

EARLIER AND CONTEMPORARY RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND AFRICA

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China's relationship with Africa has evolved over a long and complex period. The almost mystical Silk Road, for example, which existed prior to Alexander the Great, linked international trade and economy toward the interplay of goods, culture, and gold connecting the Mediterranean world (including Africa) through Central Asia and onwards to China. The Umayyad Islamic Empire (661-750 CE) firmly established administrative trade and Islamic outposts throughout Central Asia and into China. The Mongol Empire renewed administrative relations from Europe and Africa and through to China. All westerners learn that the quest for spice trade with Asian regions and China propelled European navigation and manoeuvring through the late Medieval Period and into the Renaissance – especially after the Spanish Reconquista. During the heyday of overt European Imperialism, Africa was a significant bridge for achieving trade with China. European nations vied for supremacy to control key African ports to harbour vessels carrying wares, ships of war, and diplomatic missions – solely to achieve regular and long-term commerce with Asia (again, especially India and China). In the heyday of European Imperialist hegemony, China did not actively participate in direct involvement on the African continent; China's interests were maintained through ongoing relationships on the periphery¹.

¹ Zhufan Zhi (諸蕃志) (“Records of Foreign Peoples”), a two-volume work from first quarter twelfth century, describes Somalia (Chung-li), Berber Coast (Pi-P'a-Lo), and Zanzibar (Ts'ong-pa). The text's author Zhao Rugua (趙汝适, a government trade minister, clearly shows that China recognized Africa's importance for trade. Significantly, many sections from Zhufan Zhi were copied or transliterated from an earlier 1178 tome: Lingwai Daida (嶺外代答). (Text 1: Chinese East African Trade Before the 16th Century, Potter, Joshua W., 1974: Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 5(2) retrieved at <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/30d277bf#page-1>; Text 2: Zhao Rugua: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhao_Rugua)

In modern times, and especially during the Cold War, China's policy towards Africa generally supported revolutionary movements, supporting Communist political and economic policy against Western – particularly U.S. and imperial ideology. Chinese policy generally affirmed communism and supported revolutionary movements in Africa and elsewhere. Eisenman recalled the 1960's Chinese news that 'African revolutionaries were studying Mao's works and using Chinese guerrilla methods'². Moreover, China can be seen as attempting to weaken Russian influence in Africa during this period, and Angola was the location of this ideological battle. The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola was the first in Africa to receive Chinese support. In 1973, Deng Xiaoping met official representatives of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola. A few months later, China's government sent the Angolan army hundreds of tons of arms and 112 experts to train guerrilla fighters led by Holden Roberto³.

As well as China can be seen as attempting to balance a variety of strategic objectives. In some cases, China sought to develop diplomatic relations with the African countries such as Congo, Zambia and Nigeria; in other cases, China supported revolutionary liberation struggles. The nation-states of Sub-Saharan Africa suffered through insurgencies and liberation movements; some of which were supported by China. As the nation-states graduated to independence during the blossoming post-colonial period, Beijing actively sought to quickly establish diplomatic relations them and foster ongoing economic ties. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai's (1956-1966 and 1973-1976) visits to African countries were extraordinary and exceptional. As he aimed to further cooperation between the countries⁴. The TAZARA railway is a clear example of this approach. It was financed and developed with Chinese support (1970-1975) and was influential in liberating East-Central African economies from white settlers' governance. The key project gave many Zambian and Tanzanian youth an experience of liberation. This particular example provided both an economic and socio-

² J. Eisenman, 'China's post-Cold War strategy in Africa: examining Beijing's methods and objectives', *China and the Developing World: Beijing's Strategy for the Twenty-First Century*, 2007, p. 31.

³ D. Large, 'A Chinese Scramble? The Politics of Contemporary China-Africa Relations', *African Affairs*, vol. 106, No. 422, 2008, pp. 51-53.

⁴ Gill Bates, J. Stephen Morrison, and C. Hao-Huang, 'China-Africa relations: An early, uncertain debate in the United States' in B. Gill et al., (reprinted), *China Returns to Africa: a rising power and a continent embrace*, Hurst, London, 2008, pp. 169-171.

psychological boost to the African workers and communities, and was symbolic of liberation from colonialism⁵. It seems that Chinese involvement in TAZARA Railway was a positive influence for African nations to liberate and obtain independence.

Today, even though their ideology has changed, China is still aiming to improve China's image and promote person-to-person links. China has adopted the use of soft power through public diplomacy and cultural instruments. For example, Chinese cultural programs in Africa commonly focus on Chinese language and Chinese study, and are realized through scholarships and studying at Confucius institutes and Chinese cultural centres. China awarded 1,793 government funded scholarships to African students in 2003 which were one-third of the Chinese total government scholarships awarded that year⁶. Furthermore, Chinese tourism in Africa, which is one of the main elements of China's soft power, is developing. China has signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Tourism with many African countries including Tunisia, Mauritius, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Seychelles and Zimbabwe. The favourite destination of Chinese tourists in Africa is South Africa and the number of Chinese tourists to South Africa tripled between 2003 and 2004⁷. Relationships in cultural and humanitarian fields, as well as cooperation in economic and military fields have flourished.

Furthermore, the second seller of arms to Africa is China, just behind Russia and military-to-military ties between China and Africa have increased. China's military sales to Sudan were summed up as follows in the report of the Council on Foreign Relations in 2006:

Chinese weapons deliveries to Sudan have included ammunition, small arms, towed howitzers, anti-aircraft guns, anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, tanks, helicopters and fighter aircrafts. China also helped to establish three weapons factories in Sudan including one for assembling T-55 tanks. There are also an undetermined number of Chinese military personnel stationed in Sudan to secure its investments⁸.

⁵ J. Monson, 'Liberating Labour? Constructing Anti-Hegemony on the TAZARA railway in Tanzania during 1965-1976' States' in B. Gill et al., (reprinted), *China Returns to Africa: a rising power and a continent embrace*, Hurst, London, 2008, pp. 209-213.

⁶ Eisenman, p. 33.

⁷ Eisenman, p. 35.

⁸ Lake, Anthony, et al., *More Than Humanitarianism: A Strategic US Approach Toward Africa: Report of an Independent Task Force*, Council on Foreign Relations, 2006, p. 43.

There are also close military relations between China and Zimbabwe. China installed a radar system at Zimbabwean President Mugabe's mansion in 2004 and the air force of Zimbabwe received from China 6 K8 jet aircraft in 2005⁹. According to Joseph Nye's suggestion about Smart Power which could be the combination of hard and soft powers' advantages¹⁰ and China has used it in proper and possible ways through strengthening its political ties, improving its economic cooperation and reinforcing its military capacities.

There is a palpable impact from Chinese involvement in economic and political fields of Africa, especially through Chinese foreign policy towards non-Western countries, in many African nations' domestic scenes. He argues that there are three different groups of African nations illustrating political influences of China's increasing involvement on the continent. At first, the noticeable return of China to Africa happened at the time while many African nations were facing political difficulties and challenges in their transition period from authoritarian to democratic societies. Democracy was never a focus of Chinese foreign policy; they have aimed to widen through autocrats in that region its development assistance and support. Secondly, there have been huge impacts by China in the countries with massive mineral resources. At last, post-conflict African countries are perceptible of China's involvement. As China increases its involvement in the UN peacekeeping operations in the region and it is also developing bilateral relations between China and African countries¹¹. Tull sees China's positive intentions not only in economic arenas; also he argues that there are some progressive movements in political fields between China and Africa such as mutual supports in the UN and other international arenas and non-intervention issues.

As well as Eisenman argues that China's intentions in Africa are based on Chinese economic interests and in political and other policy areas. He argues that China appreciates the massive support of African nations on the Taiwan issue. At almost every meeting, China has expected African nations to reaffirm their support on the "one-China principle," while a few African

⁹ Eisenman, pp. 48-49

¹⁰ J. Nye, *The Future of American Power*, PublicAffairs, New York, 2004, pp. 67-69.

¹¹ Denis M. Tull, 'The Political Consequences of China's Return to Africa' States' in B. Gill et al., (reprinted), *China Returns to Africa: a rising power and a continent embrace*, Hurst, London, 2008, pp. 475-477.

countries including Malawi, Swaziland, Gambia, Burkina Faso and Sao Tome and Principe maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan at the present time. According to his view, one of the best examples of China's influence on African nation-states is China's successful campaign to avoid censure for human rights violations in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). After this strategic victory in the UNCHR votes in 1996, China held high-level dialogues with 15 African members and signed over 20 protocols and cooperation agreements. Significantly, China granted reprieves worth US\$18.5 million to Senegal directly after the former French colony broke diplomatic ties with Taiwan¹².

Daniel Large sees China's intentions in Africa in positive ways. He critiques Mr. George Yu's notion that "Studying China in Africa is much like pursuing a dragon in the bush. The dragon is imposing but the bush is dense"¹³ which wrote over four decades ago as follows:

Chinese dragon operating in the African bush, its actions constrained by yet selectively visible against unfamiliar terrain, persists in much of the language and assumptions used to describe China–Africa relations today. This is particularly in the case in Western coverage. The effect is often emotively to describe China's rise in Africa in terms of a monolithic Chinese dragon in an unvariegated African bush stripped of historical and political content¹⁴.

Furthermore, Daniel Large calls upon others to think beyond this framework regarding Chinese current dynamic ties with African countries. The advantages of strengthening political ties and economic cooperation may become increasingly obvious in the future with the trend of globalization especially with a good prosperity in the relations between people of China and African nations.

Therefore, it could be said that China's soft power approach started initially in the 1960s through programs facilitating medical, military and agricultural training¹⁵ in Africa has flourished today in every single area, not only in trade and economic fields. In recent years, China has activated

¹² Eisenman, pp. 31-33.

¹³ Large, p. 45.

¹⁴ Large, p. 45.

¹⁵ Large, p. 143

social, cultural and educational cooperation via formal and informal mechanisms with African countries. The China–Africa Youth Festival was held in 2004 in Guangzhou, and the first Summit of the China–Africa Cooperation Forum was held in 2006 in China¹⁶. There have been valuable improvements in China–Africa relations and cooperation in every field.

China will continue to expand its presence and integration into the world economy. The strength of China’s domestic economy and world trade requires ongoing rebalancing. China’s economic potency creates cash reserves. This commands China to diversify its relations with other nations and economies through positive outward investment and trade for future returns on investment. On the other hand, China’s domestic market still requires the import of critical know-how, especially to develop the service sector. While prior to 2013 China’s manufacturing sector had been dominant, by that year the services sector made up 46.2% of Chinese GDP. This suggests that China’s economy has become more diversified. Part of this change also includes a shift away from low-skilled jobs, suggesting a movement of demand for low-skilled workers from the least developed countries¹⁷. In the coming years, the process of China’s transformation will have a noteworthy impact upon the African continent. In general, China’s increasingly balanced and sustainable progress will be critical for the economic solidity of both sides. At the same instant, African nations should adjust their policies as they examine the positive and negative impacts of wide open doors to prevent potential difficulties. China’s export of low-tech industrial manufacturing, increasing foreign direct investment, and extended consumption demand create remarkable opportunities for African nation-states. The slower growth in Chinese demand for industrial and oil resources also pose challenges for the African economies.

¹⁶ Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Stellenbosch, <<http://www.ccs.org.za/?cat=56>>, consulted 15 May 2015.

¹⁷ UNESCAP, ‘Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific: Regional Connectivity for Shared Prosperity’, 2014, p. 42.

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