



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on October 16, 2018

Chinese Investments in Kenya Lead to Charges of Racism and Debt-trap Fears

China's state-owned Export-Import Bank loaned Kenya \$3.6 billion in 2014 to pay for a 293-mile railroad that the state-owned China Road and Bridge Corporation built from Kenya's capital, Nairobi, to the port of Mombasa. But the loan has left Kenya with enormous, some say unpayable, debts. Furthermore, Kenyan workers have complained that the Chinese managers who oversee the railroad and other Chinese operations in the country treat them in humiliating and racist manners.



While the new railroad line (shown) improves rail service along the Nairobi to Mombasa route (replacing "The Lunatic Express" built in the late 1800s by the British) the Chinese presence in the country has come at a price that some Kenyans have criticized.

A *New York Times* [report on October 15](#) quoted a Kenyan manager at an industrial park in Ruiru where several Chinese companies have set up facilities. "[The Chinese] are the ones with the capital, but as much as we want their money, we don't want them to treat us like we are not human in our own country," said the Kenyan.

The *Times* report noted that when tallying the cost of accepting Chinese investments in their countries, African nations have focused primarily on their rising debts, or occasionally on the exploitative labor practices of some Chinese firms.

But in Nairobi, notes the report, "concerns about racism and discrimination are a growing part of the conversation about China's expanding presence."

An article published by Kenya's *Standard* newspaper in July about the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) said "a multitude of Kenyans ... feel trapped on the train that ably fits the moniker Orient Express, because on it, Chinese nationals have created a small kingdom in which they run roughshod over Kenyan workers who say they are experiencing neo-colonialism, racism and blatant discrimination."

Kenyans have charged Chinese management with segregating worker facilities by race and using Kenyans only for the most menial jobs.

There is also the burden of the enormous debt that Kenya has taken on by borrowing the money from the Chinese to build the railroad. A Breitbart report in June observed that some observers have accused China of a policy of "debt trap diplomacy" by financing such infrastructure projects

Breitbart cited a World Bank report stating that there is no economic or financial case for the railway, but there is "a very realistic fear that the SGR will generate far less income than is necessary to repay the China's \$3.6 billion loan."

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