



The Strategic Implications of China in Africa

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1. Introduction and background

Strategic implication is a conclusion of a carefully designed or planned activity or programme to serve a particular purpose or advantage. In the past years there has been a growing concern regarding China's presence in Africa. The main concern is centred to the china's trade and investment in Africa especially by international community. Given its dominance in Africa China's economic sudden hostile infiltration in Africa have triggered a lot of debate and disagreement such as whether China is the latest in line of exploiters of Africa's natural resources who put their own economic interest above humanitarian concerns, or whether China's engagement in Africa is an extension of South-South solidarity.ⁱ The objective of the paper is to demonstrate the benefits of the China-Africa relations. The paper focuses on the economic and political benefits of China and Africa relations. Both countries have been having plans on how their relationship is going to benefit both China and Africa. Since the establishment of the Forum of China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) there has been unprecedented trade growth between China and African countries.

The establishment of modern China-Africa relations in Africa back dates to the late 1950s when China signed its first bilateral trade relations with African countries. Countries such as Algeria, guinea, Egypt Sudan and Morocco were the first African countries to sign the bilateral trade relations with China. China began to cultivate ties and offered economic, technical and military support to African countries and liberation movements in an effort to encourage wars of national liberation and revolution as part of an international United Front against superpowersⁱⁱ. The relations between China and Africa were short lived because of the Cold War and the Communist ideology. Originally China had close relations with the anti-apartheid and liberation movement, African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. However, the Chinese relations with the Soviet Union deteriorate and the ANC became closer to the Soviet Union, China decided to shift away from ANC towards the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC)ⁱⁱⁱ. The relations between china and African countries made the Chinese to adopt several principles, among them was supporting independence of African countries while investing in infrastructure projects. For example Somalia had good relations with china but this came into being after the Soviet Union decided to shift its support from Somalia to Ethiopia.

2. China's foreign policy towards Africa

There are four important points to be taken into consideration when looking at China's policy. The first point is that China's more active engagement with Africa is part of its continuing emergence as a truly global player and this is no different from the traditional behaviour of major powers. Second point is that in its global and regional diplomacy, China like great powers is pursuing multiple objectives. And their objectives include those that create tensions between values and interests at both the national and global level. China can no more be expected to subordinate its commercial and strategic interests to other considerations than have the western powers in their policies towards Africa and the world. Thirdly, Beijing's relationship with Africa dates back to the early 1950's, long before China's rapid economic expansion and its historic appetite for the continent's mineral resources. Fourthly, most African states are states that have benefited so far from China's increasing trade and investment as well as from debt relief, are not gifted with minerals wealth and offer few investment opportunities to Chinese enterprises^{iv}.

However China adheres to the five principles of peaceful coexistence which is to respect African states' choice in political system and development path suited to their own national conditions, not to interfere in internal affairs of the African states, support African states in their just struggles for safeguarding their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and their efforts in maintaining their states stability, unity, and promoting the development of society and economy^v. In the year 2000 China and Africa collaborated to create the Forum of China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC). FOCAC is an official forum between the People's Republic of China and African countries. FOCAC is an important platform for dialogue and cooperation between China and Africa, and has played an important role in leading and promoting China-African relations^{vi}. FOCAC is a continuity of China's central government political agenda towards Africa which seeks to solidify economic, political and diplomatic ties^{vii}. China and Africa have witnessed a rapid development of the FOCAC over the past 12 years. Since the FOCAC's creation both Africa and China have witnessed an incredible economic growth.

3. Economic implications

With reference to trade, China has received praise for its contribution to Africa's unprecedented economic growth of more than 5 per cent annually since 2001 to 2008.^{viii} For

Africa, continuing rapid growth in China may lead to complementary positive effects by increasing demand for, and revenues from Africa's resources exports. The Chinese may continue to upgrade aid and investments in Africa, particularly investments in Africa's infrastructure. During the year 2011, trade between Africa and China increased a staggering 33% from previous year to US \$166 billion. This included the Chinese imports from Africa, consisting of mineral ores, petroleum, and agricultural products. Outlining the speedily expanding trade between African continent and China, it increased further by over 22% year-over-year to US\$80.5 billion during the first five months of the year 2012. Imports from Africa were up 25.5% to \$49.6 billion during these first five months of 2012. China remained Africa's largest trading partner during 2008 to 2011.^{ix}

Economically looking at the China-Africa relations reveals the following. Since 2006 the China's grant assistance, interest free loans and preferential loans to Africa have increased gradually. Since 2009 China has remained Africa's trading partner. In 2011 trade between the two reached US\$146 billion, which is 14 times what it was in the year 2000. The tariff exemption and other measures adopted by China to boost African exports have begun to show effect with 49 African countries experiencing growth in their exports to China in the year 2010, while between 2000 and 2011, African exports to China have been growing rapidly, from US\$4.8 billion to US\$72 billion representing a compound annual growth of 24%. As of April 2012, China's total direct investment in Africa reached US\$15.3 billion, compare with less than US\$500 million 10 years ago. Despite the negative impact of the global financial crisis, China-Africa cooperation has shown robust growth, which has contributed to the recovery and development of not only the Chinese and African economies but for the world as a whole^x.

When it comes to economic relations between China and Africa firstly, on agriculture and food security the two sides commanded Africa's efforts in embracing a growth-oriented agricultural agenda through the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) aimed at increasing Agricultural growth rates. Secondly on investment and business cooperation the two sides vowed to continue to promote the conclusion and implementation of bilateral agreements on investment promotion and protection and create a sound environment with a view to scale up mutual investment. Government of China and African countries give encouragement and support to their competitive businesses in investing in each other's country so as to raise the level and quality of cooperation for mutual benefit and win-win results for both sides. The Chinese side offered to increase the size of the

China-Africa Development Fund to US\$3 billion to support the expansion of investment from Chinese businesses to Africa^{xi}.

Thirdly, on infrastructure the two sides were of the view that underdeveloped infrastructure is an obstacle to Africa's development and integration. China's contribution to infrastructure development in Africa in recent years was appreciated. They both also agreed that infrastructure will remain a priority in China-Africa cooperation. In this context, the African side hopes that the Chinese side will support development projects that promote regional integration. Recognizing Africa's urgent need for infrastructure development, the Chinese side will support the building of major infrastructure projects in Africa to promote Africa's economic and social development. The Chinese side had also planned to increase investment and play a larger role in infrastructure development in Africa through providing loans and free assistance to African countries and encouraging investment by Chinese companies^{xii}.

Fourthly, when coming to trade the Chinese side promised to further open its market to African countries. It offered a phase in a manner, grant tariff exemption treatment to 95% of exports from the least developed countries in Africa having diplomatic relations with China. An African commodities trade centre will be established in China and preferential policies such as reduction and wavering will be adapted to participating African enterprises to promote export of African commodities to China. Both sides agreed to properly handle trade differences and frictions through friendly consultation under the principle of mutual understanding and mutual accommodation. The fifth point is that China and Africa enjoy complementarity and cooperation potential in energy and resources. China will continue to cooperate with Africa, in keeping with the principles of mutual benefit and sustainable development and try to raise the added value of the energy and resources products of African countries and enhance their capacity intensive processing^{xiii}.

Under the FOCAC umbrella, China-African trade has experienced unprecedented growth. From a mere US\$ 2 billion in 1999, China-African trade in 2011 reached US\$ 160 billion, making China a leading trade partner for Africa. In South Africa, bilateral trade between the two countries has surged from \$1.6 billion to \$25.7 billion. South Africa's major exports to China have traditionally been mining products, especially iron and steel, heavy chemicals and nonferrous metals exports in the region of \$5.5 billion a year in minerals to China. In contrast SA imports Chinese clothing, machinery, televisions, communication equipment, furniture and footwear. Apart from increased trade volumes, co-operation has continually increased in

terms of investments in a range of sectors, cultural exchanges, capacity building and of course, political consultation. The China-Africa relationship has remained dynamic on many fronts. China's focus on infrastructural development with the construction of roads, bridges, hydroelectric and irrigation schemes, schools, hospitals, health centres and an array of government buildings have made a clear and definite contribution to improving the lives of people across Africa^{xiv}. As Adams Bodomo, African Studies director at Hong Kong University, states, "In 10 years, China has built a lot more infrastructure than, for example, Britain did in my own country -- Ghana -- for 100 years." In fact, China has been identified by Africa as a strategic source of infrastructure growth.

4. Political implications

Politically China has started to play more active role in promoting peace in Africa. For example China has played a role in promoting peace between Sudan and South Sudan and also said that it can lend its support to the African Union and other African actors who are trying to deal with crises but often lack the necessary leverage over the parties involved in the conflict^{xv}. According to the Chinese President Hu Jintao said that China will also launch the initiative on China-Africa Cooperation Partnership for Peace and Security; deepen cooperation with African Union (AU) and African countries in peace and security in Africa. China will also provide financial support for the AU peace keeping missions in Africa and development for Africa Standby Force and it will also train more officials in peace and security affairs and peace-keepers for the AU^{xvi}. Moreover China has already made concrete commitments to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in Africa. China has also managed to strengthen its government to government relations with African countries.

When it comes to consular and Judicial Cooperation both parties have strategize to further promote exchanges and cooperation between their respective judiciaries and law enforcement departments and to jointly improve the capacity to prevent, investigate and combat crimes. They also strategize to cooperate in the field of peace and security. The Chinese government appreciates the concept and practice of "solving African problems by Africans". It will continue to support the effort of the African Union, other regional organisations and countries concerned to solve regional conflicts and will strengthen cooperation with African countries in peacekeeping theory research, peacekeeping training and exchanges and in supporting to building of peacekeeping capacity in Africa^{xvii}.

Furthermore in cooperation in international affairs both sides expressed the view that international situation is the most profound changes and adjustment after the cold war. The international financial crisis has led to a world economic recession and has brought about profound and complex changes to the international politics and economic landscape. Therefore it is of even greater importance to strengthen China-Africa cooperation in international affairs. The two sides reaffirmed that Africa should be fully represented in the arrangements related to the world economy. The African side stressed the urgent need to enlarge the G20 and other existing mechanisms for international economy^{xviii}.

On the African side they have been planning the fully support by the Chinese government as one of the United Nations Security Council member coming to the reforms of the United Nations Security Council, the World Bank and World Trade Organisation. They have been aging support for one African country to represent Africa and become one of the permanent members of the UNSC. Also they have been relying on Chinas support when it comes to African Affairs in the UNSC; with these China has been supporting African views.

There have been more achievements in the China-Africa relations. One of the improvements is the high-level visits and dialogue between the two. There have been frequent high-level exchanges between China and Africa. Dialogues and consultation have increased and political mutual trust strengthened. Contacts between political parties, legislatures and local governments, both sides decided that to strengthen exchanges between political parties and enhance experience sharing on governance. They will also continue to expand friendly contacts between the National People's Congress of China and parliaments of African countries as well as the Pan-African Parliament in order to promote mutual understanding and deepen their relations^{xix}.

5. Conclusion

The China-Africa relations have progressed over the years and it is time for African countries to gain greater leverage to ensure that they benefit from it as China does. Indeed evidence suggests that both China and Africa have benefited from the political and economic relations despite the imbalances that still prevail in terms trade and investment. The benefits from china such as Chinese aid and investment, if Africans manage it well it can complement the social sector focus of most western aid by strengthening Africa's inefficient infrastructural capacity untapped private sector.

Africans must proactively monitor and review the relationship and ensure that its interests are safeguarded in order for this relationship to provide a win-win solution. The challenge that Africans are facing is that their natural resources that they export to China are raw and unprocessed one. This makes the Chinese to import the natural resources at a lower price. What African countries need to do is to find a means to process their natural resources and export them as final products, for example when they export diamond, coal, gold, and oil to name but few.

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ⁱⁱ Muekalia, D.J. 2004. *Africa and China's Strategic Partnership*. Africa Security Review. p6

ⁱⁱⁱ Taylor, I. 2000. *China's Foreign Policy Towards Africa in the 1990s*. journal of Modern African Studies 36(3). p93

^{iv} China facts and figures. 2002. *China's Africa policy*. www.china.org.cn/english/features/china-africa/82055. Accessed 2013/09/28

^v ibid

^{vi} Xu, W. Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: creating a more mature and efficient platform

^{vii} Dr. Daouda, C. May 2012. FOCAC: Trade, Investments and aid in China-Africa relations. www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FOCAC_Policy-Briefing_tradeinvest_final.pdf. Accessed 24/10/2013

^{viii} Menen, J. 2008. *Withering the Storm*. Gulf News, April 27. Available at: http://archive.gulfnews.com/supplements/southafrica2008/main_story/10208675.html.

^{ix} "China and Africa Trade". <http://www.joc.com/global-trade/china-africa-trade-booms>

^x Fundira, T. July 18, 2012. Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) Summit: An Opportunity for a win-win Strategic Partnership. www.tralac.org/2012/07/18/forum-on-china-africa-co-operation-focac-summit-an-opportunity-for-a-win-win-strategic-partnership/. Accessed 10/10/2013

^{xi} Fifth Ministerial Conference of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Beijing, 19 July 2012. Chinese president's speech at opening ceremony of Fifth Ministerial Conference of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Beijing, 19 July 2012. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-07/19/c_131725637.htm. Accessed 25/10/2013

^{xii} ibid

^{xiii} ibid

^{xiv} April, F.Y. 2013. South Africa-China Diplomatic Relations at 15 years

^{xv} Ambassador Adala, O, Hengkun, J and Murphy, P. July 10, 2012. China Can Help Keep Peace in Growing Africa. People Daily Online. English.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/7869855.html

^{xvi} Fifth Ministerial Conference of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Beijing, 19 July 2012. Chinese president's speech at opening ceremony of Fifth Ministerial Conference of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Beijing, 19 July 2012. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-07/19/c_131725637.htm. Accessed 25/10/2013

^{xvii} The 5th Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan. 2012, 07, 23. www.focac.org/eng/zxxx/t954620.htm. Accessed 24/10/2013

^{xviii} ibid

^{xix} ibid