35 participants - 30 interviews took place as voice calls, 2 participants shared an audio recording of their responses to some interview questions, and 3 provided written responses to some of the questions. One participant I interviewed twice, once virtually and once in person. One of the interviews was conducted with two participants from the same organisation on the call, a decision of their own choice.

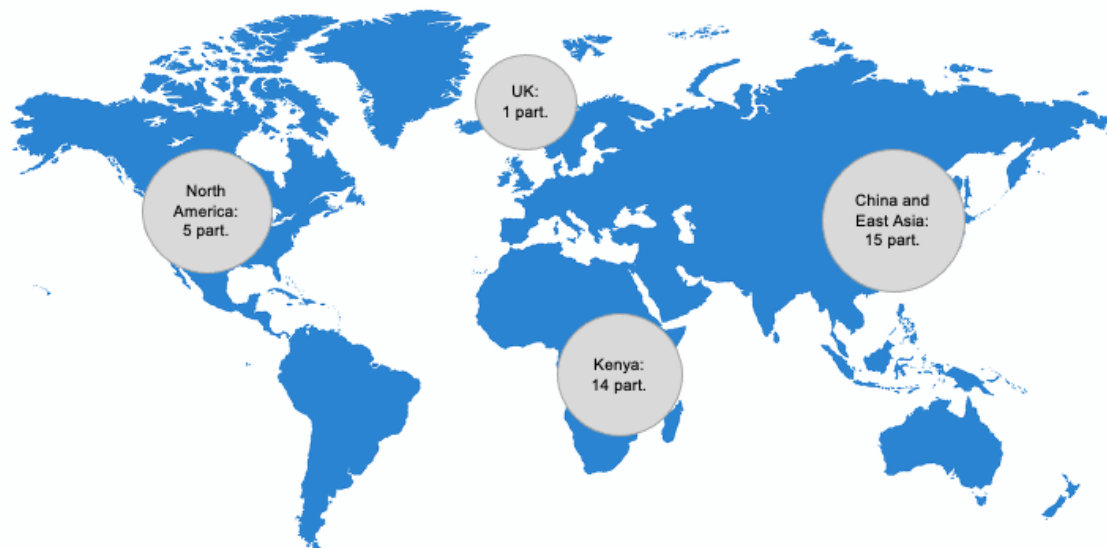
In reaching out to participants, I let them decide which channel they preferred to use and made date/time arrangements according to their preference. The majority of voice calls took place via WhatsApp, WeChat or Skype. As part of these voice calls, participants were asked if they were happy to have the conversation recorded or not. On occasions, I took the decision to take manual notes as the audio connection was poor. Whilst English may not have been the first language for most participants, all participants were able to speak with good proficiency in English.

The below table (**Table 2**) shares the types and numbers of participants engaged with and the map (**Figure 1**) shows the location of participants. The interviews across multiple types of participants provided a rich qualitative foundation for both understanding the types of Chinese engagement, and the perspectives and attitudes towards it.

Table 2: Types and numbers of participants

Participant type	No. of participants
Work for INGOs	9
Work/ed for Chinese non-profit organisations	6
Work/ed for Kenyan non-profit organisations	5
Chinese students/researchers/volunteers	5
Other Chinese conservation experts (e.g. conservationists, programme managers)	5
Other Kenyan conservation experts (e.g. conservationists, programme managers)	3
Work for Kenyan state agency	2

Figure 1: Location of participants



Virtual engagement allowed flexibility of timing and channel for participants, and also meant that they could speak with me in a place that they felt comfortable. In order to develop rapport, I began the interviews by introducing myself and how I came to be interested in Chinese engagement in African conservation, before outlining the purpose of the research and giving the participants the opportunity to ask any questions and introduce themselves. I felt that building positive relations and encouraging general conversation exchange prior to the interview questions, as well as explaining the research and offering information sheets in advance, aided in addressing any concerns and put participants at ease. Where there were additional questions about anonymity, for example, we discussed what pseudonyms could be used.

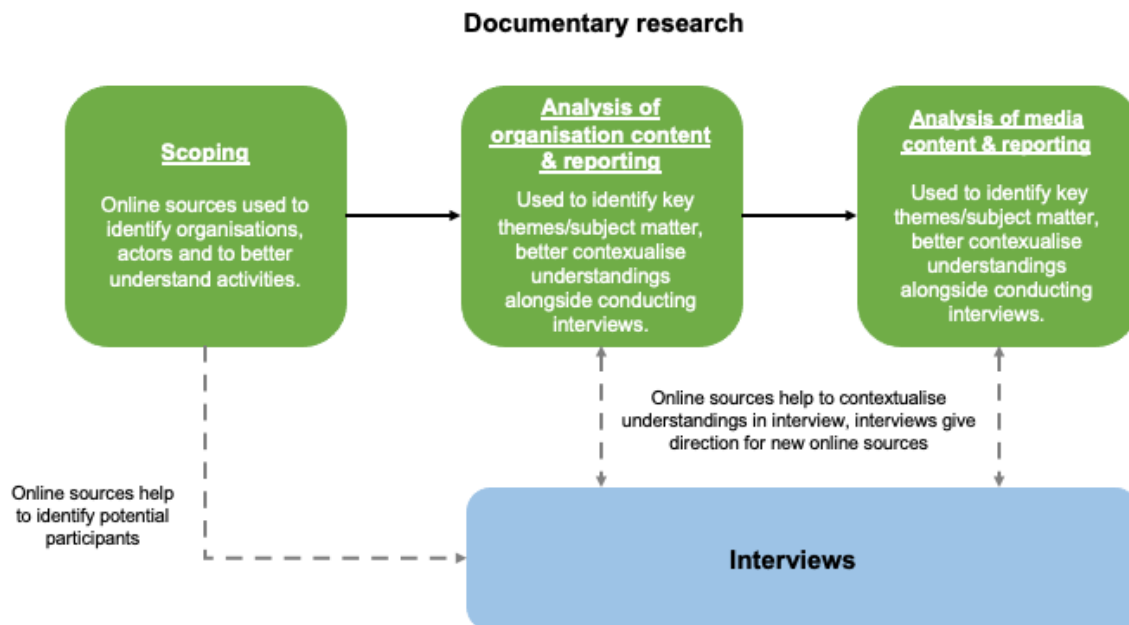
The interview schedules were helpful in guiding the conversation topics and were tweaked to reflect the role or circumstance of the individual, as discussed above. Some participants requested that they be sent the schedule in advance, both to understand more about the types of questions and to prepare. In most cases, I felt participants were able to speak with relative ease on the different topics. In some instances, participants spoke at length and in detail, and with great passion, about certain topics, specifically activities that their associated organisations were engaged with and their individual perspectives. On occasion, it left less time for other questions and topics. On the other hand, others were more reserved in their responses, largely because they admitted to having more limited knowledge and awareness on certain topics, although political sensitivities around talking to a Western researcher may have also played a role in some cases. Consequently, some of these interviews were shorter.

A number of Chinese participants expressed that they were very pleased that research was being done on Chinese conservation engagement and were keen to provide links to their own research and to keep in touch on the subject matter.

4.3 Using online sources for documentary research

The world wide web was an important “source of information” (Mawdsley 2006, p.274). The use of documentary research in the form of content from organisation websites and media reporting was a key component of data collection that was undertaken throughout the research process. Axelsson (2012) states that documentary sources can be useful for identifying gaps, new dimensions and contextualising primary data. For this research, the use of documentary sources was a critical complement to the interviews, identifying and developing key ideas and points to discuss. As previously indicated, online sources were initially important as part of the ‘stakeholder analysis’ conducted to identify organisations and potential participants to reach out to. Such sources then helped to identify different types of activities and what might be important issues or themes to discuss in interviews. Furthermore, online sources were also used to triangulate data and to help contextualise and build-on key ideas and conversation topics raised in interviews. Thus, the use of documentary research was an essential process for addressing the key objectives and research questions of this thesis – both to better understand the nature of Chinese engagement through the types of activities and actors involved, and the implications of engagement through understanding relevant themes and relationship dynamics in Kenyan conservation and China-Africa relations, and perspectives on engagement. **Figure 2** illustrates how this process worked in practice, demonstrating the flow between the different stages of the documentary research and how this fed into the interviews, and vice versa.

Figure 2: Process of conducting documentary research alongside interviews



Content from organisation websites and media reporting was specifically useful for identifying actors, activities and better understanding relationships between Kenyan and Chinese actors. For example, INGO websites provided insight on specific programmes of activity and campaigns, which actors were involved and the intended outcomes. Media sources were also useful for this, specifically for identifying activity that was not associated with larger, more established non-profit organisations, but equally for identifying actors and activities beyond the periphery of non-profit – such as engagement from the Chinese state, businesses or educational and research institutions. Using media sources also provided opportunity for more qualitative insight into representations of and response to Chinese engagement in conservation and China-Africa relations. For example, this included opinion pieces from Chinese or Kenyan sources on their experiences of Chinese engagement in African conservation.

As part of this analysis, media sources allowed for interpretive and deconstructed reading, in other words reading between the lines and drawing on external knowledge for interpretation (Yates 2004). This was especially useful in linking back to key literatures on both conservation and China-Africa relations. As an example, analysis of English language resources produced by Chinese sources (which were largely published by state media outlets) allowed for a better understanding of what topics of Chinese engagement in African conservation were discussed with apparent official approval and how they were represented. The analysis indicated that such stories were overwhelmingly positive, linking back to the wider China-Africa literature

and debate surrounding how Chinese media is used as a soft power tool to represent Chinese activities, and especially those of the state, in a positive light (Wagner 2017).

For African sources, the AllAfrica online database was used as the gateway to access English language reporting materials. The AllAfrica database aggregates, writes its own stories and distributes news from over 140 African news organisations and over 500 other institutions and individuals, producing up to 900 reports a day with a claim to represent a diversity of positions on every topic (AllAfrica 2024). Using the database, keyword searches and themes were used to source material (see **appendix D**).

The African source searches generated vast volumes of results and in order to filter out the most relevant results, I scanned the headlines of articles listed to identify those with a clear connection to Chinese engagement in African conservation. It was important to look beyond Kenyan sources in order to get a broader perspective on Chinese engagement, but also because much activity transcends borders and is often approached or discussed as ‘African’ conservation and ‘China-Africa’ engagement. This was especially important in terms of the research questions, specifically in understanding how Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation manifests, the factors driving engagement and how it connects to broader actors and activities. The time span for these articles stretches from 2020 back to the early 2010’s. The lack of reporting prior to the 2000s correlates with the recent (re)emergence of more intensive Chinese engagement in Africa as a whole. In total, the analysis draws on 88 articles from the AllAfrica database source (see **appendix E**).

For Chinese media sources, it was a challenge to identify media databases for Chinese content that could draw on as broad a scope of sources. Therefore, the primary source accessed was China.cn.org, a state-run web portal that aggregates English language Chinese news stories, in addition to articles from *China Daily* online, an English language daily newspaper owned by the state. A clear limitation of this method was the inability to access Chinese language sources. Nevertheless, the English language sources were useful for identifying actors and activities, and also as a way to understand the Chinese state narrative around conservation in Africa and the image that is presented. As with the approach to African sources, keyword searches and themes were used to source material (see **appendix F**). The same filtering methodology was applied to Chinese sources as was used for the African sources and the number of relevant news reports were narrowed down to 81 (see **appendix G**). The timelines for articles date from 2020 back to the early-mid 2010s.

5. Data analysis

As part of the approach to data analysis, thematic analysis – “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke 2008, p.79) – was used to analyse both documentary sources and interviews. This analysis of data was informed by an abductive approach. Abductive research “conducts parallel and equal engagement with empirical data and extant theoretical understanding” (Thompson 2022, p.1411). The approach originates from the philosophical arena of pragmatism (Peirce 1974) and is focused on identifying the most logical explanation for phenomena (Peirce 1974; Hurley *et al.* 2021). As such, an abductive approach uses existing theoretical understandings where research, concepts and opinions on subject matter already exist to guide research, whilst also being open to more exploratory theoretical understandings that do not fit within established theoretical frameworks (Thompson 2022). For this study, the key themes and ideas that were taken from the research questions related to conservation and China-Africa relations. In terms of conservation, the pre-determined understandings included themes such as the illegal wildlife trade, Chinese demand for products of the trade and the influence of neo-colonialism in conservation. For China-Africa relations, themes included ‘South-South cooperation’, Chinese diplomacy and soft power, and African agency. Whilst the research and analysis remain guided by key objectives and research questions that help to define some pre-existing themes (Harding 2019), adopting an abductive approach enabled new ideas and themes to emerge. Chinese engagement in African conservation has received very limited academic interrogation to date, and, therefore, abductive methods were critical in better understanding the nature and implications of activity. The importance of the education of Chinese audiences as a key focus of activity is an example of a new theme that was derived from the analysis. The education of Chinese audiences was significant because of the great emphasis that is placed on this form of engagement above all others.

All interviews were transcribed or written-up on the same day or as soon as possible after taking place, and audio recordings were deleted once their transcription was complete. NVivo coding software was used to enable annotation of data and to draw out common themes in interview transcripts and notes. As highlighted, I employed the method of thematic analysis, whereby I used ‘codes’ to identify relatable parts of texts, and ‘themes’ as recurring ideas in the text (Braun and Clarke 2008). The context and theoretical framework of the research were used to inform the initial key themes and these were expanded upon in the process of coding the data. In total, there were 10 core themes identified based on adopting an abductive approach (see **appendix H**). The process of analysing the interview transcripts and notes

commenced prior to all the interviews being completed. The benefit of this was that I could begin to understand what themes were emerging and use this to help identify new actors and activities, such as the importance of Chinese tourism and tour operators, and thus further potential participants to contact. Beginning the analysis prior to completing interviews was also helpful in identifying gaps in knowledge and to address these by identifying new participants that may be able to provide insight and/or to guide further documentary research in these areas.

In terms of analysing website and media content, I found it much more efficient to manually deconstruct documents and identify key themes rather than to use software. As indicated in the process flow chart for the documentary research (**Figure 2**), website and media content sources were used in different ways at different stages.

Stage 1) In the initial 'stakeholder analysis' stage of research, organisation websites and reporting, and to some extent media content, was used to identify organisations and actors, and to understand what activities were taking place in connection to Chinese engagement.

Stage 2) Alongside conducting interviews, I analysed online organisation content and reporting. The purpose of this was not to fully deconstruct content, but to identify key subject matter and themes from organisation home and information pages, reports and press releases. Given the nature of organisation website content being more focused on activities rather than opinion or discussion forums, the core themes were largely focused on subject matter specific to the cause of the organisation. For example, for INGOs key subject matter relating to Kenyan conservation might be human-wildlife conflict or the illegal wildlife trade.

Stage 3) As per stage 2, a process of manual thematic deconstruction and analysis was adopted to identify key subject matter and themes amongst media sources. Of importance in this analysis was recognition of authorship, publisher and time of publication, as these would have implications for content as well as the sentiment around which subject matter is being presented, and for what purpose. Both African and Chinese media reporting presented similar themes or narratives on Chinese engagement in conservation. These were related to three main areas, namely: characterising Chinese engagement (what types of actors are engaged and what are they doing), the present-day conservation context and approaches to conservation in Africa, and the broader China-Africa relationship.

The process of documentary analysis was important for establishing the prominence in the material of particular themes and concepts and assessing how their importance was presented, in what contexts and to whom. Whilst the documentary analysis was important for the triangulation of data and assessing the nature of activity and perspectives towards Chinese engagement, the analysis also provided greater context for participant interviews, in terms of understanding the activities being referred to and the conservation and relationship dynamics around these.

6. Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations in conducting this research were multifaceted, with consideration of the ethics of knowledge production and my positionality within this, and the ethics around engaging participants. Neely and Nguse (2015, p.142) argue that, "...knowledge is shaped by the people and places involved in its creation...". This means that how we come to have knowledge of and understand things is created through means of methods, positionality and the relations we develop through those (Hausermann and Adomako 2022). The insider/outsider dichotomy and the significance of researcher identity in research that transcends the Global North/South divide, and how this shapes knowledge production has been widely debated (Twyman, Morrison and Sporton 1999; Giwa 2015). As a white, female, 'Northern' researcher examining what might be framed primarily as 'Southern' relations and processes, I am aware that this exerts a degree of influence on the shape of research and how I develop understandings. In terms of research process, I have explained how in relation to data access I was limited to accessing online content and media articles written in English, thus omitting sources and knowledge produced in Mandarin, Cantonese or Kenyan languages. Language will have inevitably been a barrier in making connections with potential Chinese participants who spoke no or limited English, and therefore did not have the ability or desire to respond to my request to engage. A further consideration is that whilst I was able to engage with Chinese participants in English, a reliance on English may have limited the extent to which I could build rapport or limited the extent to which participants could fully express themselves, even though all Chinese participants had good proficiency in English and seemed comfortable using it.

I was very cognisant of my positionality as a researcher and potential power differentials in the process of engaging participants and conducting interviews. Recognising the role of interviewer influence (Sumner and Tribe 2008) and local socio-cultural factors is important in

the constructivist approach adopted as part of this research. Interviewer influence can distort participant responses due to characteristics of the interview situation, the interviewer's attitude and expectations, as well as participants feeling a need to reply in a manner they think is 'socially acceptable' to the interviewer (ibid.). These factors inevitably shape the interaction with participants and the data produced. Hence, the process entails co-producing knowledge with participants. The local socio-cultural factors and social dynamics (the behaviour of groups resulting from interactions or social processes) were essential considerations in informing the questions I asked in interview and how I analysed responses, as well as my appreciation of what was left 'unsaid' (Sumner and Tribe 2008). For example, this might have included being aware that some participants may not want to express more controversial views towards their associated organisation, and specifically in the case of Chinese participants, any negativity towards the Chinese state. To further illustrate, one Kenyan participant wanted to check that I did not work for an INGO before sharing negative sentiment towards INGO activity. As such, an important stage of the documentary research was to better understand the context and dynamics of Kenyan conservation and China-Africa relations, and to understand what potential tensions might exist or concerns that might be important for certain groups of actors. This background knowledge helped me to frame interview questions and have a greater understanding of responses, and why participants may have such perspectives.

In further considering power differentials, Quartiroli *et al.* (2017) suggest that the use of virtual channels (such as Skype) to some extent mitigate against the potential power differentials that exist between participant and researcher, whilst Weller (2017) also suggests that the informal nature of virtual communication can help to put participants at ease. This is because participants can be interviewed where they feel comfortable and where they do not have to be seen meeting me. In addition, the participant has the opportunity to just dial out of the call (Janghorban, Latifnejad Roudsari and Taghipour 2014). Thus, given the virtual context in which the interviews were conducted, allowing participants to choose a preferred channel, time and space, should have helped to mitigate some of the differentials.

A thorough review of the ethical implications of the research was conducted and a robust set of ethics protocols were developed in response. This formed the basis for an ethics review application to the OU Human Research Ethics Committee, which was approved on the 24th January 2019 (Reference no: HREC/3082/Masciaga). Informed consent was gained from all participants who took part in interview (Bryman 2015). In initially contacting participants, I stated that I was a PhD research student with Open University in the UK, I outlined the focus area of my research, why I was interested in speaking to them about their knowledge and experience, and participants were welcomed to ask questions about me and the research. All

participants were sent an information sheet explaining the aims of the research, key topics they will be asked about, the process of interview, how data will be managed and used, gaining informed consent and confidentiality, as well as the details of my supervisory team in case they had any further questions. Some participants wanted further details either before agreeing to or prior to interview, so a list of key research questions, research summary and/or the interview question guide itself was shared. On consenting to interview, participants were asked what their preferred method of communication was and what timings worked for them. At the start of each interview, I checked that the participants understood or if they had any questions relating to the information sheet, as well as any other questions about the research, and gained verbal consent to proceed with the interview. It was important to do this as not all participants were fully fluent in English, although all had a good level of proficiency. I explained that the participant did not have to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable with and explained that participants would be sent a consent form after interview to confirm their verbal consent in writing. I felt that sharing the consent form after interview was important for a number of reasons. Firstly, I felt that being presented with a consent form prior to participation may generate anxiety (specifically because of the virtual nature of interviews and not speaking/meeting in person beforehand, as well as the potential misinterpretation due to any participants not being fluent in English); secondly, it gave me the opportunity to explain the consent form in the interview; and thirdly, I wanted to offer participants the chance to take part in the interview to see what was involved, before they put their consent in writing. Every participant completed and shared either a hard or electronic/soft copy of the consent form and one participant shared consent via WeChat message due to time constraints in downloading and completing the form. In addition, three of the participants wanted to ensure that I had correctly captured what they had said in the interview notes and I shared the written-up notes with them after the interviews.

Confidentiality and anonymity ensure that data gathered in research does not disclose individual identities. Anonymity is a key ethical issue (Yin 2011) and thus I took measures to ensure participants could not be identifiable within the findings. Instead of real names and job titles, a broader identifier was used when referring to participants in the research, such as 'Chinese conservation expert' or 'participant working for an INGO'. With one participant who expressed greater concern with maintaining anonymity, we jointly agreed on an identifier that could be used. All the interview transcripts were fully anonymised, kept in password protected files and will be deleted once the thesis examination process is complete.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach undertaken in this research and provided a detailed review of research design and process, including ethical considerations and protocols. The adoption of a constructivist approach, underpinned by qualitative methodologies, was critical in addressing the key objectives of the research which were to explore the nature of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation and its implications for both Kenyan conservation and wider China-Africa relations. Adopting a constructivist approach enabled a better understanding of actors' own experiences and perspectives in relation to the activities and relations that are the focus of this research. This is essential for understanding the complexity of Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, how engagement manifests and why, as well as how understandings and attitudes towards engagement are constructed.

Semi-structured interviews and online documentary research were adopted as qualitative methods that would support a constructivist approach. Semi-structured interviews were developed around key themes and designed to gain the situated perspectives of participants as far as possible. I explained how virtual channels, especially social networking platforms such as LinkedIn, were critical in being able to identify and reach participants, but also in conducting interviews. Whilst virtual voice calls allowed for less visual interaction and potential rapport building, the virtual nature of interviews allowed for much greater flexibility for participants and meant that they could speak in a place that they felt comfortable. Arguably, virtual interviews will have encouraged more participants to take part from a logistical and convenience perspective, and it meant that I was able to achieve a greater geographical reach in the research.

As a further qualitative approach, documentary research played a critical role throughout the research process, from initial scoping stages and identifying actors and potential participants for interview, through to using and analysing online sources to better contextualise and build on key ideas and perspectives raised in interviews, as well as being used as sources of data collection in their own right. This process of triangulation was thus critical in providing depth and breadth to the data collected, especially given the limitations to travel presented by the global pandemic and being unable to develop networks and gather observational data in the field. The analysis of both interviews and documentary sources was informed by an abductive approach, using thematic analysis in applying both pre-determined themes and drawing out new themes to better understand the data.

I continued to explain how ethical considerations have been built into the research. I discussed my positionality as a white, female researcher from the 'Global North' conducting research on 'Southern' relations and processes, and the ethics of knowledge production around this. In doing this, I outlined the extent to which interviewer influence and awareness of broader socio-cultural factors were important considerations for conducting interviews and analysing interview data. I also detailed the processes undertaken as part of gaining informed consent, and measures I took around confidentiality and anonymity for interview participants.

Despite the challenges and limitations encountered in the research process, the constructivist approach and specific methods adopted allowed for me to gain depth and breadth of understanding in assessing the nature and implications of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation. Building on this methodology, the next three chapters present the data analysis and discuss the key empirical findings of this research, which in turn enable me to address the core research objectives and questions of this thesis.

Chapter 5: The emergence of Chinese engagement in Kenyan wildlife conservation

1. Introduction

Chinese engagement in Kenyan and broader African conservation is a relatively recent phenomenon, rising in prominence over the past decade and creating a sphere of China-Africa conservation engagement. In tracing the emergence of Chinese engagement in Kenyan wildlife conservation, this chapter discusses the types of actors involved and the nature of engagement. In doing this, it seeks to address two of the research questions: How are Chinese non-profit actors engaging in Kenyan conservation? What factors are driving Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation?

In this research, Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation has been categorised and examined across three areas. Chinese non-profit engagement can be split into two main areas of activity, Chinese-led non-profit engagement and Chinese non-profit engagement that is initiated or led by INGOs. The third area is how Chinese non-profit engagement connects to or is facilitated by the Chinese state and for-profit sector. One of the key arguments presented in this chapter is that Chinese-led non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation is growing but remains limited, reflecting the emergent nature and wider socio-cultural and political context of non-profit activity in China's overseas engagement. It is found that much of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan and African conservation is initiated or led by 'Western' INGOs. This is significant in understanding the extent to which Chinese conservation engagement might be distinctly 'Chinese'. Moreover, Chinese non-profit activity can also be shaped by or linked to Chinese state or for-profit actors and interests. To some extent, there is a reliance on INGOs and the Chinese state to enable, legitimise and become a partner in Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan and wider African conservation. As such, it is necessary to approach Chinese non-profit conservation engagement in Kenya as encompassing a diverse set of actors that come together in hybrid forms of activity. These dynamics present significant blurring of boundaries in the types of Chinese engagement and between Chinese and non-Chinese actors.

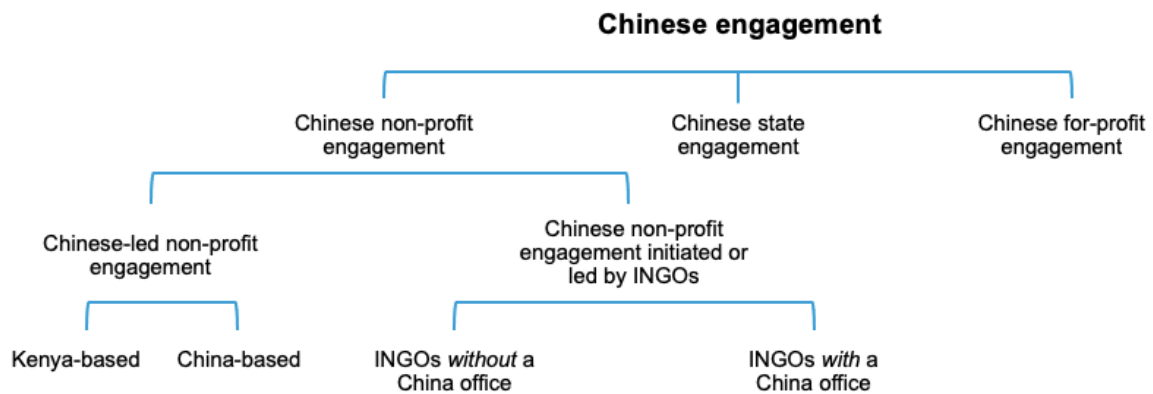
The chapter explores the multifaceted nature of Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation. In examining Chinese non-profit engagement, the research differentiates between Chinese-led engagement and Chinese engagement initiated or led by INGOs. The first section focuses

on Chinese-led non-profit engagement, differentiating between Kenya and China-based activity. It discusses how both organisations and individuals (such as students or volunteers) can be considered 'non-profit' actors. It further highlights how much of Chinese-led non-profit activity is focused on the education of Chinese audiences and youth engagement. The second section continues to discuss Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs. It differentiates between two main structures of engagement, activity initiated or led by INGOs *without* a China office and INGOs *with* a China office. These geographies and actors involved determine the degree to which engagement is shaped by Chinese actors. It is further argued that INGOs have been, and remain, some of the most visible and active players in supporting, facilitating and leading 'Chinese' engagement in African conservation. The third section progresses to contend that the nature of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan and African conservation has emerged from and been shaped by growing awareness of wildlife and conservation in China, set against the backdrop of a Chinese NGO landscape that is still establishing itself and navigating complexities of the Chinese social and political landscape. The final section shows how Chinese non-profit engagement is often linked to a much broader range of activity beyond what might be readily framed as 'non-profit'. It explores the direct interaction between non-profit engagement and the Chinese state and Chinese for-profit sector, whilst also demonstrating how the state and for-profit sector engage in African conservation in their own right, and how this can come to influence and shape Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation.

2. Categorising Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation

Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation can be examined across three different areas of activity. Chinese non-profit engagement is the key focus for this research and can be split into two main areas, Chinese-led engagement and Chinese engagement initiated or led by INGOs. The third area is how Chinese non-profit engagement links to the Chinese state and Chinese for-profit activity. These categorisations were developed based on identifying and examining all the different forms of Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation and the types of actors involved. This revealed diversity in the types of activity and a complex array of dynamics between different types of Chinese and non-Chinese actors. **Figure 3** illustrates the structure of these categorisations as part of Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation. It shows how the different areas of engagement are segmented and how they are examined in this chapter.

Figure 3: Categories of Chinese engagement



Chinese non-profit engagement encompasses all those activities involving Chinese-led non-profit activity (such as that of China House) and Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs (such as WildAid or WWF). The diagram shows how Chinese-led engagement (on the left) is further segmented by Kenya and China-based activity. Chinese non-profit engagement that is initiated or led by INGOs (in the middle) is split between activity initiated or led by INGOs *without* a China office and INGOs *with* a China office. These categorisations of Chinese non-profit engagement reflect the structure of engagement and the actors involved, and ultimately, the degree to which engagement is determined by Chinese actors. Chinese-led non-profit engagement, both Kenya and China-based, is where engagement represents the greatest degree of Chinese agency in terms of leading and delivering activity. Engagement initiated or led by INGOs *without* a China office, is the area of activity that demonstrates the least amount of Chinese agency. Where engagement is initiated or led by INGOs *with* a China office, this represents a hybrid of ‘Western’ INGO activity being led by China-based teams, and therefore a greater degree of Chinese agency. The final area (or linkage) is how Chinese non-profit engagement connects to the Chinese state and for-profit sector (on the right). This link is significant because of the degree to which the Chinese state, in particular, might play a role in shaping non-profit activity and its outcomes. This categorisation of engagement is analytically useful and significant in that it highlights the complexity, and often dependencies in engagement, as well as the different forms and foci adopted. The following sections will explore these categorisations, the types of engagement involved and how they are connected.

3. Chinese-led non-profit engagement

Chinese-led non-profit activity in Kenyan conservation is a new and emerging area of Chinese engagement in Africa. Chinese-led activity can be defined as activity that is either initiated and

led by Chinese actors (such as Chinese founded and led organisations) or where the initiative to engage in Kenyan and African projects is Chinese-led (such as Chinese students and volunteers). This engagement includes Chinese actors living in and outside of China. It is helpful to further differentiate between Kenya-based and China-based engagement and advocacy. Kenya-based activity can be characterised as smaller-scale, youth and education-focused, and involving direct engagement with local actors that work with and support Kenyan-led projects. China-based engagement also targets education but can incorporate a wider scope of activity including public or policy campaigning and financial investment in Kenyan and African related wildlife projects. In the case of China-based activity, however, there is often limited disaggregation of focus on 'African' wildlife and conservation by country, and the matter of 'African' wildlife often forms just a small part of wider global wildlife and conservation activities. Despite their different locations, both Kenya and China-based engagement have a strong focus on education and raising awareness amongst Chinese audiences.

3.1 Kenya-based engagement

Chinese-led non-profit engagement in Kenya and wider Africa was almost unheard of up until 10-15 years ago. It increased within this time frame but its expansion was halted by the outbreak of COVID-19 from the end of 2019. China House and the Mara Conservation Fund are the only two Chinese-led non-profit conservation organisations that it was possible to identify, at least in terms of organisations that are or were Kenya-based. These two small-scale, non-profit organisations have pursued different approaches to conservation engagement. Both organisations lead or support activity connected to wildlife advocacy and conservation work on the ground. They have focused on addressing and raising awareness of the illegal wildlife trade, as well as channelling efforts at broader wildlife advocacy amongst Chinese audiences (including those living in and visiting Kenya) and supporting localised conservation initiatives. Specific activities have included working with local conservation actors to track wildlife, supporting local human-wildlife conflict reduction initiatives, engaging in wildlife advocacy campaigning and events, visiting local schools to promote wildlife advocacy, as well as participating in knowledge exchange with Kenyan conservation actors. To carry out activities, these Chinese-led non-profit actors have worked with local Kenyan wildlife advocacy and conservation NGOs, Kenyan wildlife conservancies, Chinese diaspora communities and businesses, and alongside INGOs.

A key focus of such activity has been to engage Chinese audiences in conservation, including Chinese diaspora in Kenya and visitors from China, and has largely taken the form of Chinese-

targeted education and youth-focused activity. The participants of youth-focused activity include Chinese school and university students, those conducting research in Africa or volunteers and participants of ‘voluntourism’ – a form of tourism whereby tourists engage in volunteering activity (Douglas and Greenhill 2017). In terms of Chinese audience engagement, China House has coordinated the engagement of Chinese diaspora communities in African conservation initiatives and it continues to run its own educational programme for visitors from China to join. Mara Conservation on the other hand has often been the recipient of groups of Chinese students and volunteers, whereby the coordination of the visit is planned by both Chinese youth groups and schools (essentially non-profit actors) and Chinese for-profit tour companies.

As indicated in interviews and online media sources, China House is the most recognised organisation when it comes to Chinese-led non-profit activity in Kenyan conservation. China House was founded in 2014 in Nairobi, Kenya by Hongxiang Huang. A key focus for China House was in helping to integrate Chinese communities in Africa, specifically through enhancing wildlife advocacy and coordinating activities to engage Chinese diaspora communities in conservation and sustainable development initiatives.

As stated on the China House website (China House 2024a), it was on a trip to Ecuador in 2011 that Hongxiang had his “wake-up call” to the role of Chinese businesses in environmental responsibility and sustainable development, specifically in relation to the adverse effects brought by Chinese businesses (such as mining companies) to local communities. This interest and desire to do something was further compounded in 2014 when Hongxiang went on an undercover assignment to investigate the ivory trade, posing as a buyer and infiltrating networks (ibid.). These efforts were later captured in *The Ivory Game* - a Netflix documentary on the ivory trade telling the story of governments and conservationists working against poachers and Chinese ivory traders, that was produced in collaboration with Leonardo DiCaprio (Bradshaw 2016). It was from this point that Hongxiang began to consider how much impact he could achieve on his own in relation to the wildlife trade and advocating for sustainability (China House 2024a). As quoted by Hongxiang on the China House website:

I noticed a growing interest among many young Chinese in philanthropy, wildlife conservation, and helping Africa. I saw that what I was doing in South America and Africa could be continued by these passionate Chinese youths. I firmly believed that a collective effort had the power to bring about significant change.

In 2014, I laid the foundation for China House, propelled by a vision to incorporate China into the realm of global sustainable development. My strategy hinged on global citizenship education and youth engagement as the catalysts for tangible change. In this endeavour, I envisaged that their collective might pave the way for positive global transformation. (China House 2024a)

The China House website states that from 2015-2018 (in the time it was based in Kenya), China House engaged in 35 conservation related initiatives across Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, engaging over 160,000 individuals in its activities (China House 2024b). In this time, China House worked in partnership with various actors to deliver activity in Kenya and across the East and Southern African region, including with the INGO HSI, Kenyan animal advocacy NGO Africa Network for Animal Welfare (ANAW) and Chinese Embassies. A 2017-2018 report produced by China House and HSI outlines the series of activities they worked on together to engage Chinese diaspora communities in African wildlife conservation (China House, Humane Society International 2018). These advocacy initiatives were focused on raising awareness amongst Chinese communities and businesses of the illegal wildlife trade, promoting behaviour change in consumption and “cultivating wildlife lovers”. Some of the projects included coordinating the ‘Wild Run’ and ‘Walk for Elephants’ events in Kenya and Tanzania, facilitating wildlife volunteering opportunities for young Chinese visitors in Kenya and Tanzania, working with Chinese state-owned enterprises to drive awareness amongst Chinese construction workers in Namibia, and hosting the China Africa Wildlife Conservation Conference in South Africa. The Chinese state was also involved in activities. The report states that China House cooperated with the Chinese embassy in Tanzania to host the ‘Walk for Elephants’ event that took place in Tanzania in 2017. The event drew 550 people to protest against the ivory trade and was attended by the Chinese Ambassador to Tanzania. Additionally, whilst based in Kenya China House partnered with ANAW. Together they hosted a series of de-snaring events to engage members of the Chinese diaspora community as volunteers. The aim of the events was to remove snares and rescue injured wildlife (China Global South Project 2015b).

During the course of this research, China House has evolved and reshaped its direction over such time. It was in 2018 that China House moved its base to Shanghai in China and repositioned itself as a ‘social enterprise’. The term ‘social enterprise’ and social entrepreneurship can be understood as the use of commercial activities by non-profit organisations to achieve their ambitions (Dees and Anderson 2006). In evolving towards a ‘social enterprise’ model, interviews indicate that China House needed to move its base to

China to pursue its conservation advocacy work more effectively and at greater scale. One interview participant explains that China House did not want to rely on external funding and wanted to be able to control how it operates. A student fee-paying model, supported by Chinese students based in China paying to engage in educational experiences and sustainable development activities in developing countries, enabled the organisation to do this. Although, this may not have been the only reason that China House shifted to a social-enterprise model and moved the organisation to China. An interview participant working in non-profit conservation in Kenya suggests that the Chinese embassy in Kenya encouraged the organisation to limit its activity, especially in relation to campaigning. This implies that perhaps the Chinese embassy did not approve of China House's activities, and as a result of political sensitivities, the organisation decided to adapt its approach in Kenya. In turn, this scenario demonstrates how Chinese-led non-profit activity can come to be influenced and shaped by the state - a theme that will be further developed as the chapter progresses.

This evolution of China House has taken shape in a number of ways. Firstly, it has expanded its focus from engaging Chinese diaspora in Kenya and Eastern/Southern Africa in wildlife advocacy and conservation, to a much broader focus on facilitating volunteering and research opportunities for China-based youth to visit 'developing' countries. Secondly, it has further expanded its geographical focus to incorporate a much wider scope of projects across Africa and Asia. Thirdly, whilst much of the organisation's activities were initially focused on wildlife advocacy and conservation, engagement has expanded to include a range of advocacy projects, such as female empowerment and female education (China House 2024c). The non-profit organisation initially positioned itself as an 'NGO' (Li 2015a), and from 2022, it was positioning itself as an 'educational social enterprise' and 'think tank' (China House 2022). As of 2024, the China House website outlines the mission of the organisation as follows:

To further integrate China into global sustainable development. We're committed to turning Chinese communities and businesses into an even more positive influence for global development while nurturing the next generation of change-makers. Plus, we tackle pressing issues affecting women, children, refugees, wildlife and education in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, working closely with all stakeholder. (China House 2024d)

At present, the key focus of the Shanghai-based organisation is on educating and engaging Chinese youth in global development projects, the majority of which have been in Africa. It also runs a Chinese investigation team that works in strategic partnership with conservation

NGOs to provide insights into the involvement of Chinese actors in the illegal wildlife trade (China House 2024e).

In recent years, China House has continued to partner with ANAW in the 'Friends of ANAW' programme, designed to support and improve human-wildlife coexistence. As part of the programme, China House has escorted groups of students from China to engage in ANAW's initiatives in addressing human-wildlife conflict and animal advocacy. One of these was the 'Lion Light' project, an initiative to deter lions from attacking livestock and entering land of local farmers and communities. China House supplied the lights and the Chinese participants on its programme helped to install the lights brought over from China. Whilst, the scope of China House's activities has grown to include a wider 'development' focus, in 2024 the China House website still reflects that the majority of its engagements have been focused on conservation and in Africa.

As the second key example of a Kenya-based Chinese-led non-profit organisation, the Mara Conservation Fund is a different type of organisation altogether. The organisation leads and operates its own conservation projects in Kenya and is based in Ol Kinyei Conservancy in the Masai Mara region of Kenya. It was founded by Chinese wildlife conservationist Zhou Qiang, aka Simba, whose work has focused on developing a better model for human-lion coexistence in the Ol Kinyei Conservancy (Mara Conservation Fund 2022). Simba is frequently referenced by Chinese interview participants and in Chinese media sources, and is acknowledged as a pioneer for Chinese-led activity in Kenyan conservation. Simba's work on human-lion coexistence was portrayed in 'Lion Heart', a documentary film following his work that showcases the challenges and threats to the Maasai people's way of life and the wildlife they coexist with (The Moving Visuals Co. 2023). Released in 2017 by Singaporean content creator The Moving Visuals Co., it is said to have inspired greater Chinese interest in Kenyan conservation (Zhou 2018; Mara Conservation Fund 2022).

The Mara Conservation Fund website states that it is focused on three areas: community-based conservation, reduction of human-wildlife conflict and anti-poaching measures (Mara Conservation Fund 2022). Its community-based conservation initiatives have included helping to create jobs for the local community, supporting schools and supporting the empowerment of local women through the Mara Women Development Project. Activity to reduce human-wildlife conflict has focused on building lion-proof 'bomas' (livestock enclosures) for Masai families, and anti-poaching efforts have included providing equipment such as vehicles, Global Positioning System (GPS) devices and tents to the KWS and Kenyan state conservancies (ibid.). The Mara Conservation Fund staff are a small local, rather than Chinese, team. The

organisation works with its Kenyan partners, including Kenyan state conservancies and the East African Wildlife Society, an East African NGO with a key focus on Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda (East African Wildlife Society 2024). It also has a network of international partners, including Nature Guardian Wildlife Conservation Centre, a China-based non-profit organisation that it has worked with to improve wildlife conservation in China and in Africa through knowledge exchange and cooperation (Mara Conservation Fund 2024). As part of its operations, a key area of focus has also been in receiving visiting groups from China and other parts of the world, including Chinese youth and school volunteering groups. It can be argued that the Mara Conservation Fund is distinct from other modes of Chinese non-profit and wider Chinese conservation engagement in Africa. The focus is not just about the engagement of Chinese audiences in activities or the provision of resources, its activities are also directly embedded in conservation protection and management on the ground – working in a similar way to Kenyan or international non-profit organisations in Kenyan conservation.

Taking the work of China House and the Mara Conservation Fund together as the leading examples of Chinese-led non-profit engagement in Kenya, the education of Chinese audiences on wildlife and conservation, and in particular the illegal wildlife trade, remains a key focus. As will emerge as the chapter progresses, the emphasis on education around the illegal wildlife trade has also been central to other forms of Chinese conservation engagement, such as INGO-initiated, Chinese state and Chinese for-profit activity. Concerns around the illegal wildlife trade and the role that Chinese consumers have played in contributing to it has been a key motivating factor for the inception of Chinese-led non-profit organisations and a key focus of engagement for many of their activities in Kenya. Many of the Chinese interviewees who had engaged in Chinese-led non-profit activity acknowledged that Chinese consumers have had a role in driving the illegal wildlife trade, and because of this, Chinese audiences and actors could play a key role (or should take responsibility) as wildlife advocates and champions to turn the tide on Chinese consumption. Highlighting the importance of educating Chinese audiences in combating the illegal wildlife trade, an interview participant from China who engaged in conservation research activities in Kenya explains:

Education is very important and for Chinese and what we can contribute to wildlife conservation in Africa, education is probably the best method we can use because for example, fundraising, lots of Western countries help with fundraising in wildlife conservation and there are also research institutions help doing research. The special role of Chinese there is we are always considered as demand side. That's why education is important, we're not

trying to enforce on the supply side, we're trying to support from the demand side – I believe this should be one of the main focuses.

In many cases, activities focused on education are closely linked to the engagement of Chinese youth and students in conservation activities in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa, and this is very often framed by Chinese organisations, and by Chinese interviewees, as volunteering. These Chinese volunteers (as individuals) can also be categorised as Chinese non-profit actors. In these scenarios, there are two different types of volunteers. The first are Chinese volunteers that live in Africa, the second are Chinese student volunteers that visit from China. The understanding developed from interviews and documentary research is that the majority of volunteers are visitors from China, with engagement in conservation being facilitated by both Chinese non-profit organisations and Chinese for-profit tour operators – the latter of which will be further examined later on in the chapter.

There are a number of ways in which volunteering takes place. As a non-profit organisation, China House is the most widely recognised organisation that facilitates Chinese volunteering opportunities in Kenya and Africa. Whilst it was based in Kenya, the volunteers were largely from the Chinese diaspora community. Since the organisation moved to China, the volunteer participants have primarily been Chinese youth and students visiting from China, where the ambition is to also engage the participants in advocacy and research. In other scenarios discussed by Chinese and Kenyan interviewees, Chinese non-profit organisations (such as youth groups) based in China are sending Chinese volunteers to support conservation organisations based in Kenya (including the Chinese non-profit Mara Conservation Fund and Kenyan conservation organisations). The Mara Conservation Fund works with Chinese organisations in receiving Chinese volunteers, both through working with Chinese non-profit organisations, but also for-profit Chinese organisations that facilitate the visits of volunteers.

The dynamic of Chinese volunteering being facilitated by both non-profit and for-profit actors somewhat blurs the boundaries of volunteering and 'voluntourism'. Much like Western volunteer tourism (Mostafanezhad 2013; Remers 2022), Chinese youth are increasingly interested in individual learning and experience-building opportunities through a combination of educational, volunteering and tourist-type activity. Chinese interview participants discuss how volunteering provides opportunity to gain new life experiences, a broader global outlook and develop ethical responsibility, as well as contributing and 'making a difference'. In reference to sending young Chinese citizens overseas, an interview participant working for a Chinese non-profit organisation that has engaged in conservation activity and supports volunteering opportunities explains:

[it is about] letting them grow, ask them to do something contributinal to the world and so on. So, we are not only looking at conservation, we're looking at the whole issue of China global engagement and sustainable development, and conservation is an important part of it.

'Voluntourism' itself is about 'giving back, doing good and feeling global' (Germann Molz 2015), whilst enjoying the sights and experiences of the 'exotic' (McGloin and Georgeou 2015). China is usually depicted as a recipient of volunteer tourism (Wang 2022). However, according to a 2016 report published by the world's largest youth-run organisation (AIESEC 2016), China has now become one of the biggest exporters of volunteer tourism. This is a trend recognised amongst interview participants, with one conservation manager working in Kenya explaining:

I did have quite different groups of Chinese students. So mainly between 16 and 18. I think the younger generation are very into conservation [...] I've had quite some groups of Chinese coming to conservation projects in Kenya. So, I can say they are getting in to appreciating the importance of wildlife and appreciating why we need to conserve resources.

It is understood that for some Chinese youth and student interviewees who have participated in such initiatives, their desire to respond to a sense of ethical responsibility, learn and build experience is explicitly linked to CV enhancement and supporting educational application processes. An interview participant working for a Chinese non-profit organisation engaging in conservation activity explains:

Our key group of Chinese students are those students who want to start international courses; they will have the demand to do some research in Africa or other developing countries as it will help them to apply for good universities in Western countries.

Based on interviews with Chinese participants and information gained from organisation websites and online sources, it is understood that youth and student participation is furthering awareness of African conservation. The vision is that those who participate in volunteering and who take part in research activities in Africa (such as those facilitated by China House) will become vehicles for longer-term wildlife advocacy in China. At the same time, it can be argued that Chinese engagement in African conservation driven by purposes of education,

volunteering or indeed voluntourism are akin to Western and even globalised socio-cultural trends (Otoo 2013; Proyrungroj 2020) and therefore cannot be considered as distinctly 'Chinese' (Lorimer 2010).

To a great extent, the examples of engagement outlined in this section are where Chinese agency is clearest, where non-profit activity and organisations are initiated by Chinese actors, and where the link to Kenyan conservation is most direct and potentially significant. These organisations are, or have been, based in Kenya and therefore can be seen as most directly linked to Kenyan conservation efforts. The nature of engagement is relatively small-scale and localised and the number of organisational actors operating in this space are limited. Nonetheless, these organisations are seemingly driven by their own agendas in terms of ambition for supporting and facilitating Chinese conservation engagement, and not by agendas determined by other actors, such as the Chinese state. As such, this bottom-up engagement could be seen to be focused on establishing genuine outcomes for conservation.

3.2 China-based engagement

The range of Chinese-led non-profit activity promoting African wildlife conservation and drawing attention to the impact of the illegal wildlife trade is broader in China. Activity ranges from education and raising awareness on wildlife and the illegal wildlife trade amongst Chinese audiences, to campaigning for change, through to delivering funding and investment to causes related to African wildlife. A number of non-profit organisations founded in China are involved, with examples including The Paradise Foundation (supported by leading business figures such as Jack Ma of retail giant Alibaba and Pony Ma of the technology corporation Tencent) and China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation (CBCGDF). There are also a range of smaller online-based wildlife advocacy communities such as student-founded Animal Dialogue.

Founded in 2015, The Paradise Foundation is a Shenzhen-based, non-profit environmental organisation that is philanthropically funded. Its board members and advisors are comprised of some of China's most influential philanthropists, entrepreneurs and artists (The Paradise Foundation 2024a). According to its website (The Paradise Foundation 2024b), its core foci are establishing and managing nature reserves, marine conservation and nature education in China. Whilst the activities of the organisation are primarily focused on China, it has also supported initiatives in Kenyan and African conservation. In 2018, The Paradise Foundation launched the 'African Ranger Awards', a programme recognising the role of African rangers

in nature conservation, providing financial incentives and support for recognised rangers, and raising greater awareness of African wildlife (United Nations Environment Programme 2020). The awards have received noteworthy coverage in Chinese, African and international online media sources, in part a result of having Jack Ma as a famous ambassador. Additionally, The Paradise Foundation has also partnered with the Mara Elephant Project in Kenya, signing an agreement with the local African organisation running the project to help support the design of the project, including a mechanism to channel profits from tourism back into conservation and launching the 'Wild Partners' app game on the Taobao mobile app allowing players to 'adopt' African elephants (Mara Elephant Project 2019).

CBCGDF is another example of a China-based non-profit organisation that has supported initiatives related to Kenyan and African wildlife conservation. According to its website (CBCGDF 2024), CBCGDF has "three hats": as a scientific association, a charitable organisation and a non-profit environmental-social organisation. As part of its global focus on wildlife and the environment, the link to African wildlife tends to be focused on species-led advocacy and campaigning (including providing recommendations for Chinese policy change), specifically in the context of the illegal wildlife trade. As an example of activity, CBCGDF's website claims that through the efforts of its 'Pangolin Working Group', it helped to remove pangolin from the '2020 Chinese Pharmacopoeia' (CBCGDF 2022a). Additionally, as part of CBCGDF's 'South-South Biodiversity Science Project', the organisation has participated in a number of initiatives to cooperate on and support African elephant conservation. In 2018, CBCGDF partnered with the OI Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya to improve and donate lights to deter predatory wildlife, invest in beehives and donate 'monitoring' equipment. Then in 2021, CBCGDF became the first Chinese social organisation to join the African Elephant Protection Initiative (CBCGDF 2022b).

In terms of activities carried out by other types of China-based non-profit organisation, the research and educational think tank, Animal Dialogue, has also contributed to raising awareness of Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, primarily through online-based activities. As a group of Chinese scholars and professionals, the aim of the organisation is to "change the popular attitudes towards animals and nature in China" (Animal Dialogue 2024). Animal Dialogue publishes online articles on conservation and animal-welfare for its subscribers, facilitates discussion groups and provides career support and learning for young people who want to pursue a career in conservation (ibid.). In the context of Kenyan conservation, Animal Dialogue engaged with Simba, from the Mara Conservation Fund, to report on his work with lions in Kenya (Zhou 2018). Animal Dialogue also worked with the Alibaba Foundation to support the reporting of the 'African Ranger Awards'. As such, a key

focus of this organisation is also about showcasing the efforts of Chinese actors in global conservation efforts.

Overall, there are few China-based non-profit organisations that are seen to be directly engaging in Kenyan conservation efforts. Of the China-based non-profit engagement in Kenyan and African conservation that exists, it is generally indirect. In the examples discussed, it is clear that the focus is generally on Africa as a whole. Even then, activity around African wildlife forms a relatively small part of overall global activity and is often incorporated into a species-led focus, whether it be elephants, big cats, pangolins, and so on, rather than a country-led focus.

4. Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs

Chinese non-profit engagement that is initiated or led by INGOs is the most active and high-profile area of Chinese non-profit engagement. Such engagement is complex and multi-layered, involving a range of actors and different forms of activity. As outlined at the start of this chapter, the structure of engagement and the actors involved can be categorised as Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs *without* a China office and INGOs *with* a China office. These geographies determine the extent to which engagement is driven and shaped by Chinese actors, and ultimately, the degree of Chinese agency. Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs *without* a China office is where INGO teams outside of China are leading on the engagement of Chinese actors (including audiences in China or with Chinese for-profit actors) in Kenyan and African conservation activity. This form of engagement demonstrates the 'weakest' form of Chinese agency. For Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs *with* a China office, this manifests as a hybrid of 'Western' INGO activity being led by China-based teams, with a potential convergence of 'Western' INGO and Chinese agendas and priorities at play. In turn, such engagement represents a higher degree of Chinese agency.

It is evident that INGOs have been some of the most visible and active players in 'Chinese' engagement in Kenyan and African conservation. Over the past ten to fifteen years, INGOs have assumed a key position in elevating wildlife advocacy and conservation in China, specifically in raising awareness of the impacts of the illegal wildlife trade and its connection to African wildlife. Gamso (2019) has written widely on China and the illegal wildlife trade and argues that INGO activity, amplified by Chinese celebrity endorsements, has contributed to

mobilising local support and increasing pressure on the Chinese government to ban the ivory trade.

Some of the key INGOs engaging in Chinese conservation efforts connected to African conservation include WildAid, WWF, TRAFFIC, WCS, IFAW, TNC, HSI and AWF. As 'Western'-founded organisations these INGOs have international representation, working from offices based in China and/or Africa. The organisational focus and approach of INGOs as part of Chinese engagement in African conservation differ depending on the structures of engagement as presented at the start of this section. This includes where the INGO teams themselves are located, the location of the Chinese actors and audiences they are seeking to engage, as well as the desired outcomes of engagement and how they choose to engage with Chinese actors or audiences. Nonetheless, the overarching emphasis across all activity is on raising awareness of conservation and the implications of the illegal wildlife trade amongst Chinese audiences, either in China or in Africa.

Chinese non-profit engagement that is initiated or led by INGOs *without* a China office is the dynamic of Chinese non-profit engagement whereby INGOs, which are not based in China, are engaging Chinese audiences and actors in their activities. Within this structure, the balance of power is with the INGO and therefore is least determined by Chinese actors, with the least amount of room for Chinese agency. The number of INGOs operating in this category was found to be more limited. Based in Kenya, the AWF has a strategic stream of work focusing on Chinese engagement with African conservation. As a Western-founded, Africa-based INGO, the creation of a specific China-Africa strategy is of significance. In actively seeking out Chinese engagement this highlights the perceived relevance and value of engaging Chinese actors and audiences in Kenyan and wider African conservation. This is potentially derived from the association of Chinese demand with the illegal wildlife trade, the opportunity to gain support from a large new audience in China, as well as the influence of China's increasing presence in Africa.

The AWF have engaged in a great variety of activities and with a diverse range of Chinese actors. What distinguishes the AWF's activities from other INGOs is that its sole focus is on Kenyan and African conservation, unlike the other INGOs that are discussed as the chapter continues which advocate for wildlife on a global scale. In terms of engaging Chinese businesses in Africa, the AWF have been seeking out opportunities to develop 'corporate relations' with the likes of Chinese tour operators and infrastructure businesses. The motivation for engaging with the latter is so that the AWF can provide expertise on wildlife and conservation in order to mitigate negative impacts of construction projects. The AWF have

also contributed to creating joint forums of China-Africa conservation representatives. In partnership with US-based non-profit the Aspen Institute, the AWF formed the China-Africa Wildlife Conservation Council. The council serves as a platform for China-Africa cooperation for conservation and governance of wildlife and wild lands. It facilitates a forum of cultural and economic exchange amongst civil society representatives, investors and celebrities that can support the Chinese and African governments in joint commitment of conservation and sustainable development (Qiao 2020). Like many other Chinese-led non-profit actors and INGOs, engagement of the younger Chinese generation has also been a key focus for awareness raising and engagement activity, with social media as an important means of reaching these audiences. In 2017, the AWF partnered with China-based bakery chain 'BreadTalk' to raise awareness of leopard and cheetah conservation through Chinese social media platform Weibo, encouraging customers to scan QR codes and follow AWF's WeChat profile (Parulis-Cook 2019). In addition, knowledge exchange has also been a focus of activity - one such project included inviting Chinese experts to visit African zoos to exchange knowledge on zoo management and animal protection (African Wildlife Foundation 2018). The majority of the AWF's activities lead on the engagement of Chinese actors, but in 2020, it also entered a partnership with the established China-based NGO Friends of Nature. The organisations developed the China-Africa Youth Dialogue series, an online programme enabling youth to connect and become champions for conservation in both China and Africa. Webinar sessions brought together participants from universities and environmental institutions to discuss matters such as sustainable wildlife economies and the wildlife trade (Odongo 2020). Whilst this specific example of activity suggests that a greater balance in power relations may be a play between the AWF (as an INGO) and Friends of Nature (a Chinese non-profit organisation), the vast majority of AWF activities involve leading on the engagement of Chinese actors.

Chinese non-profit engagement that is initiated or led by INGOs *with* a China office is the dynamic where most Chinese non-profit activity that is initiated or led by INGOs takes place. A key focus of much of this engagement has been on raising awareness and engaging audiences on the illegal wildlife trade, predominantly in China. The types and channels of engagement are diverse, much like conservation INGO activity in others parts of the world. Typical activities include big-budget celebrity-endorsed campaigns, youth engagement events, coordination of multi-stakeholder forums in China and Africa, and working alongside the Chinese state and with Chinese for-profit actors on campaign activity (which will be examined later on in this chapter). Although most of such INGO engagement focuses on engaging audiences in China, there have also been attempts to engage Chinese communities in Africa. For example, the IFAW China and Africa teams jointly established a programme

creating a platform for local Chinese communities to participate in conservation activities and connect with Kenyan conservationists in Kenya.

Big-budget campaigns have been at the forefront of engagement that is led by INGOs *with* a China office. The likes of WildAid, WWF and IFAW have been at the helm of high-profile campaigns to increase awareness and change wildlife product consumption behaviour, whilst promoting wildlife advocacy. WildAid's 2017 'Kung Fu Pangolin' campaign featuring actor Jackie Chan or WWF and TRAFFIC's 2016 'Link your fingers to support elephants' campaign (WWF 2016a) are key examples of this. In talking about the audience for such campaigns, one interview participant working for an INGO with an office in China comments:

Our broader goal is to make these products sort of taboo throughout society... The people that consume our message and media are just naturally going to be in their 20s and 30s. That's the demographic, urban, comfortable, well-off and 20/30/40 age bracket.

Over the past decade, many celebrities have featured in INGO campaigns to support awareness of the illegal wildlife trade and wildlife conservation advocacy targeting audiences in China. The primary message is to stop consuming products of the illegal wildlife trade. The celebrity ambassador for wildlife has become an increasing trend in Chinese engagement in African conservation. WildAid in particular has worked with basketball player Yao Ming, and actors Jackie Chan, Li Bingbing and Hai Ching in campaigns addressing demand for wildlife products from ivory, to pangolins scales, rhino horn and shark fins. As part of this, in 2012-13 Yao Ming visited Kenya to take part in WildAid's documentary project titled 'The End of the Wild' (Capital FM 2012; Hawa 2012). Interview participants suggest that Chinese celebrity engagement, via INGO campaigns, has helped to elevate Chinese presence in African conservation and raise awareness of the illegal wildlife trade and conservation, especially amongst younger audiences. To an extent, Chinese celebrity endorsement of African conservation could also be seen to be increasing awareness and inspiring Chinese youth to engage in conservation opportunities, like those provided by China House. Arguably, celebrities are not only fulfilling INGO wildlife ambassador roles, but are also important vehicles for generating positive representations of China in Kenya – reinforcing the argument made by Jeffreys (2017, 2018) that Chinese celebrity engagement with non-profit causes can be a tool for projecting a positive image of China. An interview participant in a senior role at a Kenyan conservation organisation talks about the link between increasing presence of Chinese celebrities engaging in African conservation and China's efforts in diplomacy and image in Africa. The utility of celebrity to enhance image is further evidenced in the language

and narratives found in some of the Chinese media sources. As one *China Daily* headline calls out, “*Yao charms Kenyans with height on conservancy mission*” (China Daily 2012). Whilst Chinese celebrity engagement is most frequently attached to activities of ‘Western’-founded INGOs, it equally serves purpose for elevating perceptions of China and Chinese non-profit engagement.

As has been argued, Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs can be largely differentiated and categorised as INGO activity *without* a China office, where engagement has the least scope for Chinese agency, and INGO activity *with* a China office, where engagement has greater scope for Chinese agency. However, not all Chinese engagement associated with INGOs aligns to these categories. A further scenario of engagement that is linked to Chinese-led non-profit and INGO activity is where there exists a balance in power dynamics in the partnership and cooperation between both Chinese-led non-profit actors and INGOs. This form of engagement demonstrates the greatest degree of Chinese agency when it comes to Kenyan and African conservation engagement. In this scenario, INGOs are ‘supporting’ Chinese-led activity. The collaboration between the Chinese-led non-profit and HSI (introduced earlier on in the chapter) is a key example of this dynamic. The primary focus of the work was to engage Chinese audiences, primarily the Chinese diaspora community in Kenya and other Eastern and Southern African countries, in conservation advocacy activity. Supported with a grant provided by HSI, the China House team are at the forefront of leading engagement, with much of the online material and reporting focusing on the story of China House and their ambitions for Chinese engagement in Africa (Li 2015a; China House, Humane Society International 2018). In this collaboration, the approach and ambition behind the engagement has been set out by China House. China House also has the language skills and access to Chinese diaspora, that would be more difficult for an INGO operating in Africa to achieve on its own. In turn, the provision of funds by HSI enables the activity to take place, and arguably, a partnership with a recognised INGO further raises the profile and legitimises engagement. With China House leading engagement and HSI providing the funds, this suggests that relatively equal power dynamics are at play. In a sense, this engagement demonstrates the strongest form of Chinese agency at play when it comes to INGO activity in Kenyan an African conservation.

In summary, it can be argued that INGOs are critical actors and key vehicles in Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation. The dynamic of typically ‘Western’-founded INGOs helping to initiate, lead and support Chinese engagement in African conservation is significant. On the one hand, it signals the continued dominance of INGOs, and wider Western actors, in African conservation. On the other hand, the coming together of Western, Chinese and African

actors to support African conservation suggests that some form of triangular cooperation might be at play, which in turn makes engagement more hybrid in nature. This key role and the implications of Western actor involvement in Chinese conservation engagement will be further examined in Chapters 6 and 7.

5. The broader context of non-profit activity in China

In order to understand the emergent nature of Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation and the key issues it focuses on, it is necessary to consider the broader context in which it is operating. Important factors driving the emergence of activity are a focus on growing awareness and knowledge of wildlife and conservation, as well as understanding the wider non-profit and NGO landscape in China.

Driving awareness and knowledge of wildlife and conservation is a central objective of much Chinese-led non-profit conservation activity, with a particular focus on youth engagement. A key aim is to increase interest in wildlife and address conceptions of wildlife and how audiences perceive its value. Conceptions of wildlife in China are a complex and contested point of discussion in the English language academic literature (Coggins 2002; Harris 2004, 2008a; 2008b; Li 2008; Xu et al. 2014; Zhang, Goodale and Chen 2014; Swan and Conrad 2015; Gao, Zhang and Huang 2017; Zhu 2022). One of the key contentions is that conceptions of wildlife have shaped the 'value' assigned to wildlife and hence attitudes towards its treatment and conservation. This argument is often discussed in the context of Chinese demand for products of the illegal wildlife trade (Zhang, Hua and Sun 2008; Swan and Conrad 2015; Thomas-Walters et al. 2020a; 2020b). 'Values' in relation to an anthropocentric view on wildlife are frequently raised (Harris 2004, 2008a; Li 2008; Xu et al. 2014; Swan and Conrad 2015; Gao, Zhang and Huang 2017), whereby the value of environmental goods is derived from their value to humans (Schmidtz 1997). As Zhu (2022) contends, Chinese approaches to wildlife and the environment do not necessarily separate the human and cultural from nature as in Western conceptions, and the value of nature is seen to be enhanced by its cultural meaning and usefulness to people. Zhu argues that the Chinese demand for products of endangered species is misunderstood as a "pillaging of the environment" in the West (*ibid.*, p.12), instead of a complex juncture of Chinese culture and economy based on cultural heritage and philosophical tradition.

Whilst it is important to emphasise the lack of nuance in some of the arguments in the

literature, to a great extent, interviews with many Chinese participants reinforce the importance of these 'values' of cultural meaning and usefulness to people in explaining responses to wildlife conservation. Traditional Chinese medicine is regularly referenced as a driver of consumption in interviews. As Zhu (2022) highlights, traditional Chinese medicine is integral to everyday life for many people in China, not only in matters of health but in Chinese practice and culture. As one interview participant who worked with a Chinese non-profit organisation that has engaged in conservation activity explains:

Endangered wildlife are considered cherished, [it] has value for medicinal uses. In TCM [traditional Chinese medicine] they like to choose the one that is like aphrodisiac. It's hard to conserve wildlife, they ask you why, 'what if my mum is in urgent need and we have to try use that?' There is a gap of information that is hard to fill in.

In addition to the narratives of deriving value from consumption is the more prominent argument of lack of familiarity with and interest in conservation. Another interview participant working for a Chinese non-profit organisation that has engaged in conservation activity explains:

Wildlife conservation is still very far away from Chinese people. Still to the majority of Chinese people, conservation is still something they feel very distant from, they are not very interested and they don't care.

This expression of emotive distance from nature is further compounded by assertions of physical distance. An interview participant who engaged in Chinese-led conservation work and research in Kenya suggests the reason why Chinese people in Kenya are not familiar with conservation is because most were brought up in Chinese cities and never saw or engaged with wildlife before coming to Kenya, "...they didn't know what wildlife was or understood animal welfare".

A study carried out in China amongst school pupils reinforces such narratives in explaining how a gap between humans and nature (through urbanisation) has bred apathy and even biophobia towards wildlife conservation and the environment (Zhang, Goodale and Chen 2014). Lack of education has been closely linked to lack of familiarity and interest. As one interview participant who worked in conservation education in China explains:

In China, environmental education is not part of the curriculum; it's additional

learning for the students. A lot of students would not get environmental education through formal education. Then talking about wildlife conservation education, it's really just a very small topic within environmental education.

These arguments about conceptions of wildlife and a lack of education about conservation can help to explain why education has been adopted as a key means of engagement in Chinese non-profit conservation activity.

Such activity can be seen as part of a growing awareness and concern for wildlife and conservation in China over the past decade. A key driver of this has been growing interest from younger generations. An interview participant working for a Chinese non-profit organisation that has engaged in conservation activity highlights the increase in students choosing to study the environment and wildlife:

Lots of students are changing their minds, choosing majors that are not so popular in China. So people will go to Zoology – this is really common in China.

Both interview discussions and supporting literature recognise the increase in youth programmes focused on wildlife advocacy (Bexell, Jarrett and Ping 2013; Zhang, Zhao and Chen 2019), more students opting for environment and conservation-focused courses at university (Bao and Li 2016), overseas travel to engage in research and volunteering projects (Yu and Na 2022), as well as supporting wildlife advocacy efforts at home and choosing not to buy products of the illegal wildlife trade.

Chinese-led non-profit conservation engagement has in part emerged from the opportunity to drive Chinese interest and knowledge in African wildlife conservation. The emergence and nature of activity has also been shaped by the wider landscape of non-profit and NGO activity in China. Whilst the Chinese landscape for non-profit and NGO activity associated with African conservation is growing, the challenges of establishing operations are a frequent point of discussion amongst Chinese or China-based interview participants. These challenges include financial restrictions and regulation around fundraising, legal and administrative obstacles, and a politically sensitive environment, all of which are echoed in literature on Chinese civil society (Yang 2005; Sullivan and Xie 2009; Fei 2016; Zhuang, Zinda and Lassoie 2022). As an interview participant who worked with a Chinese non-profit organisation that has engaged in conservation activity comments, "...it's also hard for China's NGOs to 'go-out', they have to consider all the legal issues and relations".

The challenge of raising funds in China for projects overseas, for both Chinese non-profit organisations and INGOs, was discussed by an interview participant working for an INGO with an office in China:

It's really hard to get money within China, unless it's to a domestic organisation [...] big international organisations cannot accept money here in China. Getting money out of the country, like to local stuff in Africa, is also a huge challenge. Without those channels to do so, it's a blocker. There's interest for sure, it's a problem. It's a restrictive environment. It's the restrictive environment over the will to do it.

Working within boundaries of political acceptability is another key challenge, the imperative being to ensure 'China' is represented in a positive way. This was both explicit and implied in interview discussion. In speaking about Chinese individuals in Kenya in general, one interview participant working for a Kenyan wildlife NGO shares the view that there is often caution to engage in Kenyan conservation, "...Chinese would love to, but the diplomatic environment won't allow them". The reference to how "the diplomatic environment won't allow them" implies that the Chinese state, via means of the Chinese embassy in Kenya, may not approve or may be restricting in the types of conservation engagement Chinese nationals are seen to participating in. The interview participant continues to explain that when it comes to education related activity, or conservation engagement that does not "injure reputation", it is possible for Chinese people to play a role. However, they contend that it is different when the country's name is involved. This understanding is further reinforced by an online article written by members of the China House team and published by the Africa-China Reporting Project – a group hosted by the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, that aims to improve reporting on China-Africa relations:

At the very beginning of China House we did not find working with Chinese embassies in Africa very easy due to mindset differences. [...] The way China House undertakes wildlife conservation projects, and the fact that we would openly admit that China is the largest ivory market in the world, were not well accepted by the Chinese Embassy in Kenya and many Chinese community members. They would say we are "helping the west attack China's image". That is why we never worked with the Chinese Embassy in Kenya in the first few years of our project, despite that Kenya was where China House was founded. A Chinese embassy's style is usually determined

by the style of the ambassador. Some Chinese ambassadors are more open-minded and have realized propaganda is not the way to go, which gave us opportunities to work in a public-private partnership. (Huang, Yanran and Ye 2018)

The importance of Chinese image and reputation, particularly that of the state, is further illustrated in other aspects of conservation engagement in Kenya. In 2016, the founder of China House participated in the US documentary *The Ivory Game*. Whilst the documentary was broadly praised by Chinese media outlets such as CGTN (CGTN 2019) and the South China Morning Post (Su 2017), a Chinese interview participant who was familiar with the documentary comments that there was also concern. They explain that some Chinese audiences expressed anger that a Chinese person engaged in a project that presented China in a negative light. Talking negatively about China was framed as “betrayal”. Such insights reinforce the importance of China being represented in a positive way, even in relation to matters where Chinese engagement is more limited, such as conservation. To a degree, the importance of reputation links back to political sensitivities and the state’s desire to control narratives. As expressed by another interview participant who engaged in Chinese conservation activity in Kenya, “...if the voice isn’t coming from the state, the state pushes back”.

In the broader context of conservation INGO activity in China, a Chinese conservation expert explains:

If you want to survive as an NGO in China you have to collaborate with government [...] it is an authoritarian government; everything is from the top-down approach [...] if you want to survive as an NGO in China you have to collaborate with government. If you keep collaborating [...] it’s kind of strengthening the big brother mind. You have to take a different position if you want to make something change [...] is sometimes risky, you know.

The reference to “authoritarian government”, “top-down approach” and need to “collaborate with government” highlight the influence of the political climate and limitations on organisational autonomy in shaping INGO and NGO activity in China. Although conservation INGOs are generally ‘Western’-founded international organisations and their goals may be underpinned by globalised narratives of conservation, their ways of working have clearly adapted to the social and political environment and norms of working in China. As such, there is dependency on the state and its parameters of acceptability to legitimise and deliver INGO

activity (Noakes and Teets 2020; Holbig and Lang 2021).

A key argument to emerge from examining Chinese-led non-profit engagement in connection to Kenyan conservation is that it is rather limited and nascent. A core focus of much of the activity taking place in Kenya has been on the education of Chinese audiences, in particular on the illegal wildlife trade, but also on broader matters of Kenyan and African conservation. A core aim of which is to create advocates for wildlife and to address consumption of illegal wildlife products. To a great extent, Chinese public consumption has come to be seen as a driving force behind the trade, this would explain why engagement through education has been the focus of much activity.

It can be argued that Chinese non-profit activity in Kenyan and African conservation, through both Chinese and non-Chinese organisations, is often seen to be both more restricted and more tied up with the state than in other national contexts, especially the 'West'. As highlighted in this analysis, the restrictive legal environment presents challenge in operations and with raising funds, especially for Chinese non-profits supporting causes overseas. A focus on conservation advocacy and education of audiences is thus an easier way to engage in conservation, rather than in the provision of funding for projects and resources. To a great extent, it is also seen to be important to gain support and collaborate with the Chinese state (such as the instance of China House working with Chinese Embassies in East Africa) and being aligned to Chinese state agendas – which will be examined in detail in Chapter 7. To a great extent, this reinforces some of the debates raised in Chapter 2 on the influence of the state on NGOs (Schwartz 2004; Lu 2007; Hsu 2014; Salmenkari 2014; Teets and Hsu 2016) and how working around state control is part and parcel of smooth NGO operations at a global scale (Larsen 2016). The section that follows will examine the influence of the Chinese state in the case of Chinese conservation engagement in Kenyan conservation in greater detail.

6. Facilitating non-profit engagement: the Chinese state and for-profit actors

In exploring Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation, it becomes clear that it is also linked to and shaped by other forms of activity, including the state and for-profit sector. In this context, the Chinese state refers to both the central Chinese government and its local Africa-based Chinese embassy officials. The Chinese-led for-profit sector includes large and small-scale businesses, operating in China and in Kenya and Africa.

6.1 The Chinese state

The role of the Chinese state is important in terms of both direct and indirect influence in the context of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan and African conservation. In this way, Chinese-led non-profit engagement and engagement initiated or led by INGOs to some extent links to or is facilitated by state actors and activities. As part of this, the state also plays a key role in directly engaging in Kenyan and African conservation and potentially signalling that conservation is an appropriate arena for Chinese non-profit actors to engage. In the previous section, it was discussed how the state can create challenges and limitations for Chinese non-profit activity. For instance, it was shown how China House had encountered issues with the Chinese embassy in Kenya, the embassy was disapproving of their approach to conservation and how it projected the image of 'China' in a negative way. It was also discussed how legal restrictions, such as the limitations around fundraising, can be a challenge, and how there is a need to "collaborate" or align to expectations of the state in order to survive. Whilst the Chinese state may present challenges and to some extent limit the scope of non-profit activity, the state can equally be an enabler, legitimiser and partner in activity. The state is an 'enabler' in creating space for Chinese non-profit activity, it 'legitimises' engagement in the eyes of 'publics' by being seen to support activity, and it is a 'partner' when it jointly advances and leads efforts.

To a great extent, it is important and advantageous to have a good relationship with the Chinese state and be mindful of political sensitivities if you want to operate as a Chinese non-profit organisation or NGO, both in China and overseas. In the case of Kenya-based activity, the Chinese embassy and Chinese officials have been linked to Chinese non-profit activity in terms of influencing and responding to Chinese political sensitivities and expectations of practice. The example of China House shows how the Chinese state (via its embassies) can come to influence and even 'police' the engagement of Chinese non-profit activity, even when outside of China. The role of the Chinese state and embassies in policing its overseas citizens is a subject that has received increased Western media attention in recent years, both in Africa and elsewhere (dos Santos 2022; Ridgwell 2022). Whilst China House encountered struggles amongst some Chinese embassy officials in Kenya, there were other Chinese embassy officials in Tanzania that were willing to support their activities. In the online article written by members of China House and published by the Africa-China Reporting Project (Huang, Yanran and Ye 2018), it is explained how earning the support from the Chinese embassy in Tanzania was a great enabler and legitimiser for their activities. As a result of being connected to the state, it was easier for China House to engage and gain the support of Chinese

businesses operating in Tanzania to participate in their advocacy work to address the illegal wildlife trade. As explained in the article:

In 2016 the Chinese Ambassador in Tanzania was Lu Youqing. He was the first Chinese ambassador in Africa to openly admit to the media and condemn that there were Chinese people smuggling ivory in Africa, while previously Chinese ambassadors would avoid talking about it and simply say “Chinese always love wildlife” [...] When the embassy takes the lead it is much easier to engage the state-owned companies and large private companies, who usually interact in relative close cooperation with the embassy [...] Companies would just deal straight with us when knowing we are from the Embassy: “How much do you want?” It was never so easy when we approached Chinese companies directly before. (Huang, Yanran and Ye 2018)

The importance of gaining support and partnering with the Chinese state is not only evident in Chinese-led non-profit activity, but also in Chinese engagement via INGOs. Partnering or participating in events with the state to further conservation objectives has been a common strategy for Chinese engagement via INGOs, such as the cases of WWF, WildAid and WCS. For instance, since 2015 the WWF and TRAFFIC China have jointly hosted a series of multi-stakeholder workshops with support from the National Forestry and Grassland Administration (an environmental arm of the Chinese state) and local Chinese embassies across Africa (including Kenya). Attendees have included Chinese state-owned enterprises, Chinese for-profit business, local Chinese communities, African wildlife conservation authorities, as well as African and Chinese media. The workshops focused on awareness of wildlife trafficking and in more recent years were used to promote the ivory ban (TRAFFIC 2017; TRAFFIC 2018a; TRAFFIC 2018b; WWF 2019). Whilst the link to Kenyan and African conservation is more indirect, further examples of collaboration include WildAid China’s partnership with the state to deliver demand-reduction advertising campaigns at key ports of entry to China, as well as WCS’ coalition with the government to provide intelligence on the illegal wildlife trade. It can be argued that state engagement, as part of non-profit activity, contributes gravitas to initiatives and helps to legitimise participation of other Chinese audiences. In the example of the WWF workshops, Chinese state-owned enterprises, Chinese for-profit business and local Chinese communities were also in attendance. If the state was not connected to this activity, it may have been more difficult for WWF to gain their support in attending. As such, there has been considerable involvement and willingness from INGOs based in China to engage the Chinese state. This desire or need to engage the Chinese state signals the importance of the

state as enabler, legitimiser and partner in activity to achieve conservation objectives and to engage other Chinese actors and audiences.

Whilst it is important to consider how Chinese non-profit engagement is linked to and shaped by Chinese state engagement, it is also relevant to understand the role and influence of Chinese state activities in their own right. To a great extent, Chinese state activity in conservation (of its own accord) helps to both raise the profile of and provide legitimacy for the activities of Chinese-led non-profit actors and Chinese engagement via INGOs. It also signals that the Chinese state wants to engage in conservation, opening up the opportunity for Chinese non-profits and INGOs to further leverage state support and backing for their own activities – as demonstrated in the examples of China House and the WWF.

The engagement from the Chinese state often takes place at the state-to-state level. This includes intervention through statements, speeches and policy announcements in state-to-state relationships, as well as material intervention through physical provision of finance and equipment to Kenyan conservation and law and enforcement measures. The 2017 Chinese government announcement of the ivory ban and working with African governments to monitor and enforce this has been the most prominent example of Chinese state intervention in African conservation. Media reports from Chinese sources published by Xinhua, *China Daily* and CGTN, as well as Kenyan sources such as *Daily Nation* and the KWS website have praised the Chinese state on this matter. This sentiment is echoed by many of Chinese interviewees and could be interpreted as needing to show that they are onboard with what the Chinese state is doing. Much of the material intervention provided by the Chinese state, including funding, equipment and technology support such as GPS and vehicles for anti-poaching measures (Sum 2014) is channelled via the KWS (Kenya Wildlife Service 2015a; 2015b). The relationship between the Chinese state and the KWS is a key conduit for Chinese state conservation engagement (Ndonga 2019). A Kenyan interview participant engaged in Kenyan conservation activity contends that the relationship is focused on promoting awareness around the illegal wildlife trade, specifically addressing the Kenya-based Chinese private sector and consumers.

In connection to these Chinese engagements of the state, an interview participant in a senior role at a Kenyan conservation organisation explains how Chinese embassies across Africa are “pushing diplomacy” and bringing the message to Africa that Chinese are doing things to stop the ivory trade. To a great extent, Chinese state ambitions in “pushing diplomacy” in Africa and the importance of being seen to engage in conservation and address the illegal

wildlife trade, might further legitimise Chinese non-profit activity and inspire these actors to engage.

In many ways, the Chinese state has important influence in shaping Chinese non-profit activity, both as Chinese-led engagement and engagement initiated or led by INGOs. This influence manifests in the challenges and limitations that the state can create for non-profit activity. Factors such as restrictions on fundraising means that non-profit actors have to find alternative means of engaging Chinese audiences, whilst political sensitivity can restrict activity and drive engagement towards other 'less sensitive' and 'approved' forms of engagement. In parallel, the state can also be a key enabler, legitimiser and partner in activity. It is important and advantageous for Chinese-led non-profit actors and INGOs to have a good relationship with the state in order to enable and legitimise activities, contribute gravitas to efforts, and encourage support from wider Chinese audiences – as seen in the examples of China House and the WWF. Chinese state engagement in conservation, in its own right, (through state-to-state relations and introduction of new policy) aids in raising the profile of the illegal wildlife trade and conservation in Africa, and can be seen to be connected to China's efforts in diplomacy. In a sense, Chinese state efforts in advancing diplomacy provide an implicit 'gateway' for encouraging and further legitimising Chinese non-profit activity in African conservation. The significance of diplomacy as part of Chinese engagement in African conservation will be examined in detail in Chapter 7. In many ways, it is this need to be 'close' to or 'align' to the Chinese state that might make Chinese non-profit engagement more distinct from other forms international and specifically Western engagement.

6.2 Chinese for-profit actors

Chinese non-profit engagement (as both Chinese-led activity and activity initiated or led by INGOs) is also linked to or shaped by the Chinese for-profit sector and business. Engagement with the for-profit sector takes on multiple forms, encompassing activity with large and small-scale businesses, operating both in China and in Kenya and Africa. The dynamics of volunteering are also relevant in terms of both non-profit and for-profit activity. Whilst the volunteers themselves can be understood as engaging as 'non-profit' actors, some of the organisations that facilitate this volunteering are Chinese for-profit organisations and tour operators.

The five to ten years prior to the COVID-19 outbreak witnessed an increase in engagement from Chinese businesses in Kenyan and African conservation. This relates both to Chinese

businesses operating in Kenya, and those based in China. In many cases, Chinese-led non-profit activity and INGOs have been key instigators or facilitators of this engagement. In Africa, the Chinese non-profit China House, with the support of the INGO HSI, worked with local Chinese businesses on education and engagement initiatives relating to wildlife conservation and the illegal wildlife trade. Whilst based in Kenya between 2014-c.2018, China House was working with the local Chinese business communities across the East and Southern African region, with the aim of engaging them in wildlife advocacy and conservation opportunities (China House, Humane Society International 2018; Huang, Yanran and Ye 2018). In 2017-2018, China House is reported to have partnered with ten Chinese companies (including China Harbour Engineering Company, China Railway Group and Huawei) to hold wildlife conservation events, including workshops and conferences (China House, Humane Society International 2018).

Beyond connections between Chinese-led non-profit activity and Chinese businesses in Kenya, there is a broader and higher-profile range of engagement coming from businesses in China. The majority of this activity is focused on the illegal wildlife trade. Some of the prominent businesses engaging include Tencent, Alibaba and technology business Baidu. These engagements have focused primarily on awareness raising amongst Chinese consumer in China and cracking down on the illegal wildlife trade in their business channels (TRAFFIC 2019). Other initiatives have focused more directly on conservation efforts on the ground in Africa and in particular in efforts to address the illegal wildlife trade. The businessman Jack Ma of Alibaba is one of the best-known Chinese actors engaging in such activity. The launch of the 'African Ranger Awards', in partnership with the Chinese non-profit Paradise Foundation, was one of a number of projects Ma has been engaged with in relation to Kenyan and African conservation. In 2018, Alibaba Cloud, a subsidiary of Alibaba Group, were in talks with Kenya's Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife on how to use artificial intelligence to protect wildlife in Kenya's Tsavo National Parks (Business Daily Africa 2018a). The project would explore using technology such as animal tracking sensors, drones and infra-red cameras to collect data on the movement and health of the park's wildlife (ibid.). However, most non-profit Chinese business collaborations on African conservation have been with INGOs rather than Chinese-led non-profit organisations. After a visit to TNC's programme in Kenya in 2011, the TNC's China Board of Trustees initiated the China Global Conservation Fund (CGCF) – a programme focused on addressing environmental challenges beyond China (The Nature Conservancy 2024). The seed funding was provided by renowned Chinese artist, Zeng Fanzhi, and the initiative was championed and further funded by Jack Ma, who invited other philanthropists to support CGCF (ibid.). In 2015, the KWS, TNC and IFAW jointly hosted Chinese representatives from Tencent in an awareness initiative showcasing wildlife

conservation and sharing knowledge of Kenyan wildlife. The objective was to communicate to Chinese audiences, via social media, that elephants are killed to obtain ivory (Motaroki 2015). In the same year, IFAW launched the 'China-Africa Ambassador's Initiative' taking delegations of China-based media and advertising representatives to Kenya, including from state-run outlets such as CCTV (now CGTN) and privately-run organisations such as JCDecaux China and Fulong Media. Its purpose was for media organisations to establish themselves as ambassadors for wildlife on their channels and mobilise Chinese nationals living in Africa to support elephant conservation and combat the illegal wildlife trade (IFAW 2015; Liang 2015). Given that much of the Chinese media is state-run, this specific example demonstrates a blurring of boundaries between non-profit, business and state efforts to address the illegal wildlife trade.

A further key way in which Chinese non-profit conservation activity connects to for-profit activity is through volunteering and tourism. Chinese volunteer activity and voluntourism was introduced earlier on in the chapter. Whilst the Chinese volunteers themselves are 'non-profit' actors, some of the actors coordinating the engagement of volunteers are for-profit businesses, including Chinese tour operators based in Kenya and China. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, Chinese tourism and Chinese tourist engagement in wildlife education was on the rise in Kenya and Africa (Business Daily Africa 2017; China Daily 2019; Morangi, Hongjie and Cheng 2019). There has been increasing Kenyan focus on attracting Chinese tourists. In 2019, the Kenyan Tourism Board embarked on a roadshow across China's major cities to market Kenya as a destination, with over 100 Chinese tour operators and online travel agents attended events (Business Daily Africa 2018b; Nyawira 2019). Another roadshow has been scheduled for 2024 (Mutethya 2023). According to a number of Kenyan and Chinese interviewees working in conservation, there is a growing presence of Chinese-led, Kenya-based tour operators, and demand for Chinese-speaking representatives within Kenya's tourism sector. Chinese tourist businesses have become an important strand in Chinese business engagement with Kenyan conservation by facilitating activity for Chinese volunteering groups and Chinese tourists. In addition to coordinating Chinese volunteer and tourist engagement in conservation, one Chinese tour operator has engaged in various other activities to support Chinese awareness of Kenyan wildlife conservation, working with CCTV on wildlife documentaries, hosting an educational visit for Chinese UN Environment Programme Goodwill Ambassador and singer Karry Wang, and conservation visits for groups of Chinese researchers. The collaboration across notional boundaries of Chinese non-profit actors (as volunteers/voluntourists) and Chinese for-profit actors (as tour operators) is further discussed by a conservation manager working in Kenya:

These are actually student groups, they are mostly recruiting companies and they recruit different students and bring them together to come and participate in our conservation programmes in Kenya. So last year I had more than five families and we have actually been getting requests from different companies so that they can organise something that their guests can participate in, giving back to nature. So, there has been lots of these questions from the Chinese tour companies.

This scenario presents a complex array of collaborative and potentially overlapping dynamics in terms of the non-profit and for-profit engagement at play. Not only does it further show how Chinese non-profit engagement can be facilitated by Chinese for-profit businesses, but also how Chinese for-profit businesses are channelling Chinese non-profit students and volunteers to engage in Kenyan conservation initiatives led by both Kenyan state conservancies and Kenyan non-profit organisations. This reinforces the idea that Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation, both as non-profit and for-profit activity, is often focused on working with and supporting Kenyan actors, rather than leading and operating their own conservation programmes. This in turn presents potentially important implications for understandings of Kenyan agency in Chinese conservation engagement – which will be explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

As in the case of the Chinese state, it has been shown how Chinese non-profit activity can also be linked to or facilitated by Chinese for-profit engagement. The relationships between actors operate in a number of ways. In the first instance, Chinese-led non-profit actors (such as China House) along with the support from INGOs, have sought to work with Chinese for-profit actors as part of their wildlife advocacy efforts in Kenya. In the second instance, Chinese for-profit actors, such as Tencent and Alibaba, are also found to be working in partnership with China-based INGOs to deliver initiatives directed at addressing the illegal wildlife trade. Thirdly, Chinese for-profit businesses, such as tour operators, are also playing a role in facilitating Chinese non-profit volunteering opportunities. In summary, these engagements reveal that a complex, often interdependent and overlapping set of dynamics are at play between Chinese non-profit and Chinese for-profit actors when it comes to Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation.

7. Conclusion

As part of assessing the landscape of Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation, this chapter has identified and examined a 'new' set of Chinese partners in Kenyan conservation, making an important contribution to knowledge in both the context of Kenyan conservation and China-Africa relations. The chapter has outlined the nature and dynamics of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan and wider African conservation. It has shown how Chinese non-profit engagement manifests and how it intersects with other forms of Chinese and non-Chinese activities and actors – including INGOs, the Chinese state and Chinese for-profit sector. As such, Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation has been categorised across three areas of activity. Chinese non-profit activity is examined as both Chinese-led non-profit engagement and Chinese non-profit engagement that is initiated or led by INGOs. The third area has focused on how Chinese non-profit engagement can be linked to or facilitated by the Chinese state and for-profit sector.

Chinese-led non-profit activity is the central focus of this research. Whilst this type of engagement has increased in Kenya and Africa, the number of actors and activities remains limited, with few autonomous 'Chinese-led' conservation projects. Of such engagement in Kenya, the majority of activity has a strong focus on education of Chinese audiences and engaging younger generations, and has largely manifested by means of educational activities, research and volunteering. In many ways, Chinese-led non-profit engagement is still nascent and establishing itself and is seen to be shaped by and connected to other Chinese and non-Chinese actors and activity. At the same time, Chinese engagement could be seen to be differentiating itself from more mainstream 'Western' manifestations of engagement. While Western engagement tends to be characterised by leading or shaping conservation programmes on-the-ground or through fund raising, Chinese engagement is focused on driving behaviour change and supporting the initiatives of INGOs and Kenyan actors.

Chinese non-profit engagement that is initiated or led by INGOs is in many ways the most established and visible area of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, in terms of the volume of actors and the scale of activities. INGO engagement is multi-layered and takes shape in different ways based on the geographies of where the engagement is being directed from, the types of actors involved and the resulting power dynamics between INGOs and Chinese actors. These structures of engagement are important in understanding the degree to which engagement is determined by Chinese actors and the degree of Chinese agency at play. Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs

without a China office (such as that led by AWF) demonstrates the weakest degree of Chinese agency in determining conservation engagement. In this scenario, INGOs outside of China are leading the engagement of Chinese actors through targeting Chinese audiences in activities. For Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs *with* a China office (such as the activities of WildAid or WWF), engagement is a hybrid of 'Western' INGO and China activity and interest, with greater scope for Chinese agency. This category is by far the busiest of Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation. Moreover, a further link to these categories was identified in the partnership and cooperation between Chinese-led non-profit actors and INGOs. This area of activity is where power relations are most equal (such as that between China House and HSI) and demonstrate the greatest degree of Chinese agency as part of INGO engagement. The scenario of 'Western' INGOs establishing themselves as initiators, leaders as well as supporters of Chinese engagement in African conservation is of significance. This is because it carries potentially important implications for better understanding international and Chinese agendas for delivering Chinese engagement in African conservation. At the same time, the scale of INGO involvement potentially makes engagement less distinctly 'Chinese', and therefore, what is understood as 'Chinese non-profit engagement' displays limited differentiation from more established 'Western' or 'international' approaches and practices. Such dynamics of INGO involvement will be further examined in Chapter 7.

To better understand the emergence and shape of Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation, it was also necessary to consider the broader context in which the organisations and activities are taking shape in. Of key relevance is the growing awareness and knowledge of wildlife and conservation in China, as well as understanding how non-profit activity sits against a backdrop of a Chinese conservation NGO landscape that is still establishing itself and navigating the complexities of the Chinese social and political landscape.

This broader context is also important for examining and explaining how Chinese non-profit engagement is linked to and facilitated by other forms of Chinese activity and actors, including the Chinese state and for-profit sector. The role of the Chinese state influence is significant in shaping Chinese non-profit activity, both as Chinese-led engagement and engagement initiated or led by INGOs. Whilst the Chinese political environment may present challenges and somewhat limit the scope of non-profit activity, the state can equally be an enabler, legitimiser and partner in activity. It is in the interest of Chinese-led non-profit actors and INGOs to have a positive relationship with the state in order to enable, legitimise and provide support for their efforts in Kenyan and African conservation. Moreover, Chinese state engagement, in its own right, serves in providing that implicit invitation for encouraging and

legitimising Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation. It can be argued that it is the need to 'align' to or be 'close' to the Chinese state that has the potential to more clearly differentiate Chinese non-profit engagement from other forms international and Western engagement. When it comes to Chinese for-profit activity, it is also found to play a key role in linking to and facilitating Chinese non-profit engagement. This manifests through Chinese-led non-profit actors seeking to work with Chinese for-profit actors as part of wildlife advocacy efforts, as well as Chinese for-profit businesses (such as tour operators) facilitating Chinese non-profit volunteering opportunities. Collectively, the engagements that are linked to the Chinese state and the for-profit sector reveal a complex set of dynamics between Chinese non-profit and Chinese for-profit actors, resulting in hybrid forms of activity. As such, it can be argued that much of Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation (specifically Chinese-led) is made possible or legitimised by being connected to more complex dynamics of Chinese diplomatic as well as corporate interest.

The following chapter will build on these understandings of different actors and activities related to Chinese engagement in conservation. It will explore the extent to which increasing Chinese non-profit engagement is impacting conservation and addressing the illegal wildlife trade in Kenya.

Chapter 6: Perceptions of Chinese engagement and the implications for Kenyan conservation

1. Introduction

The previous chapter explored the nature and dynamics of Chinese non-profit engagement and how it relates to other forms of Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation. This revealed that Chinese non-profit engagement is linked to a diverse set of actors and often hybrid forms of activity. Focusing in on Kenyan interview participants' perceptions of Chinese conservation is a critical means of better understanding the implications of Chinese non-profit engagement. This chapter specifically focuses in on Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement in conservation in general. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, this is because participants tend not to differentiate between forms of Chinese actor engagement, and secondly, perceptions of Chinese conservation engagement are very often linked to perceptions of wider Chinese activity in Africa. In doing this, the chapter asks: What are the implications of Chinese engagement for Kenyan conservation?

The Chinese relationship with wildlife and conservation has often been interpreted negatively in Western media reporting and by INGOs (Kelly 2019; Margulies, Wong, and Duffy 2019; Li 2020; Luo and Gao 2022). However, a key contention of this chapter is that Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement are diverse. This is demonstrated both in Kenyan perceptions of the implications of Chinese engagement, as well as the understandings of implications based on these perceptions of Chinese engagement. Of significance is how the exploration of Kenyan perceptions of Chinese activity opens up wider debates within Kenyan and African conservation, specifically in relation to the implications of foreign engagement. Moreover, whilst the scale of Chinese activity in conservation is not significantly changing the established dynamics of foreign influence in Kenyan conservation thinking and practice, engagement with Chinese actors is a 'new' option and is actively being sought out. Indeed, Chinese intervention might be introducing a new dynamic to conservation, one that is more humble and 'mutual', and somewhat disrupting 'Western' 'authority' in conservation.

The chapter explores Kenyan (and to some extent Chinese) perceptions of Chinese engagement in relation to conservation. This is important for understanding responses to different Chinese actors and activity, what informs and shapes such perceptions, and the implications for conservation. The breadth of Kenyan response is predominantly informed by

perceptions of Chinese attitudes towards wildlife, the relationship between Chinese actors and the illegal wildlife trade, understandings of the wider landscape of Chinese interaction in Africa, as well as the influence and experiences of broader international (and specifically Western) engagement. Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement in conservation can be broadly divided into those that see Chinese engagement as limited, those that see it as problematic, and those that see it as positive. The perception that Chinese engagement is limited or has limited implications is largely attributed to the fact that Chinese activity in conservation remains more minimal in the landscape of wider foreign, and in particular 'Western', engagement. The perception that Chinese engagement is problematic reflects Kenyan attitudes of wariness and questioning of activities, including explicit hostility. These attitudes are informed by both understandings of the Chinese relationship with wildlife as well as wider spheres of Chinese interaction in Africa. In contrast, positive perceptions include openness towards engagement, active encouragement, and the understanding that cooperation can make a positive contribution to Kenyan conservation. Linked to this, the chapter contends that the dynamics of Chinese engagement in conservation might be more cooperative in nature, with an important degree of Kenyan agency is at play.

2. Perceptions of Chinese engagement as limited, problematic and positive

Kenyan and African perceptions of Chinese engagement in general have been widely explored in the existing literature, with many scholars recognising a breadth of sentiment from embrace to suspicion (Bräutigam 2011; Wang and Eliot 2014; Řehák 2016; Jura, Kaluzynska and De Carvalho 2018; Waweru 2020; Ofosu and Sarpong 2022). Perceptions of Chinese conservation engagement in Africa have received far less attention. Much media and public discussion has focused on the negative associations of the Chinese connection to the illegal wildlife trade and implications for African wildlife, specifically from a Western perspective (Kelly 2019; Margulies, Wong, and Duffy 2019; Li 2020; Luo and Gao 2022). The exploration of Kenyan perceptions will address Chinese conservation engagement from a Kenyan viewpoint. This enables greater understanding of Kenyan perceptions of the implications of Chinese engagement, and also, the understanding of implications based on the perceptions of Chinese engagement.

Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation can be broadly divided into those that see Chinese engagement as limited, those that see it as problematic, and those that see it as positive. These categories are useful in that they demonstrate a range of attitudes

and, critically, the distinctions between them. They also reveal how Kenyan actors can have different perceptions of different forms of Chinese engagement and on what basis these perceptions are informed. In interviews, some Kenyan interview participants expressed multiple viewpoints, such as voicing caution, whilst also welcoming Chinese engagement. Additionally, some groups of participants were more inclined to possess certain perceptions over others, for example Kenyan conservation managers viewed Chinese engagement positively in terms of the visitor revenue it could generate. While many interview participants recognise how Chinese engagement could be perceived as problematic, the relative weighting of perceptions of engagement were more skewed towards interviewees seeing Chinese engagement as limited or as positive. This range of perceptions reflects the more complex nature and nuance in Chinese engagement in African conservation, as well as wider China-Africa relations. It is these perceptions that are critical in better understanding the implications of Chinese engagement in African conservation.

2.1 – Chinese engagement as limited

The use of the term ‘limited’ to describe perceptions of Chinese engagement can be understood in two different ways. The first is to indicate the limited awareness amongst Kenyan participants of how Chinese actors are engaging. The second is to highlight the perceived lack of Chinese engagement with and impact on Kenyan and African conservation thinking and practice.

The previous chapter discussed how Chinese engagement in Kenyan and broader African conservation has only risen to greater prominence over the past decade. Even as engagement in Kenyan conservation from different Chinese actors continued to grow up until the outbreak of COVID-19, it has remained quite limited, particularly in terms of Chinese-led non-profit engagement. In a number of interviews with Kenyan and Chinese participants, there was very limited awareness of how Chinese actors are directly engaging in Kenyan conservation. Few of the Kenyan participants had experience of engaging with Chinese actors who have been directly focused on supporting conservation efforts or addressing the illegal wildlife trade, such as China House or the Chinese state. Instead, Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement were shaped much more by an awareness and or experience of wider Chinese activity – such as tourism, business and trade activities, and most significantly, infrastructure projects such as the Standard Gauge Railway.

In addition to the perception that Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation is limited in

scope and scale, even the engagement that is recognised, is seen to have limited significance and impact. A number of Kenyan and Chinese participants talked about a lack of tangible outcomes for conservation, specifically for the illegal wildlife trade. This was in reference to Chinese-led non-profit activity and engagement with Chinese businesses through INGOs. One interview participant working for an INGO in Kenya discussed the launch of a joint awareness campaign involving Chinese businesses taking on roles as ambassadors for wildlife – it was claimed to have had “no impact” on conservation. The lack of impact was also raised by some of the Chinese interview participants in relation to Chinese student and youth-focused conservation activity in Africa. One Chinese interview participant questioned the “value-add” of such Chinese-led programmes. They explained that the younger participants of these programmes are already interested in wildlife and have the “common sense” not to buy ivory. As such, the engagement of these programme participants could be seen to have limited impact on outcomes for conservation if they are already advocates for African wildlife and do not consume products of the illegal wildlife trade. As part of driving conservation engagement and awareness amongst the Chinese diaspora community, the same interviewee also explained how it is difficult to engage with some groups, specifically Chinese construction workers. The link between the Chinese construction worker presence in Kenya and the illegal wildlife trade, as either consumers or intermediaries in the trade, was identified by many Chinese and Kenyan interview participants. With Chinese construction workers, it is seen to be harder to change their behavioural habits of wildlife consumption and their attitudes in relation to wildlife and conservation – which in turn makes these forms of engagement less impactful. This perceived lack of impact is important in terms of the implications it has for Chinese engagement, and hence how for some interview participants, Chinese engagement is limited. At the same time, it can be argued that deriving measurable ‘impact’ for Kenyan conservation from advocacy activity is a challenge for much non-profit activity, a point that has been argued by other scholars on the subject of conservation more broadly (Dasgupta 2017; Ebner 2018; Veríssimo and Wan 2018).

The limited significance and impact of Chinese engagement should also be considered in relation to the wider context of addressing the illegal wildlife trade in Kenya. The illegal wildlife trade is one of the key focus areas for Chinese engagement in African conservation, both in terms of awareness raising and wildlife advocacy activity, as well as Chinese state legislative and enforcement response. A key message from Kenyan interview participants, and as reflected in statistics provided by the KWS, CITES, and INGOs such as WWF, is that poaching of elephants and rhinos has significantly declined in recent years (Chebet 2019; CITES 2022; WWF 2022). The degree to which Chinese engagement has contributed to reducing poaching and the illegal wildlife trade is somewhat contested. Whilst some interviewees suggest that

Chinese engagement and a drop in Chinese demand has had an impact on reducing poaching in Kenya, others attribute the decline to the strengthening of Kenyan law enforcement. In parallel, others have challenged the existence of a poaching 'crisis' altogether. As explained by one conservation expert from Kenya, "They (INGOs) are creating a crisis, poaching is not a crisis – KWS fought the war and they won it". These understandings on the issue of poaching suggest that the mobilisation of Chinese actors to address the trade has had limited impact on conservation outcomes. Firstly, this is because the Kenyan state is seen to have taken a hard line (likely more militarised) approach to tackle the trade. Secondly, there is the suggestion that poaching is no longer a crisis. Collectively, these understandings suggest that Chinese engagement and mobilisation to tackle the illegal wildlife trade has had limited impact because the crisis was addressed by the Kenyan government, but also because the poaching 'crisis' itself does not exist.

The perception that Chinese engagement has a limited impact on conservation can also be linked to how it is perceived in relation to other international, and especially 'Western', forms of engagement. The continuing influence of Western actors, particularly INGOs, in Kenyan conservation is often a key frame of reference when assessing the significance of Chinese conservation engagement in the country. In such scenarios, it was the case that interview participants had more to say about Western or indeed INGO engagement, and its colonial legacies, than they did about Chinese activity. This is suggestive of a degree of indifference towards Chinese engagement in conservation and adds to the sense that it is not considered to be significant either in terms of extent or impact.

The use of the term 'limited' to describe perceptions of Chinese engagement is thus multi-layered. Limited awareness of Chinese engagement is significant in that it reinforces the understanding that Chinese engagement itself, both as non-profit and wider activity, is nascent. Moreover, even the engagement that is recognised is seen to have limited impact. This not only relates to the lack of outcomes for conservation from specific Chinese initiatives, but also in relation to the claim that poaching (and in particular for elephant ivory) was tackled by the Kenyan government and is no longer an issue. Additionally, Chinese engagement is seen as limited in comparison to the much greater volume of 'Western' involvement in Kenyan conservation.

2.2 – Chinese engagement as problematic

The framing of Chinese conservation engagement as problematic reflects Kenyan attitudes ranging from caution and wariness through to explicit hostility. These perceptions are often linked to a critical questioning of Chinese engagement and its motives, deriving from a lack of trust in Chinese actors in relation to wildlife and concerns about wider Chinese economic and political activity in Kenya and Africa. The perception that Chinese engagement is problematic is also informed by attitudes towards wider foreign engagement, specifically through INGOs as ‘Western’ actors embedded in histories of colonialism.

The way in which Chinese engagement is often first identified as problematic is in relation to the illegal wildlife trade and perceptions of ‘Chinese’ attitudes towards wildlife. Many Kenyan, as well as Chinese, interview participants recognise the negative associations between Chinese consumption and wildlife - whether expressing their own views or those of others. The Chinese association with the illegal wildlife trade is primarily discussed in terms of demand and consumption, with some Kenyan interviewees also discussing Chinese involvement in terms of criminal networks and activity facilitating the trade. The subject of the illegal wildlife trade opens-up broader discussion of ‘Chinese’ attitudes towards wildlife, including ‘unusual’ appetites for animal products, and the perception that Chinese people do not care about or are not interested in wildlife.

The subject of ‘Chinese’ attitudes towards wildlife often generates a degree of negative stereotyping from Kenyan interview participants. This negative stereotyping represents both homogenising exaggeration and a lack of trust towards Chinese actors. In interview discussions, at one end of the scale caution and negativity manifest as more extreme. One interview participant from Kenya who works in conservation for the Kenyan state comments that the ‘Chinese’ people have an “insatiable appetite” for wildlife and a “crazy way of life”. They continue in suggesting that Chinese demand is one of the “biggest threats” to wildlife. Another conservation expert from Kenya talks about some of the commonly held views amongst the Kenyan public, for example, “Chinese people are poachers...these people eat everything...I can’t even leave my dog”. This stereotyping is also acknowledged from a Chinese perspective. One interviewee from China who engaged in conservation research in Kenya talks about how local people attribute Chinese with unusual appetites for animals, such as snakes and dogs. Such negative stereotyping by Kenyans and Africans in relation to Chinese attitudes to wildlife is referenced in broader discussions of China-Africa engagement (Wu 2013; Kimari 2021; Munoriyarwa and Chibuwe 2022). In the research conducted by

Kimari (2021), it is noted how 'eating everything' and 'poaching' were included on a list of key characteristics Kenyans associate with Chinese people.

The negative perception of Chinese attitudes towards wildlife is closely linked to and informed by understandings of the illegal wildlife trade. Some of the key issues raised by Kenyan interview participants who acknowledged a connection between China and the trade were demand for products, criminal networks, seizures of illegal wildlife goods and prosecution of Chinese traffickers. Many of these participants had worked for Kenyan government organisations, in which there is a focus on monitoring and combating the illegal wildlife trade. A key point raised is the correlation between the arrival of greater numbers of Chinese businesses and workers in Kenya and the increase in poaching and arrests of Chinese people. An interviewee in a senior role at a Kenyan conservation organisation explains:

Now Chinese are more associated with illegal trade of ivory more than any other foreign community. For many reasons, one we have more Chinese presence in Africa in general, two, they are mainly in construction, there is a lot of low calibre staff who are involved in the construction industry. They are many and you find them across Africa, they are many and they are more predisposed to illegal trade.

In construction it gives you a large number of low cadre staff, who now get involved in illegal trade. Because if you look at the identities of these Chinese who have been taken to court across Africa, they have been involved in trafficking or facilitating an illegal gang, it's low cadre staff.

The arrival of Chinese "low cadre staff" and construction workers working on key Chinese infrastructure projects, such as the Thika Superhighway and the Standard Gauge Railway, are seen to be a particular driver in the increase in poaching and the illegal wildlife trade. As one conservation manager from Kenya explains:

The increase of poaching and getting to high peaks, relates directly to the increase in Chinese in the country. Like 10 years ago, the Kenyans gave the Chinese a project to do in Nairobi, called the Thika Superhighway. It led to increased cases of poaching and also increasing numbers of arrests of people of Chinese origin, with illegal wildlife trophies.

Thika Superhighway, later came the Standard Gauge Railway. Saw an

increase in large numbers of Chinese coming and this led to an escalation in terms of number of wildlife poaching, illegal export of pangolin scales, illegal export of live tortoise, increasing number of illegal leopard skins, increase in elephant killing. We saw a whole family of 12 elephants being killed at once, we've never seen that before. This can be directly related to increasing numbers of Chinese in the country.

These understandings indicate that the arrival of Chinese communities and businesses in Kenya has been a key driver in contributing to poaching of wildlife and the illegal wildlife trade – both in terms of Chinese populations driving demand as well as directly participating in the trade. Whilst there is recognition that poaching in Africa has declined, several conservation experts propose that Kenya remains a key trafficking hub, with ivory being sourced from old stockpiles and other countries using Kenyan ports as transit points. In such scenarios, the connection to Chinese and East Asian market demand somewhat remains.

Whilst such negative associations of China or Chinese people with wildlife and conservation exist, for most Kenyan interview participants the 'China-illegal wildlife trade' nexus was not considered one of the key challenges for conservation. Nor was the association between China and the illegal wildlife trade as strong as is often portrayed within international conservation debates amongst INGOs, international forums such as CITES and in Western media. Other studies have also challenged the prominence of these negative attitudes amongst the Kenyan population. In an analysis of a 2016 survey of over 400 Kenyans carried out by China House, the association of Chinese with wildlife issues was argued not to be as prominent as suggested by Western and even Chinese commentators (Lyu *et al.* 2016).

Kenyan attitudes of caution and lack of trust towards Chinese conservation activity are also strongly influenced by awareness of wider Chinese activity that is not directly connected to the illegal wildlife trade or wildlife consumption. As previously indicated, this links to matters such as the increasing presence of Chinese businesses and workforces in Kenya, specifically Chinese construction workers who are seen to be engaging in criminal activity linked to the illegal wildlife trade, as well as concerns around the treatment of Kenyan labour forces working for Chinese businesses. The contentious nature of Chinese infrastructure projects such as the Standard Gauge Railway and Thika Superhighway were also discussed. These types of engagements in themselves might be seen as problematic. The impact of constructing the Standard Gauge Railway through a Nairobi wildlife corridor was referenced several times by Kenyan interview participants. An interviewee who works for a Kenyan conservation NGO comments that going ahead with the construction of the railway shows that Chinese

companies are "...not so keen on the environment. For them it's business. Business comes first". Several wildlife groups, including the Kenyan NGOs ANAW and Wildlife Direct (a Kenyan-U.S. NGO), campaigned against the project. In response, the Chinese construction company, China Road and Bridge Corporation, developed a mitigation plan to reduce wildlife loss (Jiang 2020). Other activities raised by Kenyan interview participants included concerns relating to Chinese migrant labour taking local jobs and increasing Chinese competition for local business, which have also been highlighted in the literature (Farooq *et al.* 2018; Okumu and Fee 2019; Waweru 2020).

From another angle, some Kenyan interview participants expressed concerns about the motives underlying Chinese engagement in wildlife conservation. These participants relate Chinese activity in conservation to more strategic Chinese engagement in Africa – such as efforts in diplomacy, enhancing China-Africa relations, or to improve China's image. Whilst there is nothing inherently negative about being concerned with image - indeed it can be seen as characteristic of efforts in 'international cooperation' - the concern with Chinese engagement is that the focus is on creating a positive impression rather than a positive impact. This unease relates specifically to high-level Chinese interactions in conservation from the Chinese state and larger Chinese corporations. An interview participant in a senior role at a Kenyan conservation organisation explains that Chinese embassies across Africa are "pushing diplomacy" and bringing the message to Africa that the Chinese are doing things to stop the ivory trade. The previous chapter highlighted how Chinese embassies are closely involved in Chinese engagement in African conservation, maintaining significant presence in engagements as well as establishing themselves as a gatekeeper and shaping activity. The involvement of Chinese embassies in conservation engagement is not only about policing Chinese activities, but it is also about being seen to engage in conservation and advancing Chinese diplomacy. This is specifically important to counter a negative image in relation to the illegal wildlife trade and other contentious areas of Chinese engagement in Africa. These understandings are made more explicit in discussing Chinese engagement with the KWS. An interviewee working in conservation for the Kenyan state described such engagement as a means of "sanitising" the Chinese name. The idea of tending to reputation was shared by another conservation expert from Kenya. The expert suspects that Chinese businesses may have given money to the KWS as a means of corporate social responsibility or as a "sweetener...to make a bad thing look good" in response to contention linked to infrastructure projects like the Standard Gauge Railway. As such, this engagement could be seen to be 'just for show'. The suggestion that both the Chinese state and Chinese businesses are engaging in conservation activity to address reputation demonstrates how tending to Chinese image is considered important and that the responsibility should extend to actors beyond the state.

The perception that Chinese conservation engagement is problematic is also informed by influences from and experiences of wider foreign engagement connected to legacies of colonialism and 'Western'-founded INGOs. This manifests in two different yet interconnected ways. The first is how Kenyan attitudes towards Chinese engagement are shaped by perceptions of colonial and postcolonial conservation interventions by 'Western' actors and specifically INGOs. The second is how Kenyan actors can be seen to be more trusting of Western actors than Chinese actors. Therefore, negative Western media reporting and narratives on China-Africa relations may, in some cases, influence Kenyan attitudes towards Chinese conservation engagement.

In both cases, the legacies of Western colonial and post-colonial engagement set a standard against which Chinese activities, in conservation and beyond, are judged. Western colonialism and post-colonial engagement has had a significant influence on the evolution of Kenya's wildlife policies and practice (Akama 1998; Mbaria and Ogada 2016). Some scholars argue that there exists a continued legacy of colonial ideology and relationships, and an imbalance of power between 'Kenyan' actors and international conservation organisations (Mbaria and Ogada 2016; Cockerill 2018). The resulting 'moral authority' displayed by Western actors in African conservation resonated with arguments raised by Kenyan interview participants, specifically the ideological and material legacy and influence of Western-led engagement in conservation and the issues this creates, not least a stark imbalance in power (Garland 2008; Brockington and Duffy 2010; Cockerill and Hagerman 2020). Western-led cooperation, or intervention, has often been seen to have developed a 'white saviour' complex (Baaz *et al.* 2015; Duffy 2017; Hart, Leather and Sharma 2021), whereby African wildlife needs to be saved by Western actors (Baaz *et al.* 2015; Hart, Leather and Sharma 2021).

How foreign actors have constructed and continue to shape conservation was a prominent topic in interviews with Kenyan participants, especially conservation experts and managers, and those without association to INGOs or the Kenyan state. These interviewees may have been more forthcoming in their critical views on foreign actors because of their disassociation with international organisations and the Kenyan state who work very closely with foreign actors. The subject of foreign actors opened up discussion on the legacies of Western colonial conservation thinking and practice, how conservation is a construct of 'foreign' engagement and an activity oriented to the benefit for foreigners, and, ultimately, how wildlife conservation has been prioritised over local people. Arguing that "a lot of conservation in Africa stems from colonisation", a conservation expert from Kenya contends that "white people" stayed after Kenyan independence under the premise that they needed to conserve animals, but that really

it was to keep the land. Such critiques were often accompanied by a sense of resentment towards colonial practices of separating people from nature and claiming land, as well as neocolonial legacies of 'foreign' control in Kenyan conservation. Another conservation manager working in Kenya shares the view that:

Kenyan conservation has been taken over...the locals are not directly involved in conservation. It's seen as foreign...The other challenge is lack of benefits from wildlife to communities. So, the communities see wildlife as a liability.

These viewpoints suggest 'foreigners' have cynically used the idea of conservation for their own gain and that existing conservation structures are dominated by non-Kenyans. This argument is reinforced by a conservation expert from Kenya who states that the KWS, as an agency of the state, used to be the most powerful authority in Kenyan wildlife management. Although the KWS is recognised as the official authority, this interview participant argues that "new practitioners" and conservation INGOs are now the "more powerful" entities in Kenyan wildlife conservation and "nudge KWS in policy". The interviewee continues to discuss this in the context of "new" foreign actors in conservation, specifically referring to "tactical experts" such as ex-SAS personnel who are arriving in Kenya to train rangers in military-style tactics. This could be seen to link into wider debates around the continued militarisation and securitisation of conservation in Africa and the prioritisation of Western governments to use conservation as a vehicle for tackling wider security concerns in the region (Duffy *et al.* 2019; Duffy 2022a). The same interview participant also highlights a more recent "flood of money" and the securing of land for conservation by "Western governments", which they believe could be a response to China's growing presence in infrastructure and business. This securing of land by Western governments might be seen as an attempt in 'green grabbing', both with the intention of maintaining Western influence in conservation, but also in countering further advancement of Chinese influence and control of land in Africa. This might suggest that conservation is also seen as a tool in strategic foreign engagement and international power dynamics between China and the West.

The perceived lack of transparency around negotiations and agreements made by the Kenyan government and foreign actors is also explicitly and implicitly highlighted as an on-going concern by conservation experts and managers from Kenya. Some interviewees discuss the generalised sense of 'corruption' in conservation. The core argument is that funding, specifically from international sources, can unduly influence conservation activity at the expense of best practice, local communities and Kenyan agency. The existing concerns

around lack of transparency also extend to Chinese intervention. It could be implied that the added presence of Chinese intervention in Kenyan conservation may trigger some kind of bidding war between Western and Chinese actors for undue influence in conservation.

The notion that foreign money has shaped conservation feeds into wider concerns around the neoliberal capitalist commodification of nature (Brockington and Duffy 2010; Brockington and Scholfield 2010). In this sense, wildlife has become a commodity 'to sell', for the benefit of INGO campaigns, for wider international agendas (reinforcing the 'need' for the militarisation and securitisation of conservation), and for the Kenyan economy and tourism. Wildlife tourism is an important source of revenue for the Kenyan economy (Korir, Muchiri and Kamwea 2013; African Nature Based Tourism Platform 2022), and prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the Kenyan Tourism Board was actively encouraging the growth of the Chinese market. Conservation managers working with local communities certainly highlight the importance of tourist revenues for sustaining local wildlife conservation and communities. However, there are concerns that tourism creates dependencies in local livelihoods and the wider Kenyan economy. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, several conservation managers and experts expressed reservations about the reliance on wildlife tourism and how a lack of foreign revenue had significant negative impacts on conservation and local livelihoods. These interview participants were concerned that a growth in Chinese tourism would only deepen such dependencies on tourism and therefore only make things worse rather than better.

To some extent, the implications of these perceptions is that Chinese engagement in conservation is not seen to be significantly differentiated from 'Western' and broader international conservation engagement. Chinese engagement could be seen to be manifesting in line with or being incorporated into globalised modes of conservation – whereby much engagement is delivered through INGOs or through already established dependencies on conservation tourism. In a sense, Chinese engagement in conservation is somewhat mirroring and being incorporated into Western and 'globalised norms' in conservation practice (Epstein 2006). INGOs themselves are both a manifestation of globalisation as well as key facilitators in the globalisation of conservation (Rodríguez *et al.* 2007) and assume a role in the promotion of 'international conservation norms' - the international institutionalised provisions and agreements in place to address issues relating to wildlife conservation (Mak and Song 2018). Therefore, Chinese engagement in conservation (and specifically activity initiated or led by INGOs) becomes part of a Western or globalised vision and approach - which in turn makes it less 'Chinese' in terms of conservation and business as usual.

The second argument in relation to foreign influence is that, in some cases, Kenyan actors can be seen to be more trusting of Western over Chinese actors. This is in part because of colonial and contemporary Western influence in conservation. An interview participant who has worked with Chinese actors in conservation in Kenya discusses how the lack of trust towards Chinese actors engaging in conservation can be attributed to accepting Western narratives about Chinese engagement.

Kenyans in conservation will always go by what they hear Westerners in conservation saying, even without verification of facts - and this is because of the history between the two groups, where Westerners have reached a point where Africans trust them more than they do Asians or other groups of people.

Western narratives about Chinese engagement generally (and regarding conservation in particular) tend to be negative and so generate Kenyan concern, caution and even hostility towards Chinese engagement. A researcher from China who carried out conservation research in Kenya discusses how Western sources are seen to present Chinese engagement negatively, “In English people discuss China in a bad light. Chinese government officials blame international NGOs for showing China in a bad light”.

The sense of Chinese frustration at the lack of trust and hostility from both Western and Kenyan actors is echoed amongst a number of Chinese interviewees, specifically those who have spent time working, volunteering or researching in Africa. This sentiment is further articulated by a Chinese conservation worker writing about their experiences of conducting non-profit activity. They describe the socio-political and cultural battles facing Chinese individuals when conducting non-profit activity. The account explains how Chinese non-profit workers are looked upon as “Chinese government propaganda” by local NGOs and journalists, “people, especially Westerners always discriminate against us...we want to do the right thing”, but it is not recognised or appreciated (Huang 2020). Firstly, this scenario demonstrates how non-profit actors struggle to disassociate themselves from the perception they are controlled by the Chinese state. Secondly, these understandings demonstrate how Western opinion may (in part) be responsible for creating obstacles and potentially limiting the scope for Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation.

The perception that Chinese engagement is problematic is underpinned by a variety of different factors that may generate caution, lack of trust and even hostility. These perceptions can be influenced by negative associations of Chinese society’s relationship with wildlife and

the illegal wildlife trade. They can also be influenced by awareness of wider Chinese engagement in Africa that is seen to be contentious, such as large-scale infrastructure projects, which in turn raise questions around the underlying motives of Chinese engagement in wildlife conservation. Moreover, such negative perceptions can also be shaped by experiences of wider foreign engagement connected to colonial legacy and influence from INGOs. Perceptions are not necessarily based on direct experiences, often, viewpoints are informed by understanding, experience and perception of wider forms of Chinese engagement in Kenya and the history and dynamics of the conservation sector.

2.3 – Chinese engagement as positive

Alongside the perspectives that Chinese engagement is limited or problematic, are perceptions that engagement might actually be a positive influence. This positive influence is grounded in a belief or expectation that Chinese engagement can have positive impacts on Kenyan conservation. The notion that Chinese actors could be seen in a more positive light in relation to the illegal wildlife trade and conservation has received little attention in media coverage and academic debate. As such, the perception that Chinese engagement might be a positive influence in many ways contributes new knowledge and reshapes debate whereby much academic, international media and NGO discussion has drawn attention to the challenges that Chinese demand and activity present for wildlife and conservation (Wasserman 2013; Sullivan and Cheng 2018; Wasserman and Morales 2018; Kelly 2019; Margulies, Wong, and Duffy 2019; Li 2020; Luo and Gao 2022). These positive perceptions include openness towards and even active encouragement of Chinese engagement. More active encouragement of Chinese engagement is significant in that it indicates an important degree of Kenyan agency is at play.

The perception that Chinese engagement is positive is held by a range of Kenyan actors towards multiple types of Chinese actor and activity. This can be seen in NGOs and INGOs based in Kenya, managers working for conservancy organisations, those engaged in wildlife tourism, as well as Kenyan government officials and the KWS. The types of engagement being encouraged are also diverse - from support for non-profit conservation advocacy initiatives, skills and knowledge transfer, research funding, political cooperation on the illegal wildlife trade, and conservation tourism.

Positive attitudes that suggest at least a passive welcoming of Chinese conservation engagement demonstrate a basic openness to the idea that there can be real benefits for

Kenyan conservation, particularly in terms of addressing the illegal wildlife trade. One interview participant in a senior role at a Kenyan conservation organisation explains how the decline in elephant poaching can be attributed to actions taken by the Chinese (and other East Asian countries):

I think the climax was between 2012 and 2015. That's when we had a climb and I think that was the top, then I think it started going down. Because I think there has been a lot of international pressure on China and the Far East countries to fight illegal trade. It's now going down. Over the last 2 or 3 years a lot of governments have taken serious measures.

The steps the Chinese state has taken to work with the Kenyan government in addressing the trade, alongside introducing the ivory ban in China, are generally well received amongst Kenyan actors engaged in conservation. In a 2017 newspaper article, Kaddu Sebunya, President of the Kenya based INGO AWF, illustrates how Chinese government action is often seen to be critical in addressing the illegal wildlife trade, stating “it is China that has always held the key to unlocking – or should we say, locking up – this despicable crisis” (Sebunya 2017).

In addition to sentiments echoed in some of the online media sources and as shared by organisations such as the KWS and AWF, many Kenyan interview participants are welcoming of Chinese engagement in its different forms and for its different benefits. These different forms of engagement include Chinese investment in conservation initiatives, including funding for equipment to support ranger patrols and for conservation research initiatives. Other forms of engagement include knowledge-sharing activity and joint research, or the increasing numbers of Chinese visitors engaging or expressing interest in conservation. The growing opportunities for Kenya-China research exchange, funding, as well as for Kenyan students to study in China are discussed by a conservation manager from Kenya:

Over the past few years I've heard, not directly but indirectly, I've seen increasing the number of Chinese investing in research in Africa. Different angles, amphibians, reptiles, bats, I've seen the Chinese universities working with the national reserves of Kenya. Before 2009, it was hard to see Chinese working in the field of conservation. But over the last two years we've seen them increase in numbers. Most of the research today is being funded by Chinese institutions – especially at the National Museum of Kenya which is a leader in terms of research and also the Kenya Wildlife Service.

Through the universities we are also seeing a lot of opportunities being given to Kenyan students to study conservation work in Chinese universities.

It is these types of China-Africa engagement, in terms knowledge-sharing and research or study opportunities, that are generally welcomed by Kenyan interviewees. The subject of Chinese investment in research in Kenya and provision of Kenyan study opportunity follows a much wider trend of Chinese engagement in Africa that has been addressed with both positivity and critique (King 2010; Wheeler 2014; Cyranoski 2018; Grimm 2018). These discussions are often tied to wider debates relating to Chinese soft power, cultural diplomacy and 'South-South cooperation' – which will be further examined in the next chapter.

The welcoming of Chinese engagement often extends into more active invitation and steering of activity, particularly by Kenyan non-profit actors. This proactive initiation or steering of activity signifies the importance of Kenyan agency at play. Kenyan NGOs have partnered with Chinese stakeholders in delivering awareness programmes, hosting Chinese visitors and students in Kenya, but also in working directly with stakeholders in China. A first example of greater steering of activity from Kenyan actors is in the partnership between the Kenyan NGO ANAW with China House. China House assumed the role as supporting actor in ANAW's 'Friends of ANAW' programme, supplying provisions and Chinese participants on the ground to address conservation priorities as outlined by ANAW. This included ANAW's priorities of addressing human-wildlife conflict and supporting wildlife education and advocacy in Kenyan schools. The previous chapter explained how a core focus of the activity of China House is to educate and raise-awareness amongst the Chinese participants engaging in its programmes. This engagement could be seen to be more cooperative in nature, presenting a humble and 'mutual' dynamic in the sense that Chinese actors are not determining the outcomes or leading on conservation activity, but instead, Chinese actors are supporting these priorities whilst also learning from engaging in these opportunities.

Invitation and steering of activity was also demonstrated in the work carried out by the jointly registered Kenyan and U.S. NGO Wildlife Direct, which has developed its own China strategy. The organisation created the role of a Chinese Liaison Officer and engaged with stakeholders on education and awareness projects in China and Hong Kong, forming part of its 'Hands off our Elephants' initiative to address poaching and the illegal wildlife trade. Its longer-term focus was to link up schools in Kenya and China, and to invite Chinese audiences to Kenya to further drive advocacy for elephants and deter consumption of ivory. The Wildlife Direct website states that it was initially conceived as an online platform providing a voice for African

conservationists (Wildlife Direct 2023). However, it is also registered in the US, therefore the degree to which Wildlife Direct is wholly influenced by 'Kenyan' directive can be questioned.

In both these examples of non-profit activity, the organisations have defined their own objectives for conservation, outlining how they want to work with Chinese actors to best address conservation issues. This proactive invitation and steering of Chinese engagement is significant for understanding the role of Kenyan agency in initiating or leading activities. Moreover, such examples of non-profit engagement (involving Chinese non-profit actors and wider Chinese audiences) might demonstrate a more humble and 'mutual' dynamic in China-Kenya conservation engagement.

As an agency of the Kenyan state, the KWS has also been actively engaging and collaborating with the Chinese state in efforts to combat the illegal wildlife trade and support conservation. In 2015, a delegation led by William Kiprono (then Director General) of the KWS visited China, "to explore strategic partnerships in biodiversity, tourism, resource mobilisation and national park infrastructure development" (Kenya Wildlife Service 2015a). The team met with Chinese NGOs, the Chinese State Forestry Administration, Chinese journalists, research scientists and university students. Also in 2015, the Chinese state provided technology and equipment such as GPS devices and ranger vehicles (Kenya Wildlife Service 2015b), not only to the KWS but to other African countries. An interviewee working in conservation for the Kenyan state describes the relationship and terms of engagement between the KWS and the Chinese as about "setting out the type of engagement with Chinese" and partnering economically in relation to sourcing funds. The participant states that within the relationship "constant diplomatic awareness is required" and that engagement should be based on "mutual respect". The use of this phrase suggests that having a fair degree of agency and influence is considered important by KWS officials, and that this consideration guides how they work and lead a cooperative relationship with the Chinese state.

The Kenyan state, business and non-profit community have also been proactive in encouraging a greater Chinese presence in conservation tourism to Kenya. Chinese visitor engagement incorporates a combination of educational, volunteering and tourist pursuits. Over the past five to ten years there has been a significant push to attract Chinese tourists to Kenya, spearheaded by the Kenyan Tourism Board (Business Daily Africa 2018b; Nyawira 2019). Alongside this has been a rise in the number of Kenya-based Chinese tour operators and businesses catering to the growing market and providing on the ground Chinese speakers for tourists. An interview participant from China who works in the Kenyan tourism industry explains how, since 2010, more Chinese have been willing to explore Africa as they have

already visited the other “more developed countries”. The encouragement of Chinese visitors is echoed by interview participants working for Kenyan conservancies and NGOs that receive both Chinese volunteers and more traditional tourists. One conservation manager from Kenya explains:

Five years ago, I used to have groups accompanying the high school groups. But for the last three years, the numbers have really changed. I can tell you I think last year, 2019, I had over 170 Chinese students here participating in our conservation programmes. This is very important because they are actually enabling us to do some of the things we could not do [...] the money goes directly to the conservancy and helps to pay the rangers.

In this case, Chinese visitors are perceived as really valued and are seen as a source of revenue to sustain conservation activity and local livelihoods. Whilst this chapter has recognised that the increase in Chinese tourists is not welcomed by all, Chinese engagement through educational, volunteering and tourism has, in some cases, demonstrated the more humble and ‘willing to learn’ nature of Chinese engagement. This in turn has challenged negative perceptions of Chinese attitudes towards wildlife. Two interview participants who work or have worked for Kenyan NGOs highlight how some Chinese students they engaged with had no idea how elephant ivory was obtained. One interviewee states that there was “innocence in their eyes”, whilst another explains how some were shedding tears and “couldn’t believe they were sponsoring this slaughter for wealth and status”. After interacting with Chinese visitors in Kenyan national parks, another conservation expert from Kenya shares how their own “ignorance was reduced” as they realised that more Chinese people than they expected are trying to support African conservation in China. This suggests that Kenyan perceptions can be changed through interaction, with initial caution giving way to recognition of the value and benefit of these forms of Chinese engagement.

Such shifts can also be seen in the emergence of explicit and cooperative efforts to improve cross-cultural understanding. Launched in 2014 and led by both Kenyan and Chinese wildlife experts, the ‘Debunk the myth of ivory’ initiative aimed to promote greater awareness and cultural understanding on ivory on both sides (Kantai Duff 2014). To some extent, this activity presents a more complex, multi-layered dynamic to Chinese engagement with Kenyan conservation. The expert team themselves are comprised of a representative from Wildlife Direct (a Kenyan-U.S. NGO) and from Save the Elephants (a Kenya-based INGO), and a Chinese independent researcher. This is significant in terms of potential triangulation of cooperation at play and the role of INGOs in facilitating Chinese engagement in African

conservation – a subject that will be further explored in the next chapter. In terms of the activity itself, the team travelled to China seeking to address conceptions of Chinese consumption of ivory and to better understand the cultural context, whilst showcasing African wildlife and the implications of elephant poaching (Kantai Duff 2014; Li 2015b). The team delivered presentations and spoke with Chinese media, students and Chinese and international NGOs. One of the Kenyan leaders of the project explains:

I left China laughing off notions of barbaric dog-eating, ivory consuming “middle class” of Chinese; I left behind the beginnings of a dialogue on this issue, learning that communication is everything; I left knowing that there is an army of Chinese willing and waiting to engage and fight for elephants with the same passion and vigour that I have; I left with hope. (Kantai Duff 2014)

Such activity not only demonstrates how ‘Kenyan’ actors are proactively seeking to engage with Chinese actors, but also in how they are pursuing cross-cultural understanding and alliance building. In this scenario, the Chinese audiences are the actors being drawn into Kenyan conservation, with both Kenyan and Chinese actors involved benefitting from the mutual learning facilitated by knowledge sharing and relationship building.

In summary, Kenyan perceptions that Chinese conservation engagement is positive exists in many forms, from passive welcoming, to greater invitation and steering of activity. These perceptions extend across different types of Kenyan actors and relate to different types of Chinese engagement. For many Kenyan actors, there is at least a passive welcoming of Chinese conservation engagement and an openness to the idea that there can be real benefits in raising-awareness amongst Chinese audiences for addressing the illegal wildlife trade – manifesting through Chinese non-profit engagement, Chinese volunteering and tourism. This passive welcoming also extends to the response to China’s state policy change on the ivory trade and the welcoming of Chinese investment in Kenyan conservation research and knowledge-sharing opportunity. Kenyan actors are also seen to be inviting and steering engagement with Chinese actors – including with Chinese non-profit actors, Chinese visitors (as volunteers and tourists), the Chinese state and wider Chinese audiences based in China. Greater invitation and steering of Chinese engagement from Kenyan actors not only suggests the existence of a more positive Kenyan disposition to Chinese engagement in conservation, but also indicates that an important degree of Kenyan agency is at play. This is significant in terms of the implications for conservation because of the legacy of colonial ideology, the resulting imbalance of power between Kenyan and Western actors, and in turn, how Western INGOs as ‘foreign’ actors have come to be seen as problematic in the context of Kenyan

conservation. As such, it could be argued that Chinese intervention might be seen to be more cooperative, introducing a new dynamic to conservation, one that is more humble and 'mutual'. This could be seen to somewhat disrupt 'Western' 'authority' in conservation, where there is Kenyan concern that local ownership and direction has been lacking.

3. Conclusion

This chapter has explored Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement and its implications for Kenyan conservation. Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement in conservation can be broadly divided into those that see Chinese engagement as limited, those that see it as problematic, and those that see it as positive. Interview participant attitudes towards Chinese conservation engagement are shaped by a range of factors. These include perceptions of Chinese attitudes and activity in relation to wildlife, understandings of broader Chinese engagement with Africa, and experiences of foreign conservation intervention in general, particularly relating to the legacies of European colonialism and the consequent dominance of 'Western'-founded conservation INGOs.

The perception that Chinese conservation engagement is limited or has limited significance derives partly from limited awareness of how Chinese actors are engaging in Kenyan conservation. With Western actors, particularly INGOs, continuing to be the most visible and active 'foreign' players in African conservation, Chinese engagement can appear almost minimal in comparison. Furthermore, where there is awareness of Chinese conservation engagement, Kenyan interview participants often suggest that it presents a lack of tangible outcomes for conservation, including the illegal wildlife trade. Additionally, it is not seen to be significantly influencing the field, nor changing the established dynamics of foreign intervention.

Perceptions that Chinese conservation engagement is problematic underpin caution and critical questioning towards Chinese activity, and can extend to outright hostility. Such perspectives are informed by stereotypes about 'Chinese' attitudes towards wildlife and China's perceived role in the illegal wildlife trade. Cautious and wary attitudes were also linked to a questioning of 'why' Chinese actors are engaging in conservation, which was closely associated with wider concerns about Chinese economic activity in Kenya, such as large-scale infrastructural projects and the increased presence of Chinese businesses. Furthermore, the perception that Chinese engagement is problematic was also informed by attitudes to foreign

conservation intervention in general. These revolved around the colonial legacies that have shaped Kenyan conservation and lead to the dominance of the sector by Western-founded INGOs, raising concerns that conservation is more aligned to foreign interests than local needs.

In contrast, perceptions of Chinese engagement as positive ranged from passive welcoming, to greater invitation and steering of activity, and were expressed across a variety of Kenyan actors in response to different types of Chinese engagement. There are seen to be real benefits and positive implications for Kenyan conservation, specifically in relation to addressing the illegal wildlife trade. At the same time, wider benefits to conservation can be derived from knowledge-exchange, Chinese investment and commercial revenue from Chinese visitors. These benefits and resulting positive attitudes also drive Kenyan actors to seek out and steer Chinese engagement, signalling the importance of Kenyan agency at play. Furthermore, it could be argued that the way in which Chinese intervention is taking place is more cooperative in nature, introducing a new more humble and 'mutual' dynamic to conservation. This could be seen as having the potential to disrupt power relations in Kenyan conservation where there are widespread Kenyan concerns that there is not enough local ownership and direction versus Western INGOs. The Kenyan agency emerging around Chinese engagement, and the fact that Chinese actors represent a new set of potential partners, might help Kenyan actors to counter Western dominance in conservation. Recognising the presence of Kenyan agency, and the more balanced and cooperative relations as part of the conservation engagement between Kenyan and Chinese actors, represents an important contribution to understanding the dynamics that are emerging from Chinese involvement in Kenyan conservation.

The following chapter will build on these more cooperative dynamics of Chinese engagement in conservation to examine the implications for understandings and analysis as part of wider China-Africa relations.

Chapter 7: Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation in the context of China-Africa relations

1. Introduction

This chapter examines how Chinese conservation engagement in Kenya is both shaped by and might shape wider China-African relations, and how these relations are understood. In doing this, it addresses two of the research questions: What factors are driving Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation? How is Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation shaped by and potentially re-shaping wider China-Africa relations?

The chapter begins by assessing Chinese engagement in Kenyan and wider African conservation in relation to understandings of 'cooperation' within China-Africa relations, particularly in light of the idea of 'South-South cooperation'. A key line of argument is that Chinese-led engagement in conservation is often seen to be more cooperative than might be expected, given that much analysis tends to emphasise the power and benefits China enjoys in its relations with Africa. An important strand of Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation is characterised by a two-way process of 'mutual' engagement and reciprocal learning, with a key role for Kenyan agency. This in turn has the potential to challenge the more established 'provider-recipient/beneficiary' dynamics of foreign, and in particular Western, engagement in conservation. African agency becomes an important component of such engagement, and as such, this research builds on the growing scholarship on recognising and seeking to better understand the nature and implications of African agency in China-Africa relations.

At the same time, Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation often involves a diverse range of actors and activity. As discussed in Chapter 5, this engagement not only involves Chinese non-profit, state and for-profit actors, but also Western-founded conservation INGOs. These INGOs support and even directly initiate and lead Chinese conservation engagement in Kenya, suggesting that there is some form of 'triangular' cooperation developing between Chinese, Western and African conservation actors, and a potential convergence between 'Western' and 'Chinese' conservation practice. This can be interpreted in different ways, for example, as Western actors trying to oversee or shape international conservation agendas, or as Chinese actors using Western actors as a vehicle for engagement. These multi-polar dynamics have implications for understandings of 'South-South cooperation'. On the one hand, INGOs are inserting themselves in Chinese engagement in conservation, or otherwise

'letting in' or incorporating Chinese actors into Western or globalised modes of international conservation. On the other, Western actors are being purposively 'invited' or 'let in' to Chinese engagement, whereby INGOs can serve as vehicles for channelling Chinese diplomatic interest. This examination of the engagement, in light of 'South-South cooperation', highlights how there is more going on than the ideals of cooperation and mutual benefit at play.

The chapter progresses to argue how Chinese engagement or 'cooperation' in conservation can be explained by and linked to key state visions and wider diplomacy associated with China-Africa relations. While the focus of this research is on Chinese non-profit activity, it has been shown how the state is a leading actor, both through its indirect role in 'opening-up' the conservation field as a legitimate one for Chinese actors to engage in and its more direct role in attempting to steer and support Chinese non-profit activity in this field. The chapter contends that there is a case for understanding Chinese engagement in conservation as Chinese conservation diplomacy, where it is understood as a diplomatic tool aimed at facilitating positive cooperation and improving China-Kenya and wider Africa relations. In this way, Chinese engagement as conservation diplomacy is also an instrument for attending to image and activating soft power, forming part of the Chinese state's wider international engagement strategy and Chinese ambitions in delivering a 'green' BRI. An important component of conservation engagement is seen to be linked to improving China's image in relation to negative ideas or prejudices associated with the illegal wildlife trade, as well as wider areas of sometimes more contentious economic and infrastructural Chinese engagement in Africa. Whilst Chinese diplomacy is often addressed in relation to engagements of the state, Chinese (and non-Chinese) non-profit and other non-state actors engaging in conservation are also bound up and contributing to Chinese diplomacy. Conservation diplomacy is a useful and appropriate frame that recognises the importance of the role of the state in pursuing Chinese state interests, signifying conservation with 'Chinese characteristics'. At the same time, diplomacy is not all about the interests of one side, it is clear that Kenyan actors are asserting their interests and accruing benefits for Kenyan conservation, and maybe more so than they have up until now in their relations with Western actors. As such, conservation diplomacy works two ways with African agency and interests coming into play, possibly reshaping not only international engagement around conservation but also in international affairs more generally.

2. Towards a more cooperative relationship?

Chinese engagement in conservation is very often discussed by Chinese and Kenyan

interview participants and sources as 'cooperation' in conservation. The use of the term 'cooperation' as part of Chinese engagement has increased significantly over the past ten years in both Chinese and African media and in the commentary of Chinese, African and international organisations (Gumba and Chelin 2019; Qiao 2020; TRAFFIC 2021).

One line of argument to emerge from this analysis is that China-Kenya relations in conservation might be more cooperative and balanced than suggested by much work and debate on wider China-Africa relations, and to some extent, aligns to the ideals of 'South-South cooperation'. 'South-South cooperation' can be used as an analytical frame for assessing these more cooperative, balanced and 'mutual' dynamics in conservation that have been demonstrated between Chinese and Kenyan actors, as nations of the 'Global South'. The idea of 'South-South cooperation' is deployed by actors engaged in these relations and is used to describe the nature of interaction between actors. The construct of 'South-South cooperation' is also used as a frame for academics to interrogate Chinese engagement across the 'Global South' (DeHart 2012; Khoday and Perch 2012; Okolo and Akwu 2016; United Nations Development Programme 2016, 2017). 'South-South cooperation' for development is described as a framework of collaboration for developing countries to share knowledge, skills, expertise and resources (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2023). It is built on principles of mutual respect, equality and win-win outcomes (Grimm 2014), whilst also promoting a 'harmonious world', mutual benefit and nation-state sovereignty (DeHart 2012), based on self-reliance and self-help (Grimm 2014). Scholars have stated that the BRI is the most prominent initiative for what China regards as 'South-South cooperation' (Sheng and Nascimento 2021; Gülseven 2023). The BRI itself and China 'Going Out' are strategies of state conception, advanced as part of top-down agendas. Whilst primarily associated as a strategy of the state, the types of actors 'Going Out' are increasingly diversifying (Farid and Li 2021).

The ideals of 'South-South cooperation' lend themselves to the idea that cooperation is more reciprocal, aligning to the principles of mutual respect, equality and win-win. In this way, the ideal is for a more balanced two-way dynamic between 'provider' and 'recipient/beneficiary'. This research has identified a number of examples where Chinese actors have been 'providers' of 'services' and Kenyans 'beneficiaries' in conservation engagement. From 2018, China House has supported the Kenyan NGO ANAW and the OI Pejeta Wildlife Conservation Project in the provision and fitting of 'Lion Lights' for mitigating against human-wildlife conflict, investing in beehives and equipment, and since 2014, have facilitated Chinese volunteer support in wildlife de-snaring projects (China House 2024f). In a similar 'provider' role, the Chinese state has supplied technology, such as vehicles and GPS devices, to the KWS in

support of anti-poaching activity (Sum 2014). In this way, the dynamic of Kenyan actors as beneficiaries is more akin to an unbalanced development relationship that African actors are often used to experiencing with Western actors.

At the same time, one of the dynamics that indicates that China-Kenya relations in conservation might be more cooperative and balanced is that cooperation does have a reciprocal dynamic where both Kenyan and Chinese actors can assume the role of 'provider' and 'recipient/beneficiary'. Whilst in some ways Chinese actors have been 'providers' of materials and services, a key focus area of Chinese engagement in conservation has also involved Kenyan and African actors 'educating' Chinese actors about conservation and the illegal wildlife trade. The need to 'educate' Chinese actors and audiences has been both at the request of Chinese actors who are 'willing to learn' and proactively pursued by Kenyan and African actors. It can be argued that the nature of these relations somewhat disrupts the 'provider-beneficiary' dynamic, indicating that relations might be more 'mutual' and balanced. In interviews with Chinese volunteers, students and workers who have engaged in conservation projects in Kenya, it was explained that one of the reasons participants travel to Africa, Latin America or Southeast Asia is to learn about wildlife. In relation to wider Chinese conservation work in Africa and in China, much educational activity is closely tied to learning about wildlife and conservation to address the illegal wildlife trade. The previous chapter discussed how the Kenyan-U.S. NGO Wildlife Direct worked with Chinese stakeholders on education and awareness projects in China and Hong Kong, forming part of its 'Hands off our Elephants' initiative. Similarly, a key focus of the KWS has been in promoting awareness around the illegal wildlife trade, specifically addressing the Kenya-based Chinese private sector and consumers.

The framing of Chinese demand for illegal wildlife products as a problem in some ways lessens the authority of Chinese actors as the 'experts' and frames them as the actors that need 'educating'. The need for Chinese actors to be educated came across very strongly in interview with Chinese participants who often framed Chinese audiences as those needing to learn and change behaviours. This in turn appears to have opened-up a more humble or 'willing to learn' attitude on the part of Chinese actors. The previous chapter discussed how the experience and interpretation of Western actors in conservation is quite often associated with accompanying 'moral authority' and 'expert' attitude (Haas and Reppenning 2018; Tosam 2019). To a great extent, Chinese engagement and accompanying attitudes could be seen to contrast with Western approach and attitude. This coheres with how some scholars have discussed non-Western (including Chinese) approaches in areas such as international volunteering. Polus, Carr and Walters (2023) argue that in non-Western societies,

international volunteering is conceptualised as 'horizontal' (more mutual, reciprocal) solidarity in contrast to Western societies where it is more 'vertical' (top down, expert-led). In turn, they contend that greater solidarity, respect and equality differentiates non-Western from Western international volunteering (ibid.). As discussed in the previous chapter, the ways in which Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation is approached, specifically through Chinese non-profit or state activity, upholds some of these characteristics of more 'horizontal' solidarity and reciprocity, without exercising 'moral authority' which might be more closely associated with Western cooperation and intervention. In this way, Chinese conservation engagement to some extent lives up to ideals of 'South-South cooperation', potentially disrupting Western dominance as has been argued of China-Africa relations more broadly.

The argument for recognising evidence of greater reciprocity in China-Africa relations is also linked to the role of African agency. In exploring Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement in the previous chapter, it was shown how there are indications of increasing openness to Chinese engagement from Kenyan actors. Chinese engagement has in many cases been encouraged and actively sought out by Kenyan NGOs, INGOs based or working in Kenya, and the KWS as a state actor. There exist very few independently initiated Chinese conservation projects in Kenya, with the exception of the Mara Conservation Fund set up in Kenya by a Chinese conservationist. Indeed, this research has highlighted how Chinese engagement, specifically from non-profit actors and the state, is often focused on supporting the existing activities of Kenyan organisations. In the examples explored in this and the previous chapter, Chinese cooperation has seen Chinese actors assume both a 'provider' and a 'beneficiary' role. This has taken the form of contributing technical support, funding and 'volunteers', while receiving learning opportunities and knowledge exchange.

Moreover, Kenyan agency is seen to be playing an important role in inviting, steering and shaping Chinese engagement in conservation. The previous chapter highlighted how these scenarios manifest at different levels of Chinese conservation engagement and in relation to different activities. Examples included how China House supported the Kenyan NGO ANAW in addressing local concerns around human-wildlife conflict and supported efforts in promoting wildlife advocacy in local schools. Additionally, it was shown how the Kenyan state have been proactively seeking out and steering engagement with the Chinese state – sending delegations from the KWS to China to host talks with Chinese stakeholders, whilst also working with the Chinese state to address Kenyan priority focus on the illegal wildlife trade. An interview participant working in conservation for the Kenyan state explains that the relationship is about "setting out the type of engagement with [the] Chinese" and that engagement should be based on "mutual respect". An interpretation of these relations is that

Chinese actors are not stipulating what the 'issues' and priorities are in conservation nor directing how best to address them. Instead, in much of the Chinese engagement examined in this research, the activities pursued appear to be responding to and supporting Kenyan priorities and strategy. As such, Kenyan actors have been the key agents in shaping engagement, and have 'invited' or 'let in' the Chinese partners.

To some degree these more 'equal' and reciprocal 'win-win' dynamics of engagement resonate with the ideals of 'South-South cooperation' (DeHart 2012; Mohan 2015). The dynamics lend some support to the argument that Chinese engagement in conservation is aligned to the Chinese state view that Chinese cooperation is less exploitative and more relevant to local needs (Asante 2018). As part of Chinese engagement (as Chinese state and non-state actors) there exists a focus on 'support' and 'share' (Polus, Carr and Walters 2023), rather than Western white experts 'helping' the 'inferior other' (Haas and Repenning 2018). These more reciprocal relations in China-Africa cooperation in conservation contrast with the dynamics associated with more traditional Western engagement (or intervention) in Africa's past and, indeed, present (Mawdsley 2012), and in addition, contrast with much academic work that has tended to emphasise Chinese over African agency in China-Africa relations (Corkin 2013; Mohan and Lampert 2013, 2015; Van Staden, Alden and Wu 2018, p.28). The evidence of Kenyan agency shaping and often initiating Chinese engagement in conservation adds to the growing scholarship that is recognising and seeking to better understand the nature and implications of African agency in China-Africa relations (Corkin 2013; Mohan and Lampert 2013, 2015; Gadzala 2015; Lopes 2016).

As much as Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation might fulfil some of the ideals of 'South-South cooperation' and clearly demonstrate the importance of African agency, there are other important dynamics at play, not least around the role of INGOs. As seen in Chapters 5 and 6, INGOs are also key in shaping Chinese conservation engagement and therefore disrupt the notion of this representing some form of ideal 'South-South cooperation' in action.

3. The role of 'Western' actors in 'China-Africa' conservation cooperation

Whilst there is an argument for recognising more cooperative and balanced relations between Chinese and Kenyan actors in Chinese conservation engagement in Kenya, the idea that it constitutes some kind of idealised 'South-South cooperation' is somewhat disrupted by the notable involvement of Western actors. The previous chapters have shown how much

'Chinese' engagement in Kenyan conservation involves 'Western' INGOs with teams based in China, Africa and the West. As such, the boundaries of 'Chinese' engagement become blurred by the participation of non-Chinese actors. INGOs are seen to be contributing to the invitation and steering of exchange between African and Chinese stakeholders, and to an extent, are inserting themselves into China-Africa engagement. This dynamic has the potential to make engagement less distinctly 'Chinese' and more closely bound up and incorporated into INGO, or essentially, 'Western'-led activity. This somewhat disrupts the binary of 'China-Africa' engagement being led by Chinese and African actors, and therefore, challenges the ideal of 'South-South cooperation'.

Over the past ten to fifteen years, INGOs such as WildAid, WWF, IFAW, AWF, WCS, HSI and TNC have assumed prominent positions in raising awareness of the impacts of the illegal wildlife trade in China and its connection to African wildlife. In addition to leading their own activities to directly engage and educate Chinese audiences on the illegal wildlife trade and African conservation, many of these INGOs have also worked in collaboration with Chinese actors. This includes Chinese-led non-profit actors in Africa such as China House, China-based NGOs, Chinese businesses and organisations in Kenya and China, and the Chinese state through government agencies, officials and embassies in Africa. HSI, for example, has supported wildlife conservation awareness campaigns led by China House in Eastern and Southern Africa (China House, Humane Society International 2018), while the AWF has promoted conservation awareness through a network of Chinese businesses and organisations based in Africa and China. The AWF has also supported multi-stakeholder forums for China-Africa engagement such as the China-Africa Wildlife Conservation Council, as well as facilitating cooperation between Chinese and African government officials (Qiao 2020).

One interpretation of the dynamic of Western INGOs playing important roles in Chinese engagement in African conservation is that there might be a degree of 'triangulation' of cooperation taking place between Western INGOs and Chinese and African conservation actors. The United Nations defines 'triangular' cooperation as, "Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries supported by a developed country(ies)/or multilateral organization(s) to implement development cooperation programmes and projects" (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2023). A key perceived benefit is that Southern partners in development cooperation may require expertise and financial and technical support that developed ('Northern') countries can provide (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2023). While this places 'Northern' partners in a privileged position, 'triangular' cooperation is supposed to be based on ideals of shared and mutual learning

(Piefer 2014) and inclusive partnership (Alonso and Santander 2021).

The involvement of INGOs in Chinese engagement in African conservation could be seen to offer some of the benefits attributed to the idea of 'triangular' cooperation. Wildlife and conservation INGOs offer established global networks, experience and knowledge, as well as financial resources to support Chinese engagement in African conservation. For their part, Chinese partners are more likely to have the ability to reach and communicate with Chinese audiences and consumers, which is especially important in awareness-raising activities around the illegal wildlife trade. The partnership between the INGO HSI and China House is an example of this. Whilst based in Kenya, China House was supported by HSI to launch the 'Engaging Chinese communities in Africa on wildlife conservation' project. This centred around involving the Chinese diaspora in Kenya in wildlife de-snaring exercises, public awareness marches and runs in Kenya and across Eastern and Southern African countries (China House, Humane Society International 2018). In this case, HSI provided the financial support to launch the project, and as a well-established wildlife INGO, they also contribute gravitas to further elevate and legitimise activity. In turn, the role of China House was to lead the project and identify and communicate with the diaspora.

The role of 'Northern' actors in 'South-South cooperation' and the 'triangulation' of cooperation has been discussed within other areas of global development (Abdenur and Da Fonseca 2013; Piefer 2014). Mawdsley (2019) argues that 'South-South cooperation' has evolved from its founding principles to become both more pragmatic and flexible in interpretation. The presence of Northern actors in 'South-South cooperation' in Chinese engagement in African conservation may be part of this more 'pragmatic and flexible' interpretation. In their research on China and INGOs, Farid and Li (2021) argue how INGOs operating as 'Northern' actors in China play an important role as intermediaries in 'South-South cooperation'. This is both in initiating engagement of Chinese actors in outbound support, but also in providing the bridge for bringing together tangible resource (such as Chinese finance, expertise and technical assistance) and intangible resource (such as INGO knowledge, language proficiency and brokering trust) with the recipient actors in other countries of the 'Global South' (ibid.). Abdenur and Da Fonseca (2013) argue that 'triangular' cooperation driven by 'Northern' initiatives is growing and that 'Northern' donors in particular are using this form of cooperation to strategically engage with China. From a 'Northern' perspective, this might also be an attempt to bridge 'North' and 'South' relations, to maintain influence in the 'South', but also to influence and shape Chinese cooperation (ibid.). Following this logic, INGOs seeking to establish involvement in Chinese conservation engagement in Africa could be seen as 'Northern' actors attempting to maintain their dominant position in international conservation activity and

continue to influence what happens around conservation in the 'South'. Noakes and Teets (2020) discuss how international relations scholars assign the role of 'norm-promotion' to INGOs operating in China. 'Norm-promotion' is when engagement with INGOs is perceived as a means of socialising China to Western values and standards (Noakes and Teets 2020; Wu and Nie 2021). In relation to the illegal wildlife trade, Gamso (2019) contends that INGO activity (amplified by Chinese celebrity support) significantly contributed to mobilising Chinese support and increasing pressure on the Chinese government to ban the ivory trade. As such, it could be argued that INGO activity through high-profile campaigns (such as those led by WildAid and WWF), or through youth education are a means of socialising Chinese actors in 'Western' values towards conservation and the illegal wildlife trade.

Conversely, the involvement of Western actors in China-Africa cooperation might be seen as a Chinese attempt to shape or counter INGO norms and practices (Wu and Nie 2021) or, more broadly, to constrain Western action and agendas. Noakes and Teets (2020) find that INGOs are using multiple strategies to alter their programmes and practice in order to operate and win favour in the Chinese political and legislative landscape. Similarly, Farid and Li (2021) found that many INGOs operating in China have been asked by Chinese supervisory agencies to shift programmatic focus to BRI-related projects and China's global impact. They argue that INGOs act as networkers, resource mobilisers, catalysts and a bridge for China's engagement in global development matters. In turn, INGOs have become intermediaries of China's 'Going Out' policy and a vehicle for Chinese diplomacy (ibid.). Whilst not specifically focused on China's engagement in Kenyan conservation, the WWF has published numerous reports on the impact of the BRI and how INGOs can help to facilitate the 'greening' of the BRI (WWF 2016b; 2017). As of April 2023, the WWF website mentions the China 'Going Global' strategy – an extension of China's 'Going Out' – and highlights the importance of China's environmental targets alongside its overseas ambitions (WWF 2023). One conservation expert from China discusses the concept of the BRI in relation to both China-based INGO activity and its wider adoption as part of conservation strategy in China:

I think some Chinese academic institutions and also some domestic foundations are trying to build that kind of 'green' One Belt One Road initiative...I think WCS [Wildlife Conservation Society] is trying to be part of that and are trying to develop some 'green' One Belt One Road thing. It's not specifically related to Africa, but Africa is involved.

The incorporation of such Chinese rhetoric and strategy as part of INGO engagement in conservation is significant and might suggest some form of mutually beneficial convergence

between 'Western' and 'Chinese' conservation thinking and practice. In this way, INGO engagement contributes an important, more multi-polar dimension to China's 'Going Out' and 'South-South cooperation'. Furthermore, it indicates how INGOs can become part of showcasing Chinese strategy and a vehicle for Chinese diplomacy.

4. Chinese engagement as conservation diplomacy

Whilst Chinese engagement can to some extent be understood as demonstrating features of idealised 'South-South cooperation', it is clear that diplomatic interests are also at play. Chinese conservation engagement in Africa can in part be explained by and linked to Chinese state visions and diplomacy to facilitate positive cooperation and improve relations, associated not only with China-Africa relations but also in improving image as a 'good' global environmental citizen. As such, Chinese engagement in African conservation can be understood as a form of conservation diplomacy, deployed to accumulate and exercise soft power in international affairs.

4.1 – Chinese conservation diplomacy as part of China's wider strategic interests

Scholars have emphasised the importance of the Chinese state's crafting and management of national image (Wang 2003; Zhang 2010; Ding 2011; Barr 2012; Burcu and Boni 2023), and how this represents an important part of Chinese foreign policy (Wang 2003; Burcu and Boni 2023). In particular, Chinese image building has been discussed as a means of wielding soft power (Ding 2008; Hartig 2013; Dugué-Nevers 2017). Soft power describes the ability of a country to shape the responses of others through positive appeal and attraction (Nye 2011), and encompasses utilising non-government forces and building citizen diplomacy by enlisting the power of society as opposed to the state (Li and Rønning 2013). Scholars have discussed how people-to-people exchanges, Chinese tourism (Li and Rønning 2013; Wekesa 2013; Chen and Duggan 2016), 'environmental' engagements (Gamsó 2019; Xie 2022) and INGOs (Farid and Li 2021), are key vehicles for pursuing Chinese soft power that are especially relevant in the context of Chinese conservation engagement. Soft power becomes an important foreign policy instrument (Huang 2013; Arif 2017) and a tool of diplomacy. As such, soft power could be seen to be about taking action on 'soft' issues (like the environment and conservation) as part of supporting wider diplomatic interests.

As identified in Chapter 2, a key argument from international relations scholars is that environment and biodiversity are key issues through which China can exercise its soft power and influence on a world stage (Gamso 2019; Xie 2022; Yang and Lin 2022). China's outbound engagement on matters of the 'environment' also relate directly to conservation. As highlighted in Chapter 2, conservation diplomacy as a frame for explaining and better understanding the engagement activities and dynamics of different nation states and actors in matters of conservation has received very limited academic interrogation to date. Within the literature, there are two key notions of conservation diplomacy. Firstly, where conservation is understood as a subject of diplomacy (Dorsey 1998; Lewis 2008). In this scenario, conservation diplomacy has primarily been adopted by scholars to frame conservation engagement between nation-states, with a focus on international conservation governance and legal obligations (Dorsey 1998; Ishwaran 2004; Lewis 2008). The second interpretation, which is most useful and applicable to this research, is where conservation engagement is seen as a tool of diplomacy (Yeh *et al.* 2021). The work of Yeh *et al.* (2021) on the opportunity for U.S.-China diplomacy through cooperation on sea turtle conservation in the South China Sea is an example of conservation diplomacy being used as a frame for understanding conservation as a tool of diplomacy through coordinated conservation efforts. The framing of China's conservation engagement as a tool of diplomacy to facilitate cooperation, build trust and create a platform for improving relations is highly relevant in explaining Chinese non-profit and wider Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, not only in terms of how it is manifesting, but also in relation to understanding how Kenyan actors perceive and respond to it. The work of Yeh *et al.* is of further significance in that it demonstrates the role that non-profit actors can play in supporting state diplomacy. It is the involvement of a multiplicity of actors as part of conservation diplomacy, and the different levels at which these operate and influence engagements, that is especially pertinent in the context of this research.

As highlighted, understandings of conservation diplomacy remain nascent and underdeveloped. The remainder of the chapter progresses to demonstrate the application and analytical utility of the idea of conservation diplomacy in the case of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation. In doing this, it also helps to evolve understandings of conservation diplomacy as a concept, specifically in terms of its role in building soft power, winning favour amongst local actors and on an international stage, as well as a vehicle for state influence – in this case, the Chinese state. It is these ideas that provide further important theoretical contributions to develop understandings of conservation diplomacy.

The idea of China's conservation engagement as a tool of diplomacy for improving relations and projecting a positive image of China as an important or responsible international actor is

especially useful for understanding Chinese engagement and cooperation in African conservation at the highest level. China has come under increasing international pressure over the past few decades to address the illegal wildlife trade (Mak and Song 2018; Gamsó 2019). In this time, Chinese engagement to address the illegal wildlife trade and work alongside Kenyan and African actors has increased significantly. As such, Chinese state efforts in African conservation may be in response to conservation pressures and to win environmental legitimacy (Zhang, Qin and Zhang 2023), but also to win favour in Kenyan and African state and public relations. The FOCAC summit in 2015 was the first time the illegal wildlife trade was raised as an agenda item and represents a critical launching point in cooperation on the trade and conservation (International Institute for Sustainable Development 2016; Burgess 2020). The illegal wildlife trade has continued to be an important agenda item at FOCAC (TRAFFIC 2021) and in state relations between China and Kenya and other African nations, with the likes of the KWS and Chinese state agencies such as the National Forestry and Grassland Administration and Chinese embassies cooperating on initiatives, often with the support of INGOs (TRAFFIC 2014; WWF 2019). The previous chapters have highlighted how such engagement with China on wildlife and conservation has been actively encouraged and invited by Kenyan state actors, like the KWS, and non-state actors, such as Kenyan NGOs. These engagements to coordinate action on the illegal wildlife trade could be interpreted as an arena in which to further build relations, in which Chinese conservation engagement becomes a tool of diplomacy.

Both Chinese and Kenyan interview participants relate Chinese efforts in conservation to the Chinese state's desire to project a positive image on the world stage and counter negative perceptions of the country's international activities. These perceptions were linked to the illegal wildlife trade, but also included reference to concerns about China's "global ambition", and the negative impacts associated with large Chinese-led infrastructure projects such as the Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya. Efforts to address Chinese image were largely discussed by participants in relation to Chinese state initiatives, including the activities of Africa-based Chinese embassies, Chinese state engagement with the KWS, as well as Chinese corporate public relations efforts linked to state-backed infrastructure projects. As discussed in Chapter 6, Chinese state engagement with the KWS on the illegal wildlife trade was described by one interviewee working in conservation for the Kenyan state as a means of "sanitising" the Chinese name. This suggests that Chinese engagement in conservation (at least from the state), is also about compensating for the role of Chinese demand in the illegal wildlife trade and potentially as a response to negativity and hostility towards wider Chinese engagements in Kenya and Africa. Relatedly, another Kenyan conservation expert suspects that 'the Chinese' offer money to support conservation as a "sweetener" in response to criticisms of

high-profile Chinese infrastructure projects. Addressing the illegal wildlife trade is therefore understood as an opportunity or vehicle for image enhancement and for further developing foreign relations. The perception that Chinese state conservation efforts and projecting a positive international image are linked is also evident from a Chinese perspective, as exemplified by a conservation expert from China who argues:

Chinese government are concerned about their general image in the international area, I think they are realising the current image is not very good...they want to do something for conservation in general. The government is aware of doing something more to conserve, to compensate for their global ambition, economic ambition. Conservation is a good thing for them to choose, it's a good topic.

China is doing One Belt One Road initiative... That involves a lot of the issues including nature conservation, how to do the business development, under a more 'greenised' way.

Suggestions of a 'green' approach highlight wider Chinese strategic ambitions connected to state policies of 'sustainable China', 'harmonious society' and 'ecological civilisation'. This is seen in the evolving vision for the BRI, which has enhanced the focus on delivering a 'green' BRI (Wang, Gong and Mao 2018; Elkind 2019; Cuiyun and Chazhong 2020). The 'greening' of the BRI itself is an official strategy advocated by the Chinese government – its objective is to deliver economic development whilst enhancing and preserving the environment (Elkind 2019). The focus on the environment, wildlife and conservation is in part a response to global efforts to address climate change, instigating the broader adoption of 'green' rhetoric in China (Delman and Odgaard 2014; Hu 2017; Qi and Dauvergne 2022).

To an extent, China's 'green' strategy becomes another vision that is 'exported' as part of the BRI and wider 'Going Out' strategy. Supporting conservation efforts in Africa can be seen as part of delivering a 'green' BRI. In relation to the Chinese state and for-profit sector in particular, there is a perception that engagement in conservation might be part of projecting a positive image to compensate for more negatively perceived activities. This raises the question as to whether such efforts are an attempt to 'greenwash' activities. Within the context of China's strategies of foreign engagement, wider literature has explored how Chinese state and corporate 'greening' of the BRI is part of 'green development' or 'greenwashing' (Harlan 2021).

The connection between Chinese conservation engagement in Africa and wider Chinese societal and economic ambitions, such as China's 'green' strategies, 'Going Out' and the BRI, indicate that Chinese engagement in conservation is not an isolated activity or strategy. This link is a potentially significant and defining distinction of Chinese engagement. This resonates with Zhu's (2022) contention that Chinese approaches to the environment do not rest on a clear divide between humans and nature, meaning that environmental concerns are not necessarily in opposition to wider social and economic goals, such as development through building and construction. This connects to broader arguments presented by Zhu, specifically the idea that a Chinese approach to the environment is informed by an alternative cultural and political context, whereby the state plays a key role in advancing Chinese vision and strategy in relation to the environment. This translates into state visions such as a 'green' BRI and 'ecological civilisation', where 'ecological civilisation' is recognised as China's latest manifestation of 'green' strategy and has been described as a manifestation of environmentalism (and socialism) with 'Chinese characteristics' (Balchindorzhieva and Tsyrendorzhieva 2016; Hanson 2019; Li *et al.* 2023). Zhu (2022) contends that 'ecological civilisation' draws politics and culture into conversation with the environment. As evidenced in this research, the reference to and importance of politics becomes quite clear in the context of Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation. Zhu (2022) argues that the Chinese approach to the environment and conservation, where a clear divide between humans and nature is not so prominent, indicates greater differentiation between Chinese and Western approaches. As such, Chinese approaches are countering international norms and driving a move away from Western orthodoxy to provide a different vision of an ecological future (Zhu 2022). This idea that a Chinese approach to the environment and conservation is more explicitly connected to culture and politics and not about separating people and nature, which is somewhat differentiated from Western approaches, is potentially significant in better understanding the activities and dynamics of Chinese engagement in Kenyan and wider African conservation. As such, engagement might be usefully interpreted and explained as a form of conservation with 'Chinese characteristics'.

Whilst the Chinese state is the primary mover in diplomacy as part of advancing China's wider diplomatic and strategic interests, other Chinese actors have also been brought into these strategic visions, or have themselves taken the initiative to engage in conservation and become a vehicle of Chinese diplomacy – including non-profit actors.

4.2 – The role of non-profit engagement in conservation diplomacy

Within the literature, efforts to address or shape Chinese image are often discussed in relation to wider Chinese efforts in diplomacy in its different forms (Chang and Lin 2014; Hartig 2016; Jiang *et al.* 2016; Sterling 2018). These discussions have tended to take a top-down framing, focusing directly on engagements that are initiated by the state. It can be argued that an important part of Chinese conservation engagement in Kenya and Africa, as part of conservation diplomacy, is the role of Chinese non-profit and other non-state actors, as well as INGOs. Chinese non-profit organisations, volunteers, students, researchers, tourists, celebrities and Chinese businesses engaging in African conservation through people-to-people exchange, could be considered a means of eliciting 'positive attraction' and enlisting the power of society as opposed to the state, a key component of soft power (Li and Rønning 2013). In this way, Chinese non-state actors can also become vehicles of diplomacy.

These efforts in diplomacy might be top-down in the sense that the Chinese state encourage or promote engagement of other Chinese actors, such as the promotion of Chinese celebrity engagement in conservation (including the likes of basketball player Yao Ming) via Chinese state-owned media outlets, or wider encouragement of sending Chinese volunteers to Africa. The role of celebrities in Chinese engagement in African conservation is discussed by an interview participant in a senior role at a Kenyan conservation organisation. They explain that, "the biggest effort by China now in Africa is diplomacy and for their image". The participant discussed how efforts in diplomacy and to improve China's image explain the increasing presence of Chinese celebrities engaging in African conservation, such as Jack Ma and Yao Ming. These Chinese celebrity engagements are very often connected to Chinese NGO and INGO activity. Whilst such engagements might be linked to more top-down efforts in diplomacy because of the promotion these efforts receive in Chinese state-owned media, they can also be linked to more bottom-up efforts. Bottom-up or organic efforts are those activities that are largely separate from the state and are concerned with non-profit activity and people-to-people interactions. These bottom-up efforts might possibly be more 'genuine' forms of conservation engagement in the sense that actors are seeking to achieve meaningful outcomes for African conservation.

In connection to the idea that Chinese non-state actors are vehicles of diplomacy, and also for improving China's image, is the idea that activities pursued by non-state Chinese actors and INGOs might be influenced, managed or controlled in order to project the image the state wants. In Chapter 5 it was discussed how Chinese embassies have had an important role in Kenyan and African conservation engagement, both in terms of the challenges they present

in limiting the scope of Chinese activities in conservation in Kenya, but also as an enabler, legitimiser and partner in activity. In the case of China House, the organisation encountered restrictions or issues on activity from the Chinese embassy in Kenya. The Chinese embassy was understood to be disapproving of the organisation's approach and concerned that it projects an unfavourable and negative image of China. The notion of Chinese embassies seeking to control or 'police' Chinese populations and organisations in countries outside of China has been more widely addressed in media and literature. Gu *et al.* (2016) argue that Chinese embassies have become important vehicles for maintaining control of Chinese companies operating in Africa. As such, it could be contended that conservation is not dissimilar from other forms of Chinese 'non-state' engagement in that the Chinese state attempts to oversee it with a view to protecting and promoting a 'positive' image of China.

In many ways, bottom-up efforts are playing an important role in Chinese conservation diplomacy. Chinese non-profit actors are seemingly pursuing their own agendas (such as the examples of China House and the Mara Conservation Fund), where engagement is about establishing tangible impacts for and cooperation in Kenyan and African conservation. Whilst such engagement is not necessarily centred on improving image, it might be a by-product. In the previous chapter it was shown that Chinese engagement through educational, volunteering and tourism has, in some cases, challenged cautious or negative perceptions of Chinese attitudes towards wildlife. It was argued that the more negative perceptions held by some Kenyan actors had been changed through engagement with Chinese non-profits, volunteers or students. The ways in which such Chinese engagement is approached through supporting existing initiatives and through reciprocal learning, upholds characteristics of more 'horizontal' solidarity and reciprocity, without exercising 'moral authority'. As such, initial caution had given way to recognition of value and benefit of Chinese engagement. The idea that Chinese volunteer engagement in Africa might help to offset negative ideas and actions linked to China is raised in a podcast interview comparing Chinese and Western volunteer engagement in development projects, that was hosted by China Global South Project (China Global South Project 2013) - a non-profit, multimedia organisation registered in the United States and dedicated to exploring Chinese engagement in Africa) (China Global South Project 2024).

The role of Chinese non-state actors in African conservation engagement is somewhat characteristic of how Chinese volunteers and tourists have been discussed in wider literature on Chinese soft power and diplomacy. From the early 2000s, the process of sending volunteers abroad was part and parcel of the Chinese 'Going Out' strategy and soft power politics (Ceccagno and Graziani 2016). As such, Chinese volunteers are conceptualised as

'goodwill ambassadors' and tools for enhancing China's public appeal (ibid.). In a similar way, Chinese tourists are 'ambassadors' for China and exporting Chinese culture, political values and foreign policy (Chen and Duggan 2016). Whilst these forms of engagement are not necessarily driven by Chinese state activity, such as the engagement of China House, cooperation through people-to-people exchange between Chinese and Kenyan and African actors at this level may contribute to improving image and challenging prejudice, which inadvertently supports wider Chinese state visions of foreign engagement and diplomacy.

Chinese non-profit and INGO engagement in Kenyan and African conservation further builds on and presents a new angle to existing debates on Chinese diplomacy and specifically conservation diplomacy, which has received limited academic interrogation. Chinese engagement as conservation diplomacy can be understood as a means of supporting and cooperating on African conservation effort through policy, raising awareness or in provision of resources and people-to-people exchange, in turn facilitating the opportunity to develop and improve China-Kenya and Africa relations. Chinese non-profit and INGO actors can be seen to be contributing to Chinese efforts in African conservation engagement and playing a part in China's diplomacy. Chinese state diplomatic interests are shown to be important in understanding Chinese conservation engagement and that such engagement can be understood as a form of conservation diplomacy and soft power, focused on China's international image and being seen as a responsible actor on global stage. As such, Chinese engagement in African conservation may provide opportunities for 'nation branding' and generating favourable attitudes towards China and Chinese actors (Chan 2016). As the central focus of this research, it is found that non-profit actors and activity can be (to some extent) influenced and 'managed' by the state and become a channel for improving Chinese image and diplomacy. At the same time, Chinese non-profit actors are still able to carve out their own agendas and might be a source of 'genuine' cooperation seeking to have meaningful impact in conservation.

Even though linking engagement to conservation diplomacy somewhat emphasises state interests, diplomacy relies on some kind of reciprocity that requires input from two sides to be effective. This two-way process of reciprocity has been recognised as a key component in diplomacy scholarship (Lagerkvist 2009; Lähdesmäki and Čeginskis 2022). As we saw in the previous chapter, Kenyan actors have been able to pursue their own agendas and achieve desired outcomes through such Chinese engagement, and as such, the benefits are not China's alone. The significance of this is that conservation becomes a realm in which both the interests of Chinese and African are negotiated.

The dynamics at play as part of Chinese non-profit engagement reinforce the contention that Chinese involvement in conservation is not an isolated activity or strategy but instead connects to broader Chinese societal and economic ambitions. This further supports the arguments presented by Zhu (2022) that highlight how, in China and within Chinese state policy, environmental concerns are not necessarily in opposition to addressing wider social and economic goals. More broadly, this reinforces the idea that a Chinese approach to the environment is shaped by an alternative cultural and political context, where the divide between humans and nature does not exist. Once again, these arguments are significant for the context of Chinese engagement in Kenyan and wider African conservation in helping to both better understand state-level and top-down engagement, but also non-profit and bottom-up engagement. This contributes to the contention that Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation is somewhat differentiated from Western approaches and might be manifesting as conservation with 'Chinese characteristics'.

In examining both Chinese non-profit and wider engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, it can be argued that conservation diplomacy provides key analytical utility in this context. The understandings developed in this research contribute to building on existing literature, in particular the ideas developed by Yeh *et al.* (2021) in their work on U.S.-China conservation diplomacy. The case of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation demonstrates how conservation is an issue through which to build diplomatic relations, generate good will, whilst also exerting Chinese state influence. This research further evolves understandings developed by Yeh *et al.* in introducing how the multi-scalar nature of engagement, through the multiplicity of Chinese (and non-Chinese) actors involved, contributes to Chinese 'soft power' and winning favour amongst African actors. In many ways this echoes arguments in relation to China's environmental and 'Panda' diplomacy around soft power and positively influencing non-Chinese attitudes towards China (Gamso 2019; Xie 2022; Yang and Lin 2022). As emphasised in the findings, improving Chinese image and helping to compensate for more 'negatively'-perceived Chinese activities in Africa is often framed as an important contributor to China's engagement in Kenyan and African conservation effort. Conservation diplomacy can also be understood as a vehicle through which China can exert influence, and help in furthering strategic ambitions linked to China's 'green' strategies, 'Going Out' and the BRI. In addition, conservation diplomacy not only provides a lens for the unexamined context of China-Kenya conservation engagement, but it also explores the dynamics between nations of the 'Global South'. At the same time, it has been critical to highlight the role that non-Chinese actors, specifically 'Northern' actors through INGOs, play in contributing to China's conservation diplomacy. Finally, it is the specific focus on non-profit engagement, the different types of actors involved (Chinese and non-Chinese actors) and

dynamics at play (top-down and bottom-up engagement), as well as how the dynamics of such engagement can be shaped by other Chinese actors, that is especially important for better understanding the complexity of Chinese engagement, and as such, the complex and multi-scalar nature of conservation diplomacy.

8. Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the diverse range of actors and activities connected to Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation can be understood in relation to wider China-Africa relations. In doing this, the chapter has made important contributions to broader debates within international relations. Specifically, the chapter uses the idealised framework of 'South-South cooperation' to assess the nature and outcomes of the engagement. It recognises the importance of Kenyan agency as part of wider China-Africa relations, whilst also emphasising the on-going significance of 'Northern' actors as part of such relations and raises the possibility of a 'triangulation' of cooperation between partners of the 'North' and 'South'. It further highlights the importance of Chinese state interests in driving and shaping conservation engagement, and demonstrates the value of the idea of conservation diplomacy in better understanding these dynamics.

In the first section, the idea of 'South-South cooperation' was used to assess Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation. A key line of argument was that Chinese conservation engagement might be more cooperative than suggested by analyses of other domains of China-Africa relations. Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservations is often marked by reciprocal learning and more 'mutual' relations. These dynamics are significant in that such interactions are not just one-way, whereby Chinese actors are 'providing' services or resources and Kenyan actors are 'benefitting'. Greater reciprocity within relations somewhat diverges from the 'provider-recipient/beneficiary' dynamic associated with more traditional Western engagement in Africa, and in African conservation (Mawdsley 2012). As such, it was found that there exists an important role for Kenyan agency in setting agendas, priorities and approaches as part of conservation activity, at both the Kenyan state and non-state levels. Kenyan actors have therefore been active agents and shapers in engagement and Chinese actors have had to be 'invited' or 'let in' to engage. In turn, it is argued that these more 'equal' and reciprocal 'win-win' dynamics of engagement cohere to some extent with the ideals of 'South-South cooperation' as explained and interpreted by the Chinese state and global institutions (DeHart 2012; Mohan 2015).

The second section argued that while Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation in some ways reflects the ideals of 'South-South cooperation', this framing is disrupted or develops a new dimension through the involvement of Western actors in the form of INGOs. This research has highlighted the prominence of 'Western'-founded INGOs in Kenyan and African conservation. The presence of INGOs as part of Chinese engagement indicates that there is greater complexity to the 'China-Africa' relations binary in this context of conservation. One suggestion is that there might indeed be some degree of 'triangulation' of cooperation taking shape between Western INGOs and Chinese and African actors. In many ways, 'triangular' cooperation might enable each set of actors to leverage the benefits of working with other sets of actors, whether it be network, resource or expertise – as shown in the case of the work between China House and HSI. More broadly, the involvement of Western INGOs in Chinese engagement in African conservation could be seen as part of socialising Chinese actors in 'Western' values and also in seeking to shape and maintain control within international conservation agendas. A further interpretation is that INGOs are purposefully being 'let in' or relied upon to help deliver Chinese engagement in African conservation, with the added intention that Chinese actors can influence INGO agendas to incorporate and help advance Chinese strategic interests, such as the BRI and China's 'green' agenda. As such, INGO involvement is significant in that it presents a more multi-polar dimension to China's 'Going Out' and 'South-South cooperation'.

The final section argued that Chinese engagement in conservation can in part be explained by and linked to Chinese state visions and wider Chinese diplomacy. Building on the arguments presented by Zhu (2022), it is argued that in China and within Chinese state policy, environmental concerns are not necessarily perceived to be in conflict with addressing China's wider societal and economic ambitions and that a Chinese approach to the environment is determined by a different cultural and political context. As such, a key contention is that Chinese engagement can be seen as a form of conservation diplomacy, with the Chinese state seeking to improve and promote its image, not just in the realm of China-Africa relations but on the wider global stage. The Chinese state is a key driver of this, but non-profit actors also play an important role in reinforcing the state's direction and improving China's image. However, it is also clear that non-profit actors are to some extent able to pursue their own agendas and are seen as (possibly) more focused on establishing genuine cooperation and tangible outcomes. In this way, Chinese non-profit and broader Chinese engagement Kenyan and African conservation can be usefully understood in terms of conservation diplomacy. This not only highlights the role of Chinese state interests and influence but also recognises the importance of relationship-building, and the necessarily cooperative and mutually beneficial

dimensions of the engagement in which Kenyan actors are still able to assert their own interests and agendas and derive valued outcomes for conservation. As such, the key contention is that conservation diplomacy is not only a vehicle for Chinese interest, but critically, conservation is a realm in which Chinese and African interests are negotiated. The idea of conservation diplomacy has provided key analytical utility in better understanding Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan and wider Africa conservation, whilst at the same time, the findings provide key contributions to evolving the idea of conservation diplomacy, demonstrating the complex and multi-scalar nature of such diplomatic effort.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

1. Introduction

The concluding chapter of this thesis draws together the key findings and implications of this study, and proposes how these point to potential future directions for research. The chapter opens by briefly revisiting the initial research context and questions to set the scene for understanding the importance of the findings. The sections that follow are organised around the key findings and implications of the thesis, and future directions for research. In terms of key findings, the first contention is that Chinese-led non-profit engagement is nascent and involves a diverse set of actors and often hybrid forms of activity. The second contention is that perceptions of Chinese engagement are diverse and entangled with wider dynamics of Chinese and 'foreign' engagement. Finally, it is argued that Chinese non-profit conservation engagement is shaped both by Chinese state interests and African agency.

The chapter continues to outline the findings and how they develop understandings of African conservation and China-Africa relations. The research has examined Chinese non-profit actors as 'new' sets of partners for conservation engagement in Kenya. At the same time, it has shown how Chinese engagement is also incorporated into global conservation efforts through its connection with INGOs, potentially making it less distinct. Whilst completely new ideas and practices are not necessarily being introduced as part of Chinese conservation engagement, there are ways in which it is being seen to introduce a potentially new, more balanced and cooperative set of power relations between international and Kenyan conservation actors. The implications for China-Africa relations are also multi-faceted. The presence of Kenyan agency in conservation engagement is significant in contributing to the mounting scholarship that seeks to better understand African agency in China-Africa relations (Corkin 2013; Mohan and Lampert 2013, 2015; Gadzala 2015; Lopes 2016). Whilst the role of Kenyan agency and the nature of more reciprocal dynamics of engagement somewhat align to the ideals of 'South-South cooperation' (DeHart 2012; Mohan 2015), such dynamics are once again complicated by the role of 'Western' INGOs in the engagement. Lastly, Chinese state interests and diplomacy can help to explain Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation. Indeed the idea of conservation diplomacy can be seen as a key vehicle for Chinese diplomatic efforts and providing a gateway for strengthening China-Africa relations.

The chapter concludes in proposing new directions for research. The entanglement of Chinese non-profit engagement with other Chinese and non-Chinese actors can be further developed in exploring these dynamics beyond Africa and the realm of conservation. Additionally, the shifting dynamics of Chinese engagement in Africa provide further scope for assessing to what extent a Chinese 'withdrawal' from Africa or a repivoting towards the BRI '2.0' might be reshaping engagement. To finish, it is argued that the analytical lens of conservation diplomacy has the potential to become an expanding field for examining how other states and actors can pursue diplomatic interest, using conservation engagement as a key vehicle for diplomacy.

2. Research context and questions

This research has operated at the intersection of fields of knowledge and debates relating to Chinese non-profit actors and activity, wildlife conservation and China-Africa relations. It is the emergent and highly understudied phenomenon of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation that has been at the centre of this thesis. This area of focus links into the wider field of China-Africa relations debates. As part of these debates, there has been great focus on explicitly political and economic engagement, such as through the Chinese state and private companies, with far less examination of Chinese non-profit actors and activity. Chinese non-profit actors and activities seeking to support African conservation effort is creating a new area of China-Africa cooperation that is potentially quite different from the primarily economic and political realms dominated by state and for-profit actors. Consequently, an examination of Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation could reveal new dynamics at work in China-Africa relations and potentially reshape how these relations are perceived and understood.

The aim of this research has been to make a contribution to the expanding knowledge surrounding Chinese non-profit engagement in Africa, with a specific focus on conservation in Kenya. Its core objectives have been to explore the nature of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation and to assess its implications for both Kenyan conservation and wider China-Africa relations. Guided by key literatures, a theoretical underpinning that engages with international relations thinking, and a constructivist methodological approach, this thesis has addressed four main research questions:

- **How and to what extent are Chinese non-profit actors engaging in Kenyan conservation?**
- **What factors are driving Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation?**
- **What are the implications of Chinese non-profit engagement for Kenyan conservation?**
- **How is Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation shaped by and potentially re-shaping wider China-Africa relations?**

3. Key research findings

3.1 Chinese-led non-profit engagement is nascent and involves a diverse set of actors and often hybrid forms of activity

The relatively recent phenomenon of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation has emerged from and been shaped by growing interest in wildlife and conservation in China, set against the backdrop of a Chinese NGO landscape that is still establishing itself and navigating the complexities of the Chinese social and political landscape. To date, Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation has primarily centred on the illegal wildlife trade and addressing Chinese consumer demand, with a growing focus on broader conservation and wildlife advocacy. As part of examining such engagement, it has been important to differentiate between the different types of actors and dynamics involved. The first key distinction is within the realm of Chinese non-profit activity - between Chinese-led non-profit actors, and Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs. It became clear through the research that linkages to the state and for-profit activity were also important factors that needed to be considered.

The research has found that Chinese-led non-profit engagement in Kenya is embryonic and the number of Chinese-led non-profit actors remains limited, with few autonomous 'Chinese' conservation projects. These non-profit actors are primarily comprised of small-scale, non-profit organisations (China House and the Mara Conservation Fund), larger China-based NGOs (such as The Paradise Foundation) and organised student and volunteering linked to

youth groups, schools and universities that are channelled to engage with non-profits such as the Mara Conservation Fund. Chinese-led non-profit activity has a strong focus on educating and raising awareness amongst Chinese audiences, specifically younger generations, about the illegal wildlife trade and broader conservation advocacy. Such activity takes place both in China and through Chinese students, volunteers and researchers participating in conservation related activities in Kenya. China House is considered one of the most established and well-known Chinese-led non-profit actors engaging directly in Kenya and Africa. Founded and formerly based in Kenya but now operating from China, the organisation facilitates Chinese student research and volunteering engagement in Africa and beyond, both connected to conservation and wider 'development' related activities. In terms of engagement from Chinese-led non-profit actors based in China, whilst some activity exists, such as the 'African Ranger Awards' run by philanthropically-founded The Paradise Foundation, the focus on Kenyan conservation and African wildlife more broadly is generally indirect. Instead, African wildlife forms a relatively small part of the globally focused activity undertaken by these organisations. This activity tends to adopt a species-led focus, ranging from elephants, to big cats, pangolins, and so on, rather than a country-led focus.

Although Chinese-led non-profit engagement is nascent in nature, it is potentially differentiated from more traditional, mainstream engagement coming from the 'West' in that its leading emphasis is on the education and engagement of Chinese audiences in wildlife advocacy and conservation efforts. In this way, 'conservation' itself is not an isolated strategy and motivation for engagement, as it could also be seen to link to broader Chinese ambitions in China-Africa relationship building – especially in the case of activities carried out by China House. This is achieved through working with Kenyan actors to support existing Kenyan conservation priorities. As such, its purpose and approach can be differentiated from more established 'foreign' or 'Western' forms of engagement that have been characterised by leading and shaping on-the-ground conservation programmes and fund-raising.

This study has shown that to understand Chinese non-profit engagement, it is important to examine its relationship with other actors and forms of activity, in particular, non-Chinese conservation actors. A significant component of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation is activity that is initiated or led by INGOs. INGOs, such as WildAid, WWF, IFAW and AWF, have been critical actors and key vehicles for supporting, initiating and leading 'Chinese' non-profit and wider Chinese engagement in conservation. INGOs have also been an important influence in inspiring increased Chinese interest in and engagement with Kenyan and African conservation. The degree of involvement of INGOs as part of Chinese non-profit engagement varies, operating across different structures, geographies and teams, which in

turn influence the power relations between INGOs and Chinese actors.

These categories of Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs have primarily been differentiated as INGOs *without* a China office and INGOs *with* a China office. The dynamic of engagement being initiated or led by INGOs *without* a China office demonstrates the 'weakest' form of Chinese agency. This is where INGO teams outside of China lead on engaging Chinese actors in Kenyan and African conservation activity. In this case, the balance of power is with the INGOs rather than Chinese actors. The engagement led by Africa-based INGO AWF is an example of this dynamic. The AWF leads a strategic stream of work on the engagement of Chinese audiences and actors in Kenyan and African conservation, with initiatives ranging from seeking opportunities to develop relations with Chinese businesses in Africa to help mitigate against the negative impacts of construction projects, to delivering wildlife advocacy campaigns in China targeting youth and running forums on China-Africa cultural and economic exchange in relation to conservation.

In the case of Chinese non-profit engagement initiated or led by INGOs *with* a China office, such engagement manifests with a higher degree of Chinese agency. This form of engagement is a hybrid of 'Western' INGO activity being led by China-based teams, where there is potential for a meeting of 'Western' with 'Chinese' conservation approaches and agendas. Whilst engagement is delivered by China-based teams, it is ultimately an INGO that is initiating and leading the activity, making the engagement less distinctly 'Chinese'. To a great extent, this engagement mirrors that of INGO activity across the world and is characterised by big-budget celebrity-endorsed campaigns, engagement events, coordination of multi-stakeholder forums in China and Africa, as well as working with Chinese state and for-profit actors on campaigns and initiatives. Led by their China offices, the likes of WildAid, WWF and IFAW lead with high-profile campaigns to drive awareness of the illegal wildlife trade and address Chinese consumption, whilst promoting wildlife advocacy - a key example being WildAid's 2017 'Kung Fu Pangolin' campaign featuring actor Jackie Chan.

Whilst not a category of engagement itself, but rather a link between INGO and Chinese-led non-profit actors, it is important to recognise the more balanced and equal power dynamics at play in the partnerships and cooperation between these sets of actors. This type of engagement demonstrates the greatest degree of Chinese agency, where INGOs are supporting Chinese-led activity. The collaboration between the Chinese-led non-profit China House and the INGO HSI provided a key example of this dynamic. In this case, China House was supported by HSI to launch the 'Engaging Chinese communities in Africa on wildlife conservation' project. China House led the project, identifying and communicating with the

diaspora, and HSI provided the financial support.

In examining Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation, it found to link to not only INGOs but also Chinese state and for-profit actors. The influence of the Chinese state is significant because of how it can facilitate non-profit activity, not least by directly engaging in conservation activity and thereby signalling that conservation is an appropriate area for Chinese actors to operate. Working within boundaries of political sensitivity and acceptability is important and often focused on ensuring 'China' is represented in a positive way. In interviews, there was specific mention of a "top-down approach" - some form of state agenda setting for other actors - and a need to "collaborate with government". This highlights the influence of the political climate in terms of the Chinese state mandating approaches and 'gatekeeping' in relation to wanting to maintain a level of control and shape activities. This in turn may create limitations for organisational autonomy, potentially constraining what non-profit actors can do.

There has been considerable willingness to engage the Chinese state from Chinese non-profit actors, in part because the state seeks to oversee activities, but also because engagement with the state can open doors and legitimise activity. In the case of China House, it was demonstrated how the Chinese state (via Chinese embassies) can influence and 'police' Chinese non-profit activity, which had the effect of limiting certain campaigning activities in Kenya. At the same time, it was explained how earning the support from the Tanzanian Chinese embassy was an effective enabler and legitimiser for China House's activities. The relationship with the state made it easier for China House to engage Chinese businesses operating in Tanzania to participate in their advocacy work. The notion of partnering with the Chinese state to aid in furthering conservation objectives is also evidenced in INGO activity, including the likes of WildAid, WWF or AWF. An example of this included WildAid China's partnership with the state in delivering demand-reduction advertising campaigns at China's key ports of entry. The Chinese state also participates in African conservation engagement in its own right, creating a space for other Chinese actors to enter and signalling it as an appropriate area for them to engage in. This intervention manifests through speeches and policy announcements in relation to the illegal wildlife trade, state-to-state forums, as well as material intervention through provision of finance and equipment to Kenyan conservation and in law and enforcement measures. As a result, the Chinese state holds important influence when it comes to Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation.

Chinese non-profit conservation engagement in Kenya was also found to link to the Chinese for-profit sector. This encompasses engagement from large multinationals such as Tencent,

to small-scale tour operators operating either in China or in Kenya and wider Africa. Chinese-led non-profit actors have actively sought to work with Chinese for-profit actors. For example, with the support of the INGO HSI, China House sought to engage with Chinese businesses operating in Africa to drive advocacy for wildlife to address consumption of illegal wildlife products. China-based INGOs have also worked with Chinese businesses to deliver initiatives directed at tackling the illegal wildlife trade. To illustrate, in 2015, the INGOs TNC and IFAW jointly worked with the KWS to host Chinese representatives from Tencent and share knowledge of Kenyan wildlife. Tencent would then use their learnings to communicate to Chinese audiences not to consume ivory products. Another way in which Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation connects to for-profit activity is through Chinese businesses, such as tour operators, facilitating Chinese volunteering opportunities. With a growing presence of Chinese-led, Kenya-based tour operators and services, these for-profit actors have become an important element in facilitating Chinese volunteering, voluntourism and wider tourism in Kenyan conservation. As such, these connections and relationships between non-profit and for-profit actors revealed that there is a complex and sometimes interdependent set of dynamics at play in Chinese engagement in Kenyan and African conservation, further demonstrating its hybrid nature.

A key contention of this thesis is therefore that there are a diverse set of actors involved in Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation. Chinese non-profit engagement is complex and entangled with both wider Chinese and non-Chinese actors, resulting in the hybrid nature of the activity that results. It is found that Chinese non-profit engagement can be linked to, supported and led by a wider set of actors, which in turn connect it to more complex dynamics of Chinese diplomatic and corporate interest, as well as international engagement and agendas. To some extent, the involvement of INGOs as part of Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation may challenge the extent to which engagement is distinctly 'Chinese'. At the same time, the need to be close to or align with the Chinese state potentially demonstrates how conservation engagement might be taking shape with 'Chinese characteristics'. This has key implications for understanding the outcomes in terms of conservation and China-Africa relations, as will be addressed in greater detail as the chapter progresses.

3.2 Perceptions of Chinese engagement are diverse and entangled with wider dynamics of Chinese and ‘foreign’ engagement

An important finding of this research is that Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement in relation to conservation are diverse. This brings more range and depth of understanding to discussions, specifically with regard to more positive interpretations of China’s role in conservation and addressing the illegal wildlife trade. Reporting in Western media and from INGOs has often addressed and interpreted the Chinese relationship with wildlife in a negative light (Kelly 2019; Margulies, Wong, and Duffy 2019; Li 2020; Luo and Gao 2022). The research found that Kenyan perceptions of Chinese conservation engagement are more diverse than this reporting suggests, and range across those that see this engagement as limited, those that see it as problematic, and those that see it as positive.

The perception that Chinese engagement is limited is partly derived from some Kenyans having little awareness of it. Few Kenyan participants had direct experience of engaging with Chinese actors in conservation efforts – including Chinese non-profit, for-profit and state actors. This can in part be explained by the nascent nature of Chinese engagement in conservation. Even some Kenyan interview participants who are aware of Chinese conservation engagement consider it to have limited significance and impact, with a lack of tangible outcomes for the illegal wildlife trade and conservation more broadly. This was specifically related to Chinese-led wildlife advocacy activities being unable to effectively reach Chinese audiences where the greatest impact could be made in terms of addressing wildlife consumption, such as focusing on engaging Chinese youth versus construction workers. More broadly, it was argued that Chinese engagement to address the illegal wildlife trade could be considered somewhat redundant because the issue of elephant poaching, in particular, had already been tackled effectively by the Kenyan state. Finally, Chinese conservation engagement was seen to have limited impact by virtue of comparison with longer standing and much more active and visible ‘Western’ and broader international conservation engagement.

The framing of Chinese engagement as problematic reflects a range of Kenyan attitudes from caution and wariness through to explicit hostility. These are derived from a lack of trust towards Chinese actors in relation to wildlife and a critical questioning of Chinese motives for engagement linked to concerns about broader Chinese economic and political activity in Africa. However, they were also related to Kenyan experiences of wider foreign engagement and the influence of colonial legacy and Western dominance in conservation. The first way in which Chinese engagement is acknowledged as problematic is in the context of wildlife,

specifically the negative ideas and stereotyping in relation to the Chinese association with the illegal wildlife trade and the Chinese public's relationship with wildlife. The Chinese link to the illegal wildlife trade was raised in the context of demand and consumption, but also in terms of criminal networks and activity that proliferate around it. This discussion topic often linked to broader perceptions of 'Chinese' attitudes towards wildlife, specifically the understanding that Chinese people do not care about wildlife and consume 'unusual' animal products.

The perception that Chinese conservation engagement is problematic is also linked to concerns relating to broader Chinese economic and political activity, and subsequent questioning of Chinese motives to engage. These broader economic and political concerns include matters such as the increasing presence of Chinese businesses and workforces in Kenya and contentions around large-scale Chinese infrastructure projects such as the Standard Gauge Railway. Additionally, Chinese motives to engage in conservation were seen to link to more strategic engagement in Africa, as a means of exercising diplomacy and to improve China's image in response to negativity surrounding the illegal wildlife trade and other contentious areas of Chinese engagement in Africa.

The perception that Chinese engagement is problematic was also found to be entangled with legacies of colonial experience and contemporary 'Western' influence in conservation. There are two ways in which this manifests. In the first instance, it was found that some Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement are informed by the colonial and postcolonial conservation interventions of 'Western' actors. It is shown how caution and questioning of Chinese activity and China as a 'new' foreign actor can in part be attributed to experiences of an imbalance of power between 'Kenyan' and 'Western' actors linked to colonial ideology and relationships. The role of foreign actors in constructing and continuing to shape and dominate conservation to the benefit of foreigners - whether it be through provision of funding, shaping approaches to conservation (such as its continued militarisation), as well as for tourism - were all important points of discussion raised by Kenyan participants. The perceived outcomes of this were a continued separation of humans and nature, and a prioritisation of conservation over local people. These experiences of historical and contemporary Western intervention set a standard against which Chinese engagement was interpreted, both in conservation and beyond.

It was also suggested that negative Kenyan attitudes to Chinese conservation engagement could be attributed to the acceptance of negative 'Western' ideas about Chinese engagement in Africa. There is a particular sense of frustration amongst Chinese actors, both in online reporting and as participants, at the lack of trust and often hostility from both Western and

Kenyan actors. In many ways, Chinese conservation engagement is occurring in a landscape that has been characterised by high levels of Western and INGO involvement and influence, and in some cases, this experience and influence has come to impact, create obstacles, and potentially limit the scope for Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation.

Finally, the Kenyan perception of Chinese engagement as positive is based on the idea or expectation that Chinese engagement can have positive impacts for Kenyan conservation. This is perhaps one of the most novel and significant arguments in terms of contributing new understanding of the Chinese relationship with African wildlife and conservation. Kenyan perceptions that are positive present a counter argument to existing debates whereby much academic, international media and NGO discussion has focused on the challenges that Chinese demand and activity present to wildlife conservation (Wasserman 2013; Sullivan and Cheng 2018; Wasserman and Morales 2018; Kelly 2019; Margulies, Wong, and Duffy 2019; Li 2020; Luo and Gao 2022), and to some extent, some of the more critical literature on China's wider engagement in Africa (Manning 2006; Tull 2006; Ampiah and Naidu 2008; Naim 2009; Bülow and Widenborg 2013; Asante 2018). Positivity ranged from passive welcoming of Chinese engagement – the basic openness to the idea that there can be real benefits for Kenyan conservation – to greater invitation and steering of activity, where Kenyan actors have an active role in influencing the engagement. It was found that these perceptions extended across different types of Kenyan actors and related to different forms of Chinese engagement. These ranged from support for non-profit conservation advocacy initiatives, to skills and knowledge sharing, research funding, political cooperation on the illegal wildlife trade, and conservation tourism.

Passive welcoming of Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation manifested in relation to Chinese non-profit engagement, Chinese volunteering and tourism, and in particular to the Chinese state's ban on the ivory trade. Chinese investment and knowledge-sharing around conservation were also particularly welcomed. More active invitation and steering of Chinese engagement by Kenyan actors reflected the emergence of explicit efforts in cooperation and alliance building, and to improve cross-cultural understanding. These efforts are significant because of the degree of Kenyan agency at play, with Kenyan invitation and steering of Chinese engagement at the state level, the encouragement of Chinese visitors to drive revenue to conservation, and the push to engage Chinese actors and audiences in wildlife advocacy by Kenyan non-profit actors. It was shown how Kenyan NGOs, such as ANAW and Wildlife Direct (a Kenyan-U.S. NGO), have reached out to and worked alongside Chinese actors in different ways and how these Kenyan NGOs are defining the focus for conservation efforts, determining how they want to work with Chinese actors to address challenges in

conservation. It is argued that the way in which such Chinese engagement is taking place can be seen as more cooperative and balanced in nature compared to 'Western' engagement, introducing a new more humble and 'mutual' dynamic to conservation. As such, Chinese actors and audiences are also being drawn into Kenyan conservation, with benefits and mutual learning being delivered on both the Kenyan and Chinese sides of the relationships that emerge.

3.3 Chinese non-profit conservation engagement is shaped both by Chinese state interests and African agency

In the previous section it was shown how Kenyan perceptions of Chinese conservation engagement are diverse and linked to understandings of wider China-Africa relations and other forms of international engagement. It was also explained how more positive perceptions of Chinese engagement involve accounts of Kenyan agency. In this context, there is potential for Chinese non-profit and wider engagement in conservation to be seen as bringing a more cooperative, balanced dynamic to China-Africa relations. To better understand these dynamics around balance and agency, this thesis has used the analytical framework provided by ideas of 'South-South cooperation'. A key contention of this thesis is that Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation to some extent coheres with the 'ideals' of 'South-South cooperation', whilst also being strongly influenced by Chinese state interests.

In exploring the perceptions of Kenyan actors towards Chinese conservation engagement, and the nature of these dynamics, it was found that there is seen to be an important role for Kenyan agency in establishing the agendas and priorities for engagement. There is recognition of the benefits that engagement with Chinese actors can bring, including material resources, revenue, cooperation on policy, knowledge-sharing and alliance building. The importance of Kenyan agency is demonstrated by the examples of engagement involving Kenyan NGOs, such as ANAW's relationship with China House and Wildlife Direct's engagement with Chinese audiences. It was also seen to manifest in relation to state-to-state interactions involving the KWS and in terms of the active encouragement of more Chinese visitors and tourists, supporting wildlife tourism and in turn conservation advocacy. In these scenarios, it was shown how Kenyan actors are seen to be determining how they want to work with Chinese actors, outlining where efforts should be focused, whilst also proactively seeking out engagement with Chinese actors and audiences. In many ways, Kenyan actors have been active agents and shapers in engagement and Chinese actors have had to be 'invited' or 'let in' to engage.

A key argument was that Chinese conservation engagement in Kenya coheres to some extent with the ideals of 'South-South cooperation' as advanced by the Chinese state and global institutions (DeHart 2012; Mohan 2015). One of the dynamics that indicates that China-Kenya relations in conservation might be more balanced is that the cooperation has a reciprocal dimension, with a two-way dynamic between 'provider' and 'recipients/beneficiaries'. In some cases, Chinese actors are seen to be 'providing' resources and Kenyan actors are 'benefitting'. For example, this can be seen in how China House supplied and installed 'Lion Lights' to support human-wildlife conflict reduction initiatives undertaken by ANAW, or how the Chinese state provided equipment to the KWS for ranger patrols. However, at the same time a key focus of Chinese engagement has involved Kenyan and African actors 'educating' Chinese actors (non-profits, businesses and wider audiences) about the illegal wildlife trade and conservation. This education of Chinese audiences has been both at the request of Chinese actors and proactively pursued by Kenyan and African actors. These dynamics are significant in that it sees a reversal in the established roles of foreign 'provider' and Kenyan 'recipient/beneficiary'. The introduction of these new more humble and 'mutual' dynamics in conservation could be seen to challenge the established 'provider-recipient/beneficiary' dynamics associated with Western engagement (Mawdsley 2012).

Whilst the dynamics of Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation somewhat cohere with the ideals of 'South-South cooperation', Chinese state interests were also found to be a key factor in driving and shaping interaction. It is argued that Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation can in part be explained by and linked to wider Chinese state and diplomatic interests, including being seen as a responsible citizen on the global stage and as part of China's economic and political ambitions in China-Africa relations. An important component of Chinese diplomatic interest is improving China's image and a means of wielding soft power (Ding 2008; Hartig 2013; Dugué-Nevers 2017), where soft power is the ability to shape the engagement of other actors through positive appeal (Nye 2011). Engagement in African conservation could be seen as an opportunity for the Chinese state to take action on 'softer' issues, whilst also enlisting the power of society (Li and Rønning 2013) through people-to-people exchanges, Chinese visitors and tourism, and non-profit organisations. As such, the Chinese state's engagement in conservation, and its encouragement of other Chinese actors to follow suit, becomes a tool of diplomacy, building trust and improving relations.

Chinese efforts in conservation are seen as a way for the Chinese state to project a positive image and to compensate for more negative perceptions about China's activities overseas. In particular, this includes perceptions linked to the illegal wildlife trade and the role of Chinese

consumption and criminal activity surrounding this. It was also connected to concerns about China's economic and political "global ambitions" and activities, specifically in terms of contentions linked to Chinese infrastructure projects in Africa. The importance of Chinese diplomatic interests and image can be seen particularly clearly in relation to BRI which is, after all, China's headline international project, and in particular, the evolving vision for delivering a 'green' BRI. The focus on conservation and the environment more broadly is in part linked to global efforts to address climate change, instigating the adoption of 'green' rhetoric in China. At the same time, this connects to wider Chinese strategic ambitions and state policies of 'sustainable China', 'harmonious society' and 'ecological civilisation'. This 'green' rhetoric was clearly evidenced in the language and framing of Chinese engagement in African conservation by a number of Chinese interview participants and online sources, from Chinese-led non-profit organisations, businesses, the state and INGOs. The research contends that China's 'green' strategy becomes another vision that can be 'exported' as part of both the BRI and China 'Going Out', for which Chinese non-profit activity is an important vehicle. To a great extent, the link between Chinese conservation engagement in Africa and wider Chinese social and economic visions demonstrates that Chinese engagement in conservation is not an isolated activity or strategy. This may prove to be a potentially significant and defining distinction of Chinese engagement, aligning to Zhu's (2022) key argument that Chinese approaches to the environment are not based on a clear division between humans and nature. As such, from a Chinese perspective, concern for the environment is not necessarily in conflict with China's social and economic ambitions.

The intersection of 'ideals' of 'South-South cooperation' with Chinese state interests has potentially important implications for how we think about Chinese engagement in conservation, and specifically Chinese non-profit activity. This thesis asserts that there is a case for understanding Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation as part of the Chinese state's wider conservation diplomacy. The framing provided by Yeh *et al.* (2021) best describes conservation diplomacy - it is about a two-way dynamic of transnational communication efforts to coordinate a positive agenda for cooperation that builds trust and provides opportunity to improve relations. Whilst Chinese conservation diplomacy had not been explicitly explored in the context of China-Africa relations, there has been much examination of other forms of Chinese diplomacy in relation to China's outbound engagement efforts. In particular, environmental diplomacy has been key in framing China's influence and engagements in the context of the environment and climate change (McBeath and Wang 2008; Yu 2008; Jackson 2020; Yu and Zhu 2020; Yasmin 2021). Chinese engagement on matters relating to wildlife, such as engaging on the illegal wildlife trade (Gamso 2019) and through Panda diplomacy (Yang and Lin 2022), have been discussed as vehicles for nurturing

more positive attitudes towards China. However, there has been no known exploration of this in the China-Africa context.

The literature on Chinese diplomacy tends to adopt a top-down framing and a focus on the direct engagements of the state. A key contention of this thesis is that Chinese non-profit actors might also be playing an important role in Chinese conservation diplomacy in Africa. Chinese non-profit actors, including non-profit organisations, Chinese volunteers, students, researchers, and to some degree INGOs, are shown to be important vehicles for people-to-people exchange and building alliances. Like other non-state actors, the role of Chinese celebrities and tourists are also seen to be important in eliciting positive appeal associated with soft power. To some extent, these efforts are driven by a top-down approach, where the Chinese state is encouraging 'positive' engagement from Chinese actors in conservation and in Africa. This includes both encouraging and running programmes for Chinese actors to volunteer in Africa, and also through the promotion of Chinese celebrity engagement in African conservation by Chinese state-owned media outlets. Efforts might also be bottom-up in the sense that some non-profit organisations and initiatives, such as those led by China House, appear to have been founded from individual initiative rather than state encouragement. Such Chinese non-profit efforts are characterised by a strong focus on the education of Chinese actors, Chinese volunteering and greater knowledge-sharing and alliance building. These actors and activities are still somewhat shaped by the need to be mindful of state sensitivities, or indeed might be influenced by Chinese state rhetoric and strategy, including ambitions for the BRI or sustainable China. At the same time, such Chinese actors could be seen to be seeking more meaningful outcomes for African conservation and China-Africa relations, in turn making such efforts more 'genuine'.

4. Implications for conservation and China-Africa relations

This research makes important contributions to expanding knowledge surrounding Chinese non-profit conservation engagement and implications both for Kenyan conservation and China-Africa relations. Indeed, this research has examined a 'new' set of Chinese partners and options for Kenyan conservation in the context of wider China-Africa relations.

The implications for conservation are mixed. In Chapter 6, it was shown how perceptions of Chinese engagement and how Chinese actors can contribute to conservation efforts are diverse. For some Kenyan participants, Chinese engagement was limited or had little impact,

while for others it was entangled with legacies of colonial experience and contemporary 'Western' influence. From one angle, Chinese engagement in conservation is not seen to be differentiated from wider 'foreign' or indeed 'Western' engagement. From another angle, some Kenyan attitudes to Chinese engagement were linked to negative 'Western' ideas about Chinese engagement in Africa. This in turn creates obstacles and limits the scope for Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation. Then finally, there was the Kenyan perception that Chinese engagement could have positive impacts for Kenyan conservation. The implications for conservation were a potentially more cooperative and balanced set of relations between Chinese and Kenyan actors, where the latter are seen to be determining the priorities and approach in conservation engagement with Chinese actors.

At the same time, it was found the dynamics of conservation engagement are complicated by the prominent role of 'Western' INGOs in initiating, leading or supporting Chinese non-profit activity. In Chapter 5 it was shown that even when such engagement is delivered by China-based teams, it is the INGO that ultimately drives the activity. This potentially makes the engagement less distinctly 'Chinese' and Chinese non-profit engagement could therefore be seen to be incorporated into the established 'norms' of globalised modes of conservation thinking and practice (Mak and Song 2018). The potential implication is that much of what is understood as 'Chinese non-profit engagement' may introduce little in the way of new ideas, approaches and practices that might change the nature of 'foreign' engagement in Kenyan conservation.

At the same time, whilst Chinese-led non-profit conservation engagement itself is nascent, it has been shown that its activities are somewhat different from established 'Western' engagement, particularly in terms of its focus on the education of Chinese audiences in supporting wildlife and conservation. To a great extent, Chinese non-profit engagement that is initiated or led by INGOs also remains focused on building awareness and advocacy amongst Chinese audiences. The implication of this for conservation is that Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan and African conservation is much more focused on driving behaviour change and developing more 'genuine' allyship amongst Chinese audiences, rather than seeking to determine and drive priorities for Kenyan and African conservation practice.

The engagement of Chinese non-profit actors in Kenyan conservation also presents a number of implications for China-Africa relations. As discussed in Chapter 7, the important role identified for Kenyan agency in shaping and even driving Chinese non-profit conservation engagement contributes to the growing scholarship seeking to recognise and better understand the nature and implications of African agency in China-Africa relations (Corkin

2013; Mohan and Lampert 2013, 2015; Gadzala 2015; Lopes 2016). Kenyan and Chinese perceptions that Chinese demand for illegal wildlife products is a problem, and that Chinese actors are in need of being 'educated' on the illegal wildlife trade and conservation, to some extent lessens the authority of Chinese actors as the 'experts'. This appears to encourage a more humble attitude on the part of Chinese partners, bringing a more cooperative, balanced dynamic to conservation engagement versus Western actors.

To some extent, the role of Kenyan agency in Chinese engagement in conservation, and the nature of the more reciprocal dynamics of engagement, were found to correspond with the ideals of 'South-South cooperation' (DeHart 2012; Mohan 2015). However, this is disrupted by the prominence of 'Western' INGOs in Chinese conservation engagement in Africa. One interpretation of the dynamics is that a degree of 'triangulation' of cooperation could be taking place between Western INGOs and Chinese and African conservation actors. This adds complexity and brings greater nuance to the binary of 'China-Africa' relations in the context of conservation engagement. The presence of 'Northern' actors in 'South-South cooperation' in China-Africa relations is recognised within the broader literature (Abdenur and Da Fonseca 2013; Piefer 2014; Mawdsley 2019; Farid and Li 2021), with 'Northern' actors assuming the role of intermediary (Farid and Li 2021) or using this form of cooperation to strategically engage with China (Abdenur and Da Fonseca 2013). Western INGO involvement in Chinese conservation in Africa might be seen to be part of socialising Chinese actors in 'Western' values while also seeking to maintain control of international conservation agendas. Alternatively, INGOs could be seen to be purposefully being incorporated into Chinese engagement in African conservation with the intention that Chinese actors can influence INGOs agendas to incorporate Chinese strategic interests and leverage INGOs as a vehicle for Chinese diplomacy.

Furthermore, it is asserted that seeing Chinese non-profit engagement in African conservation as part of the Chinese state's conservation diplomacy presents a new angle in existing debates on China-Africa relations. In this way, Chinese engagement or 'cooperation' in conservation can be linked to the desire of the Chinese state to build 'soft power' and win favour not only with African nations but also on the wider international stage, particularly in terms of wanting to be seen as a responsible global actor. As part of this conservation diplomacy, Chinese non-profit conservation activity becomes a key vehicle for Chinese diplomatic efforts. To be seen to be engaging in efforts to combat the illegal wildlife trade and support conservation in Kenya presents the opportunity to address negative connotations linked to demand for the illegal wildlife trade and wider activities associated with Chinese engagement in Kenya and Africa. Moreover, conservation engagement becomes a means of

alliance building, providing a potential gateway for strengthening China-Africa relations across many different levels of interaction.

This research has demonstrated the analytical utility of Yeh *et al.*'s (2021) framing of conservation diplomacy as a diplomatic tool and further contributed to its theoretical understanding, both as part of China-Africa engagement and broader international relations. Chinese engagement in Kenyan conservation demonstrates how conservation is an issue through which to build diplomatic relations, generate good will and exert influence – in this case, Chinese state influence. The research demonstrates the role of conservation diplomacy in contributing to Chinese 'soft power' and winning favour amongst African actors, as well as a vehicle to support China's broader strategic ambitions in Africa and on the global stage. Conservation diplomacy has also provided a lens for the unexplored case of China-Kenya conservation engagement, in addition to examining the dynamics between nations of the 'Global South'. Moreover, the focus on non-profit engagement and the many different types of actors involved and dynamics at play has demonstrated the complexity of Chinese engagement, and significantly, the multi-scalar and complex nature of conservation diplomacy.

5. Future directions for research

This study has provided new empirical data and analysis on the interactions and dynamics at play in Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation. The research has found that Chinese-led non-profit engagement is nascent and it involves a diverse set of actors and often hybrid forms of activity, linked to INGOs, the Chinese state and Chinese for-profit actors. Moreover, Kenyan perceptions of engagement are diverse and often entangled with wider dynamics of Chinese and 'foreign' engagement. This presents mixed implications for Kenyan conservation, in particular, the continued dominance of 'Western' actors in conservation thinking and practice, but also the introduction of potentially more balanced and cooperative relations. Furthermore, it was found that Chinese non-profit engagement is shaped by both African agency and Chinese state interests, which in turn has important implications for understandings in China-Africa relations debates. Firstly, in terms of Kenyan agency and how Kenyan actors are playing a key role in shaping the nature and outcomes of relations in conservation. Secondly, in how conservation diplomacy is a useful lens in which to explain the dynamic where both Chinese and Kenyan actors are pursuing their interests and finding

mutually beneficial ways to engage. This linked set of findings are significant in underpinning potential future directions for research.

As a first future direction, there is scope to further explore how Chinese non-profit conservation engagement is entangled with the activities of a range of Chinese and non-Chinese actors. This could include examining the dynamics in other areas of Chinese engagement in Africa, including around the environment more broadly. It could also include exploring Chinese conservation engagement in other countries in Africa and in regions beyond the continent. This would continue to build on the findings developed in this thesis in terms of how and to what extent the Chinese state and 'Western' actors might shape these engagements and with what effect. As part of this, there is the potential to further assess the degree to which such engagement might be distinctly 'Chinese'.

Another direction would be to explore Chinese engagement in African conservation in relation to the newer dynamics that might be at play in a post-global pandemic world and the apparent shifting nature of China's engagement in Africa (Cao 2019; Freeman and Tugendhat 2023; Wang *et al.* 2023). Much of the understanding developed as part of this research was formed in the pre-global pandemic context. The impact of travel restrictions and wider economic and social impacts posed by the pandemic will inevitably have resulted in a pause or reshaping of Chinese non-profit and wider engagement in African conservation. This is because much of the engagement identified as part of this research, especially Chinese-led activity, centered around education-based engagement, volunteering, tourism and face-to-face activity. Post-pandemic, it has taken China longer than many other countries to open up to global travel. Therefore, there is opportunity to examine if and how the dynamics of Chinese non-profit engagement have changed in Kenya and across Africa post-pandemic, specifically in terms of the diversity of actors involved and the way they interact.

This thesis has argued that Chinese state interests have been important in shaping Chinese non-profit engagement in the context of Kenyan conservation. In continuing the theme of newer dynamics, over the past 3-5 years the shifting nature of China-Africa relations has been a key debate. China's slowing economy, coupled with its decreasing investment and apparent withdrawal from Africa, has encouraged assertions that the BRI in Africa is losing pace (Freeman and Tugendhat 2023; Chen, Fornino and Rawlings 2024). At the same time, ambitions for the BRI are changing. The reframing of the BRI as 'BRI 2.0' stresses the importance of 'sustainability' and long-term success (Cao 2019; Wang *et al.* 2023), while prioritising "small and beautiful" initiatives (Yu 2022). This research has shown how the BRI has been, in some ways, an ideological and material catalyst for broadening China-Africa

relations, and driving Chinese interest in African conservation, with many actors engaged in Chinese conservation referencing the BRI in terms of inspiring or guiding activity. A future direction for this research would be in examining the shape of Chinese engagement in conservation and wider Chinese non-profit activity in Africa as a result of China's 'economic slowdown' and supposed 'withdrawal' from Africa.

These shifting dynamics of China's engagement in Africa, and specifically the focus on sustainability, sit against a backdrop of greater global concern for the environment and addressing climate change. Chinese conservation diplomacy could be explored in the context of China's wider environmental engagement and agenda across and outside of Africa. Moreover, the idea of conservation diplomacy could help to build on and broaden the field that looks at how states and other actors are involved in utilising conservation as a means for pursuing their interests, taking conservation beyond the confines of protecting wildlife and biodiversity, to being a soft power tool. This could have the potential to evolve the way in which nation states approach conservation. It might deliver benefits in raising the profile of and resources for conservation, or instead, it could divert the focus away from pursuing the most effective interventions in terms of conservation outcomes. Indeed, the concept of conservation diplomacy as a diplomatic tool should be more widely utilised and developed in research that goes beyond China to examines how a range of different states engage with conservation.

6. Conclusion

Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation is an emergent phenomenon, that up until now has yet to be explored. In operating at the intersection of knowledge and debate on China-Africa relations, wildlife conservation and Chinese non-profit activity, this thesis provides important insights for better understanding the nature and implications of this new form of international conservation engagement for both Kenyan conservation and China-Africa relations.

This concluding chapter has brought together the main findings of the research and drawn-out the key implications of Chinese non-profit engagement in Kenyan conservation. The research has found that Chinese-led non-profit engagement in Kenyan and wider African conservation is nascent, but has expanded to show a prime focus on the engagement and education of Chinese audiences in wildlife advocacy and conservation efforts. In this way, Chinese engagement is potentially differentiating itself from more established 'Western'

engagement that is typically characterised by providing 'expertise' and leading and shaping on-the-ground projects.

A key contention of the research is that Chinese-led non-profit engagement is connected to a diverse set of actors and hybrid forms of activity. The boundaries of what can be considered 'Chinese' and 'non-profit' activity become blurred by the involvement of a wider set of Chinese and non-Chinese actors and activity, including the Chinese state and for-profit sectors, and INGOs. Much Chinese non-profit activity is initiated or led by INGOs, with evidence of a mixed set of relationship structures and power dynamics at play between Chinese actors and INGOs. The prominence of INGOs as part of Chinese non-profit activity in conservation is significant in that it potentially makes engagement less distinctly 'Chinese'. Additionally, Chinese-led activity in Kenyan and African conservation is also found to link to or be facilitated by the Chinese state and for-profit sector. In many ways, the Chinese political environment presents challenges and can somewhat limit the scope of non-profit activity. At the same time, the state is also a key enabler, legitimiser and partner in activity. Whilst the involvement of INGOs might make engagement less distinctly 'Chinese', the need to be aligned with the state could add a distinctly 'Chinese' characteristic to engagement. In essence, Chinese non-profit conservation engagement is connected to and involves a wider set of actors, which in turn connect it to complex dynamics of Chinese diplomatic and corporate interest, as well as international conservation engagement and agendas.

Kenyan perceptions of Chinese engagement in conservation are diverse and often intertwined with wider dynamics of Chinese and 'foreign' engagement. Recognising this diversity of perceptions brings more depth of understanding to discussions of Chinese engagement in Africa and with wildlife. The implications for conservation were found to be mixed. Some Kenyan perspectives reflected that Chinese engagement had limited impact on Kenyan conservation, and others argued that it is problematic and entangled with legacies of colonial experience and contemporary 'Western' influence. In many ways, this also signified the continued influence of the 'West' in African conservation. At the same time, Chinese engagement was also seen to have the potential to bring a more cooperative and balanced dynamic to international engagement in Kenyan conservation, one that is marked by a greater role for Kenyan agency. Identifying the emergence of more balanced and 'mutual' relations provides an important contribution to the growing scholarship on the role of African agency in China-Africa relations.

Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation is also connected to and shaped by the wider dynamics of China-Africa relations. Chinese non-profit and wider Chinese engagement in

conservation are shaped by both African agency and Chinese state interests. The more reciprocal and 'mutual' relations seen in Chinese non-profit engagement in conservation seemingly fulfil ideals of 'South-South cooperation'. Yet this is disrupted by the prominence of INGOs as part of Chinese engagement in African conservation. Indeed, some degree of 'triangulation' of cooperation might be taking place between Western INGOs and Chinese and African conservation actors. As part of this, the involvement of INGOs might be seen to represent an attempt to maintain their dominance in shaping international conservation agendas. Involving INGOs may also be strategically significant for the Chinese state in that they represent vehicles for channelling Chinese strategic interest and thereby operating as a tool of Chinese diplomacy.

Chinese engagement in African conservation can be found to present a new angle to existing debates on China-Africa relations, where conservation diplomacy provides an analytical lens to explain the dynamics of engagement. Chinese engagement in African conservation in tackling the illegal wildlife trade and supporting conservation efforts can in part be linked to the desire to improve China's image and wield soft power. Such engagement presents opportunities in alliance building and provides a gateway for enhancing and evolving China-Africa relations across many different levels of interaction. Of significance to this study is the contributing role that Chinese non-profit activity plays in supporting Chinese diplomatic efforts. Despite the importance of Chinese state interests in shaping Chinese non-profit and wider engagement in conservation, African agency plays a key role in shaping the nature and outcomes of the relationship. As such, engagement is a negotiated set of activities that result in a form of diplomacy in the sense that two sets of international actors are pursuing their interests and finding mutually agreeable ways to engage. Therefore, conservation diplomacy is not simply a vehicle for Chinese interests, but instead, conservation is a realm in which Chinese and African interests are negotiated. In this way, the research makes an important contribution to further developing the nascent discussion on conservation diplomacy, providing key contributions to evolving ideas about the concept as part of broader international relations debates. This specifically relates to understanding conservation diplomacy as a diplomatic tool aimed at enhancing international relations, creating opportunities for good will and exerting state influence. In the Chinese case, it has been framed as contributing to Chinese 'soft power' and as a vehicle to further China's broader strategic ambitions in Africa and on a global stage. A focus on non-profit engagement and the different actors and dynamics involved showcases the complex and multi-scalar nature of engagement, thus evolving understandings of conservation diplomacy.

This study provides a clear agenda for future research. There is scope to further examine the entanglement of Chinese non-profit engagement with wider sets of Chinese and non-Chinese actors across other fields and regions, exploring to what extent the Chinese state and 'Western' actors shape engagement and to what effect. The newer dynamics at play in a post-global pandemic world and the shifting nature of China's engagement in Africa provide opportunity to explore the shape of Chinese engagement in conservation in Africa. This is set against the backdrop of China's 'economic slowdown' and apparent 'withdrawal' from Africa, as well as its refocus on sustainability and long-term success. Finally, the notion of conservation diplomacy contributes to the field for assessing how states and other actors can use conservation as a vehicle for pursuing their interests and as a soft power tool. This makes it a critical time to follow how Chinese non-profit and wider engagement in African conservation continues to evolve and can further inform understandings of China's international relations both in the China-Africa context and beyond.

Appendices

Appendix A) Interview schedules

Interview Schedule – Participants working for Non-Profit Organisations:

Background (some questions may not be relevant depending on participant's role):

1. Could you tell me a bit about X organisation - how has a focus on wildlife conservation and prevention of the illegal wildlife trade come about?
2. Are you able to highlight any specific projects or campaigns that are in progress at present? As well as any key activity in the past?
3. Who are the key target audiences for campaigns?
4. What role do you play in X organisation?

Chinese Engagement/Approach:

1. Would you say there has been an increase in presence of Chinese non-profit actors in the field of illegal wildlife trade prevention and conservation?
2. What have been key drivers behind the increasing presence of Chinese non-profit actors in this field?
3. How would you characterise the approach being taken?
4. Would you identify this approach as having any distinct 'Chinese' characteristics – is this any different to other approaches?
5. Is there a benefit to a 'Chinese' approach?

Outputs:

1. What are the desired outcomes of the approaches being adopted?
2. How are local communities being considered and engaged within the approach?
3. Are communities deriving any benefit from this form of engagement? If so, how?
4. How are local communities responding to this engagement?

Future:

1. Do you see space for greater Chinese-led and supported engagement in this field?
2. What do you think future Chinese-led and supported engagement will look like?
3. Are the outcomes of Chinese-led and supported activity sustainable?
4. What are the measures for success in terms of illegal wildlife trade prevention and conservation?

Interview Schedule – Participants working in Kenyan conservation:

Background:

1. What is your connection to conservation and prevention of the illegal wildlife trade?
2. What are the priorities for Kenyan conservation?
3. What is your understanding of the priorities of other organisations/institutions (state, private or non-profit) with regard to conservation?

Conservation (in general):

1. What are the main challenges presented by conservation and prevention of the illegal wildlife trade?
2. What is currently being done to overcome such challenges?
3. How are communities currently engaged in conservation? Is this working?
4. What are the implications for longer-term sustainability?

Chinese Engagement/Approach:

1. In your own experience, have you had any personal engagement with Chinese actors?
2. Are you aware of any Chinese actor engagement in conservation? If so can you describe what this might look like?
3. How are local communities engaged with conservation that might be driven or supported by Chinese actors?
4. Do you feel Chinese engagement is having impact on the illegal wildlife trade and conservation?
5. How do you and other community members feel about this type of Chinese engagement in Africa?
6. Is there any difference in how conservation is led or supported by Chinese compared to other actors?

Future:

1. Do you see space for greater Chinese-led and supported engagement in this field?
2. If so, what would you like future Chinese-led and supported engagement to look like?
3. Does it matter to you if it is Chinese-led and supported or led by other means?
4. In your view, do you think the outcomes of Chinese-led and supported activity are sustainable?
5. What are your measures for success in terms of illegal wildlife trade prevention and conservation?
6. What are your measures for success in terms of local community engagement and sustainability?

Appendix B) Information Sheet



The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences embodies the core values of The Open University, enabling, empowering and transforming individuals, societies, cultures and ourselves through our teaching, research and engagement in dialogues across the world. We design, carry out, and analyse, research studies in the fields of Development, Policy and Practice.

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Responsibilities to you:

- **Ensure your safety:** all our researchers carry photographic identification.
- **Guard your privacy:** your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Your contribution will be used for research purposes only. Nobody will be individually identified in the final report.
- **Respect your wishes:** participation in the study is voluntary and you are not obliged to answer any questions you do not wish to.
- **Answer your questions:** I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.

Evaluation of China-Africa: the role and influence of Chinese non-profit engagement in wildlife conservation

Research study: participants' experiences of Chinese non-profit engagement in wildlife conservation

What is the aim of this research?

I would like to ask for your help in finding out about participants' experiences of Chinese non-profit engagement in wildlife conservation. Your views will help to better understand the way in which Chinese non-profit engagement is discussed, pursued and experienced in the context of wildlife conservation in Africa.

What is involved?

Interviews will involve talking to you for about one hour. Given your permission, the interview will be recorded on tape to ensure that everything you share is noted down. If you prefer not to have the interview recorded then this is not a problem. The interview can be arranged at your convenience, at a venue and time convenient to you.

Please note that as a participant you can opt to not answer any questions you are uncomfortable with.

What will I be asked?

You will be asked about the following broad topics:

- Your individual connection to/experiences of Chinese non-profit engagement
- Your experiences connected to wildlife conservation in Africa
- Whether Chinese non-profit engagement is impacting wildlife conservation in Africa

Do I have to take part?

No, this research relies on your voluntary co-operation. No one needs to take part in this study who does not want to. Even if you say yes to begin with, you are free to withdraw at any time up to one week prior to the agreed date. In order to withdraw, please send an email to XXXX at your earliest convenience.

Is it confidential?

Yes. Everything that you say will be in confidence. The research can guarantee that personal information will not be passed to anyone outside the research team. This includes staff from The Open University or any group. A report will be written for the study but no individual will be identifiable from the published results of the research.

The data and report will not record any individual names, roles or job titles.

How will my data be managed?

Audio files of taped interviews will be uploaded to and stored on a secure, password-protected laptop for transcription. After this is complete the audio files will be permanently deleted. No other party, other than myself, will have access to the audio files or transcriptions.

What happens after the interview?

A summary report of feedback from interviews conducted will be produced for each group of participants. These summaries will be shared with each relevant party via email or WhatsApp, depending on participant preference. You will also be invited to share feedback if you so wish.

What next?

I will contact you again soon to ask for your consent to take part in the research and to arrange an appointment to come and see you. If you choose not to participate then this is not a problem, please just confirm this to me.

In the meantime, if you have any queries at all about the study, please feel free to get in touch using the below details.

What if I have other questions?

If you have any other questions, I would be happy to answer them. Please contact:

Francesca Masciaga
XXXX

Appendix C) Consent Form

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

CONSENT FORM

Name of Project

'China-Africa: The Role and Influence of Chinese Non-Profit Engagement in Wildlife Conservation'

Agreement to Participate

I,

(PRINT NAME)

...agree to take part in this research.

I have had the purposes of the research project explained to me.

I am free to withdraw and to request the destruction of any data that have been gathered from me up until XXXX.

I have been assured that my confidentiality will be protected as specified in the information sheet.

I agree that the information that I provide can be used for educational or research purposes, including publication.

I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact:

Francesca Masciaga

Contact Details:

Email: XXX

Tel: XXXX

Skype: XXXX

If I want to talk to someone else about this project, I can contact:

XXXX

I assign the copyright for my contribution to the Faculty for use in education, research and publication.*

Signed:

Date:

**copyright will enable the Faculty at The Open University the exclusive right to use and make copies of the research findings in the final written report*

Appendix D) African media database search keywords/phrases

The AllAfrica online database was used as a platform to access English language reporting materials as part of online documentary research. The below table shows the keywords and themes used to generate search results.

Platform	Search Criteria	Search Results
AllAfrica	China, wildlife	2,489
	China, NGO	3,697
	China, conservation	3,859
	China, non profit	2,515
	Chinese, NGO, wildlife	122

Appendix E) African media sources

The analysis of African media sources draws on 88 articles from the AllAfrica database. The below table shows the media source, country of media source and the number of articles analysed.

Platform	Source	Country	Number
AllAfrica	FOCAC	China	12
AllAfrica	Nation	Kenya	11
AllAfrica	The Star	Kenya	11
AllAfrica	New Era	Namibia	4
AllAfrica	The Conversation	UK	4
AllAfrica	The Herald	Zimbabwe	4
AllAfrica	Capital FM	Kenya	3
AllAfrica	Tanzania Daily News	Tanzania	3
AllAfrica	The Citizen	Tanzania	3
AllAfrica	The East African	Kenya	3
AllAfrica	Daily Maverick	South Africa	2
AllAfrica	Institute for Security Studies	Pan-Africa	2
AllAfrica	The Namibian	Namibia	2
AllAfrica	UNEP	Global	2
AllAfrica	Voice of America	USA	2
AllAfrica	263 Chat	Zimbabwe	1
AllAfrica	African Arguments	Pan-Africa	1
AllAfrica	Chatham House	UK	1
AllAfrica	Daily News	?	1

AllAfrica	Ensia	USA	1
AllAfrica	Front Page Africa	Liberia	1
AllAfrica	Good Governance in Africa	Pan-Africa	1
AllAfrica	Kenya Presidency	Kenya	1
AllAfrica	Leadership	Nigeria	1
AllAfrica	New Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	1
AllAfrica	Pambazuka News	Pan-Africa	1
AllAfrica	Radio France Internationale	France	1
AllAfrica	Sabahi	USA-Africa	1
AllAfrica	The Journalist	?	1
AllAfrica	The Monitor	Uganda	1
AllAfrica	The New Times	Rwanda	1
AllAfrica	The Observer	Uganda	1
AllAfrica	The Standard	Kenya	1
AllAfrica	This Day	Nigeria	1
AllAfrica	Walta Info	Ethiopia	1
			88

Appendix F) Chinese media search keywords/phrases

The China.org and China Daily platforms online were used as a platforms/sources to access English language reporting materials as part of online documentary research. The below table shows the keywords and themes used to generate search results.

Platform	Search Criteria	Search Results
China.org	Conservation, China, Africa	522
China Daily	Conservation, China, Africa, wildlife	811

Appendix G) Chinese media sources

The analysis of Chinese media sources draws on 81 articles from four different media sources. The below table shows the media source and the number of articles analysed.

Source / Publisher	Number
Xinhua	53
China Daily	26
Global Times	1
Chinese government website (fmprc.gov.cn)	1
	81

Appendix H) Data analysis core themes

There were 10 core themes to the data analysis, derived from adopting an abductive approach. These are shown in the table below.

Key themes
China-Africa relations
Chinese strategy
Chinese state
Chinese in Kenya
Chinese non-profit actors
Chinese conceptions of nature
Education
Illegal wildlife trade
INGOs
Kenyan conservation challenges

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WORD COUNT: 86,740

(excludes Abstract and Acknowledgements)