



Review Paper

## China-Africa Cooperation-An outstanding relationship Built on Mutual Respect and Common Benefits: A Review

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### Abstract

*China-Africa relations date as far back as the sixteenth century and is characterized as mutual socio-cultural and economic partnerships. Closer cooperation in recent times is forged with the objectives of protecting common interest and promoting economic development between the two. With the emergence of China as a global super power, it views Africa as a strategic partner in the race for natural resources and a ground for newer markets. China engages the continent on a broad range of diplomatic, trade and economic forums with the aim of strengthening fraternal ties and gaining an upper hand in the acquisition of the continent's natural resources. These strides have been very fruitful with results showing a gradual advantage of China over its Western competitors for economic interests on the continent. Nonetheless, China has been criticized for its robust diplomatic and trade maneuvers especially with rogue states and despotic African leaders at the somber plight of the poor citizens. Poor labor conditions and appalling environmental records are also highlights of China's shortcomings. Thus, there is need for the country to fine tune its strategic socio-political and economic cooperation with the aim of fostering political stability and reducing poverty on the continent. Chinese investments should also adopt best codes of practices that aim at minimizing conflicts and guaranteeing conducive investment environments.*

**Keywords:** China-Africa cooperation, mutual respect, common benefits, socio-cultural, economic partnership

### Introduction

**Ancient Sino-Africa Cooperation:** Sino-African Cooperation dates as far back as the sixteen century during the Ming Dynastic (1368-1644) when a famous Chinese navigator "Zheng He" visited the East African coast<sup>1</sup>. Prior to his visit two distinguished African scholars/explorers, Ibn Buttatu of Morocco and Sa'id Mogadishu of Somalia had made voyages to China<sup>2</sup>. Although these navigations were not of any economic relevance, they demonstrated the intuition of both African and Chinese navigators to embark on trans-continental voyages, which could be viewed as significant breakthroughs of such eras. Through these expeditions, China and African began establishing socio-political corporations and exploring cultural exchanges that have ever been the blue-print in the relationship between the two. From the outset, China had distinguished itself as friendly partner that pursues mutual cooperation with the continent and this has marked the ever growing fraternity even as it emerges as a world power. China's immaculate record with regards the one time lucrative but inhuman and barbaric slave trade is viewed as a guarantor of mutual respect and for this reason the country is viewed by Africans as a moral development partner that seeks to engage in win-win socio-cultural and economic exchanges.

### Modern day China-Africa Cooperation and Implications for Africa's development

Contemporary ties with Africa dates back to the birth of the Chinese revolution around the mid twentieth century, an era that demanded closer Cooperation in combating the demeaning effects of neo-colonialism and promoting mutual economic growth and development<sup>3</sup>. The Bandung Conference held in 1955 was first major conference initiated by the Chinese leadership and African leaders, which started the mapping out a strategic framework for mutual bilateral and regional cooperation between China and Africa<sup>4</sup>. This mile-stone achievement paved the way for stronger technical and military support that served as a major impetus in some instances in the struggle against colonial rule in Africa<sup>3</sup>. However, this era had little focus on economic partnership but nonetheless marked the start of China's fraternal relationship with Africa built on mutual respect and benefit that is even now the core of present day diplomatic ties between the two. By extension, this translates into a Chinese foreign policy of non-alliance and non-interference in domestic issues of other countries that has become a trail blazer in her international cooperation with Africa and the world at large.

Post revolutionary era in China has witnessed rapid economic and development growth due to strategic economic reforms that has bestowed supremacy on China as the world's factory and the second largest global economy. These achievements come at a cost, and in order to maintain this status or even attain higher goals, China's demand for natural resources (mineral ore, crude oil etc) in meeting her production capacity has exponentially escalated putting her in a trajectory to fiercely compete with other global economies for the now limited natural resources<sup>5</sup>. The consequences of this reality had culminated to China reaching out to her traditional partners with Africa seen as a strategic one in the global race for scarce natural resources. The long lasting and outstanding fraternity between China and Africa puts China in a better stead having an edge over other competitors for Africa's natural resources. Over the past decade, China has embarked on rigorous diplomatic maneuvers that demonstrate her attractive and mutual economic engagement with Africa. From 2000 to date, China has organized four forums on China-Africa cooperation that placed more emphasis on trade and economic cooperation. The first in 2000, focused on globalization and enhancement of China-Africa economic cooperation, which reached broad consensus on establishing a fair international political and economic order in the 21st century, and the promotion of Sino-African economic and trade cooperation<sup>6,7</sup>. Two official documents emanated as blueprint: the "Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation" and "Sino-African Cooperation Guidelines for Socio-Economic Development", served as a frame work for building long-term, stable and mutually beneficial new relations. A second summit held in Ethiopia, addressed the implementation of the blueprint with special emphasis on human resource development, agriculture, infrastructure, investment and trade corporations. A third summit "the FOCAC Summit" held in Beijing 2006, addressed the new implementation of Education aid for Africa. In this summit, US\$ 5 billion worth of concessionary loans to Africa was rolled out and followed by the launching of the China-Africa Development Fund worth US\$ 1 billion that was meant to spur up Chinese investment in Africa<sup>8</sup>. Subsequent summits followed-up on the implementation of the Blueprint and the continued unveiling of a number of development aid packages targeting public works project, food security, medical assistance and debt cancellation owed by the poorest African countries. Similar gestures have been offered in the ensuing years making China one of the biggest development partners to Africa.

### **China-Africa Diplomatic Relations**

China forges diplomatic relations with countries which adhere to its "One-China policy" and severs ties with any country that interferes in its internal politics in the form of recognizing Taiwan (known as the Republic of China) as an independent country<sup>5</sup> or sympathy or support for decedent groups in the country. In return, China embarks on peaceful and mutual international cooperation with a core foreign policy of non-alliance and non-interference in domestic issues of other

countries<sup>9</sup>. Currently, majority of African countries (49 out of 54) have excellent bilateral relations with China (known as the People's Republic of China). Four of the remaining countries namely Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Swaziland and São Tomé and Príncipe have either maintained relations with Taiwan or have been cunningly switching positions between Taiwan and China depending on the reigning government. China engages the continent in multi-faceted diplomatic ties by maintaining bilateral relations with individual countries as well as through cooperation with regional economic and political bodies and the African Union<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, China as a developing country is viewed as a common development partner of African countries. The true fraternal ties between the country and African countries have been manifested even in crises periods by the tendency to maintain diplomatic posts for as long as necessary in troubled African countries. On the contrary however, Western countries have the tendency to provoke or aggravate political crises on the continent and in turn impose economic and political sanctions, an approach that has plunge a number of African countries into long term political instabilities.

In terms of diplomatic capacity building on the continent, China has made hallmark inroads by funding the construction of the African Union's Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia<sup>11</sup> and a host of foreign ministry structures of individual countries and the training of African diplomatic personnel in international diplomacy with the principal objective of soliciting support for its interests on geopolitical issues especially in the United Nations (UN). In this vein, China has enjoyed tremendous political and diplomatic support over the years from the continent. The continent was a key proponent for China's place as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a status that was a big boost in its efforts to emerge as a global super power.

The country fully understands the strong link between politics and economics and unlike the West, it offers development aid and trade packs 'with no strings attached' as a way of further strengthening diplomatic ties with the continent. In terms of Trade, China uses its state-owned enterprises to engage individual countries as well as regional organizations in foreign direct investment<sup>9</sup> as leverage for closer ties, a move view by the West as rigorous petulant diplomatic maneuver and without morals<sup>12</sup>. This charge is levied due to West view of China's blatant indifference to human rights issues and support for despotic leaders on the continent. The fact that remains is that the West is wary about China's growing influence on the continent which has the potential of compromising or even undermining their security and investment interests.

### **The Philosophy of China-Africa Economic Cooperation**

The core principle of China-Africa economic cooperation is to achieve a win-win scenario through the promotion of mutual economic benefits<sup>13</sup>. In China's two prong goals of competing

for resources to match its fast growing economy and the search for new markets for its huge industrial turnover<sup>5</sup>, China's best approach has been to establish strategic partnership the continent's regional and economic blocks while strengthening bilateral relations with individual countries.

China has aided in introducing the concept of developing special economic zones (SEZs) in African countries with the aims of fostering the continent's industrialization and stimulating economic growth<sup>14,15</sup>. This constitutes China's broader economic policy of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa that has the potential of positively impacting community development and poverty alleviation. However, the success of such ventures should be based on active participation and sound economic framework for collaboration, the engagement of host governments, communication and enforcement of regional and international standards, support for integration with local economies and processes for phasing into local control. The current sustained and multi-faceted approach for economic corporation with Africa positions China as a strategic partner to the continent's emerging economies<sup>16</sup>. Most African countries have experienced GDP growth rates averaging at 5 percent since 2003 and during this period, infrastructure development in the areas of power supply, telecommunications and roads are estimated to have contributed to 1 percent point to growth mainly attributed to China's economic intervention. Recently, Chinese investments are on the rise on the continent and actively compete with Western interests in the areas of marine, energy and mineral resources.

### **Africa's Advantage in the Economic Cooperation with China**

With Africa struggling under the yoke of under-development, China as a starling model is considered the most appropriate development partner that can usher promise in the continent's development strides. As a power house for emerging technologies, China is the most willing to share the much needed technological support to drive Africa's industrial and economic growth as underscored in the preceding narrative. As the second largest world economy and her rising influence on geopolitics, China has a lot to offer Africa in exchange for good will and natural resources. Although Africa is endowed with lots of natural resources, the lack of technical knowhow and capital is a major impediment in maximizing benefits from these resources. If Africa should rise above her developmental challenges, it will need development partners that understand its needs and willing to offer plausible solutions. Therefore, China's economic pack to Africa, an exchange of resources for development aid and investment is viewed as a win-win engagement rather than exploitation<sup>12</sup>. While dialogue between developing and developed countries is progressing at snail pace and over-burdened with lots of conditionality, the cooperation among developing countries has become especially significant. And this puts China in a good posture to easily cooperate with

African countries and out- compete Western resource interest in Africa.

### **China's Investment Opportunities in Africa**

China is viewed by the West as a strong competitor for energy and other natural resources around the world. And Africa continues to offer more investment opportunities to China in the areas of agriculture, merchandise, petroleum and mineral resources. Nowadays, lots of Chinese entrepreneurs have secured huge acreages of agricultural land in Africa and are engaged in intensive mechanize agriculture using the local human resources and exchanging modern agricultural practices with local communities<sup>17</sup>. China's merchandise in Africa is thriving very well although there are still opportunities for further improvements. The country continues to forge new grounds in mining industries in Africa. Chinese investments now hold huge shares in mining companies with a large chunk of mineral ores being exported to China. In Sierra Leone for example, China holds a major stake in the giant ore mining company "African Minerals" and subsidiary Chinese companies are contracted to develop rail tracks and roads that link mining sites to points of interest in the country.

A plethora of Chinese companies now compete with Western companies for infrastructural development contracts in Africa, and China's long standing and impressive infrastructural investment on the continent gives it an upper hand. In the areas of social services, China is gradually filling the void created by the departure of Western interest. For example, Chinese hospitals and traditional health practices have become a major boost to Africa's health sector, through the provision affordable health services. Chinese medical assistance to Africa has recent seen the refurbishment of major hospitals, community clinics and provided invaluable technical expertise in the health sector.

China's current investment in Africa is tallied at 1346 in about 45 countries on the continent and the top ten favorite investment destinations for Chinese companies are Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Angola, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ghana<sup>18, 19</sup>. A current projection of China's investment in Africa is expected to rise and stimulate economic growth across the continent<sup>20</sup>. There are other new areas of investment in Africa that have not yet attracted Chinese investors. Investment in the banking sector, the entertainment industry etc, are examples of virgin areas that could be explored by Chinese investment.

### **China's Investments in Africa's Energy sector**

In meeting the nation's current and future energy needs, Chinese Oil Companies have secured strategic partnership with oil producing African countries. China's first venture into petroleum investment in Africa dates back in 1995 after the retreat of Western oil companies from Sudan upstream oil fields<sup>21</sup>. Aware of the need to expand oil supplies and the existing keen competition with other International Oil

Companies, Chinese companies forged partnership with some rogue oil rich African nations like Angola, Nigeria etc in spite of criticisms machinated by competing Western countries. Africa holds about 9-10 percent of the world's oil reserves and current supplies figures put it as a major supplier of oil to China with a daily supply approximated at 1.5 million barrel of crude oil accounting for close to 30 percent of China's oil imports<sup>22</sup>. China's largest suppliers of oil in Africa are Angola, Sudan, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Nigeria, with other countries like Gabon, Algeria, Libya, Liberia, Chad, Kenya etc involved in small scale oil exporting<sup>23</sup>. China's win-win investment opportunities are regarded as the best for Africa's energy sector. Through multitude of investment on a continent known for its political and social risks, China has helped many African countries develop their nascent oil sectors while having a huge share of the continent's oil through advantageous trade deals. The country continues to pursue exploration and production deals in smaller, low-visibility countries, such as Gabon, while also targeting Africa's largest oil producers by offering integrated aid packages in its competition with Western interest.

### **New Energy Investment Opportunities**

Africa is endowed with substantial energy resources from both fossil and renewable sources and the continent remains one of the most promising regions for energy investment<sup>24</sup>. Energy reserves have grown to 56 percent in the past decade with recent discovery of oil and gas in Sub-Saharan Africa attracting international investors and developers. The top most viable geographic hydrocarbon hubs that have recently attracted investors in Africa include the West Africa's Transform Margin, the Gulf of Guinea pre-salt plays, the East Africa's rift system and the Rovuma Basin<sup>25</sup>. Currently, there is increasing demand for Energy industry services that goes beyond traditional exploration and production as there are abundant downstream openings as well. Current and future demand for a wide range of service sector including finance, housing, road construction and logistics are expected to grow especially with the anticipated bloom of associated industries in the power, petrochemical and agricultural sectors<sup>18</sup>.

Although Africa is rich in energy resources, the continent is still faced with the challenge of producing enough power to stimulate its industrial and economic growth. There exits numerous investment opportunities in both the thermal power generation and renewable energy sectors. Currently, China is involved in a number of small to medium scale energy projects such as the development of mini-hydroelectric dams across Africa, small scale solar power generations etc. However, China as a key economic partner to the continent is favored over other nations in investing in large scale renewable projects like the DRC hydro-electric dam project and the large-scale solar power developments in the Sahel region.

### **Investment in the Mineral Mining Sector**

China is now the prime driver of world mineral prices and a number of African countries have become key beneficiaries of this opportunity as they play a critical role in the provision of key minerals for the Chinese economy<sup>19, 26, 27</sup>. China either exclusively or significantly relies on sub-Saharan Africa for its cobalt, chromium and manganese imports especially from countries like Gabon, South Africa, Madagascar, Sudan and Ghana<sup>28</sup>. China has shown growing interest in the mining belt of Central Southern Africa endowed with copper, iron gold manganese and other base metals especially in countries like Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique. The purchase of 85 percent stake of the Chambishi copper mines in Zambia in 1999 was one of China's earliest mining investments in Africa<sup>22,29</sup>. In 2006, around 27 percent Zambia's copper exports were destined for China. There are indications that Chinese companies are weighing the options for investing in South Africa's iron ore deposits in the Northern Cape. It has a significant investment in the copper and cobalt mining industry in DR Congo and has offered the country a huge loan for its infrastructural development. The West African country Niger, offers prospects for China's investment in its uranium deposits. Also, a Chinese company in Sierra Leone, recently entered partnership with London Mining Co. Ltd in an investment worth US\$ 1.5 million in the country's iron ore mining. Sierra Leone also offers new mining partnership opportunities to Chinese companies for its aluminum and titanium ore deposits.

### **Recent Success Stories of China's Economic Cooperation with Africa**

The success stories of Chinese economic cooperation with African countries are numerous and stem from the attributes of China's skilled labor, dedicated, prompt execution of development projects and mutual respect. The most recently functional China Africa Development Fund (CAD-Fund) established in 2006 aims at stimulating economic growth through foreign direct investments on the continent. With representative offices in four African countries; South Africa, Ethiopia, Ghana and Zambia, the CAD-Fund has paved the way for some 2000 Chinese investments with more than 6,000 Chinese owned or affiliated companies operating across the continent<sup>30</sup>. As the largest exporter of manufactured goods, China has continued supply to Africa with much needed consumer goods and playing a leading role in international trade across the continent.

Some major ongoing and pending trade and development projects around the continent involving Chinese foreign direct investment are referenced below:

The Malawi Cotton project, with funding from the China-Africa Development Fund is considered one of China's largest agriculture investments in Africa that has impacted positively on the nation's growth in the agricultural sector. It is viewed as model for Future Cooperation with other African countries in the agricultural sector.

In West Africa, Chinese Trade investment is estimated in excess of US\$ 5 billion. Imports from Ghana alone have increased in excess of 100 percent in raw material not limited to rubber and cocoa. A recent investment in the iron ore industry in Sierra Leone valued at US\$ 1.5 million is expected to boost the local economy and create thousands of jobs needed to reduce the mounting youth unemployment in the country.

In the area of infrastructural development, China has contributed immensely in both national and trans-national road and railway construction. The Export-import Bank of China (EIBC) will partly fund the construction of a toll road that links Entebbe International Airport to Kampala in Uganda scheduled to commence in January 2013. The 50km, six lane dual carriage way will be constructed by a Chinese consulting firm with EIBC providing funds to the tune of US\$ 350 million. China is major contender bidding for the construction of Kenya's flagship US\$ 20billion LAPSET Project (Lamu Port South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor). This project includes an 800km highway (which will stretch from Lamu, Kenya connecting Ethiopia, and Juba, South Sudan) a railway line, an oil pipeline, oil refinery, a new Port and airport in the coastal town of Lamu<sup>31</sup>. Considered as one of Africa's largest infrastructure projects, it would be a strategic development that will facilitate trade expansion, interconnection and integration within the East African region. The project is also anticipated to benefit China and its East African counterparts serving as a route to transport oil from landlocked South Sudan to ports of export.

### China's Critics

In spite of all the positive strides to establish solid and fraternal cooperation with Africa, China has been hunted by its adversaries, castigating China's appalling labor rights record and environmental neglect in its signature investment projects. A cross section of the International community blames China for fanning conflicts in some parts of Africa and for supporting oppressive governments against opposition parties or in clamping down on their citizens<sup>32</sup>. Although some of these allegations are exaggerated, China must seek to play a leadership role by engaging African leaders on issues of corruption and good governance. Even though China pursues a non-interference foreign policy with regards countries' domestic issues, it must seek to actively engage African leaders at regional and sub-regional levels on peace and conflict resolution. It must be noted that as China's investment continues to expand in Africa, any future success will largely depend on political stability on the continent. The fact that China offers development aid to some African governments without any pre-conditionality could be a recipe for bad governance and unaccountability that will give rise to conflict. Non performing governments that enjoy the generosity of China would want to take advantage of that to hold on to political power indefinitely.

Chinese investors venturing into Africa must take cognizance of the divergence between Chinese and African cultures and traditions, and should therefore seek to understand the culture and endeavor to learn the local languages of host communities as ways of building good working relationships with the natives and the local work force.

### African-Chinese Perception and Mindset

One major factor that is going to impact on the success of future Chinese investment in Africa is the perception of Africans and Chinese towards each other. The Chinese and African governments should work assiduously to improve their citizens' perception regarding the mutual benefits of the booming China-Africa socio-economic cooperation. Anthropologist on both sides should figure out strategies that will aim at improving public perception and tolerance.

At the moment, different social strata in Africa relate differently towards China. The low-income grass root people generally appreciate China, partly due to the outstanding traditional Chinese-African relationship nurtured in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and partly to the affordability of Chinese products which meets their income. The political class including African leaders and higher cadre of civil servants generally regards China as a model for developing nations. Most people in this bracket appreciate China's increasing role in Africa and on the international stage. The elite group mostly comprising middle class scholars is quite apprehensive and hostile towards China's interest, partly due to Western orientation and media insinuations c China as an exploiter of the continent's resources.

If Chinese investment in Africa should thrive, it necessary for the two people to foster a very solid common ground. Currently, Chinese entrepreneurs in Africa mainly engaged in mining, agriculture, manufacturing and catering industries should relate very well with their African counterparts and instill confidence in African consumers. They should respect and abide by the local laws and demonstrate good professional ethics. A handful of Chinese business owners in Africa, unfortunately, engage in some illegal activities ranging from pursuing unfair competition in local African markets, fraudulent activities, subjecting local employees to poor labor conditions and delays in wage payment. These negative attributes smear China's image and create wrong impressions of Chinese investment on the African mind.

### Conclusion

China's outstanding relationship with Africa has been developed on the basis of mutual respect and common benefits. This strategic partnership offers socio- economic growth and development to Africa in exchange for the continent's natural resources. China has made significant impact on Africa's infrastructural and human resource development. In order to further strengthen the already existing cordial relationship,

future partnership must target poverty reduction and the establishment of social security as guarantees for peace and stability on the continent. Education and cultural exchanges could help eradicate stereotypes and strengthen the China-Africa bond. As a way of demonstrating China's commitment to sustainable development in Africa, putting more emphasis on environmental mitigation practice, community development in its investment strides, will boost future investment opportunities on the continent.

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