Sino-Africa Relations (1950-2022)

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Abstract

Sino-Africa relations are the total bonds or relations that connect Africa and China. It is relations built over time beginning from when the Chinese sensed and recognized the existence of a continent called Africa that could serve as a ladder to their economic greatness just as it has done to some European State especially Britain. China and Africa signed Bilateral Agreements in 1950s and some of the earlier African states that signed this agreement were Algeria, Egypt, and Somalia etc. Raw materials were the major items that attracted China to Africa The initial factors that strained the ties was the Cold War that was staged and championed by the World powers. China and Africa maintained close ties themselves with the degree of their bilateral relations revolving around communication, military diplomacy, and debt forgiveness etc. The paper adopts the descriptive method and uses secondary source in its analysis of research findings. China has been described as lesser devil when it comes to loan conditions and other Official Development Assistance when compared with other Western Powers; Africa also gained some level of industrialization.

Keywords: Sino-Africa, Economic Nursery Bed, FOCAC, Espionage and Military Diplomacy.

Introduction

According to Gin, Sino-Africa relations or Afro-Chinese relation refers to the historical, political, economic, military, social, and cultural connection between mainland China and the African continent Gin (2004).

From the voyage of discoveries which made the Europeans especially the Portuguese discovered the economic potential of Africa down to the colonization of African states; Africa attained global recognition in natural resources which spurred Industrial Revolution in Europe. Africa became the economic theatre of the world and became the Market square of the world too. From then, any country that wants to be super power must have a shop in Africa less it has not started. It was part of this that made China to trace their way into Africa.

The prestigious economic potential of Africa also rang bell in China while growing up as a country that wanted to take a right position in world economy. No wonder they traced themselves to Africa from the 1950s. Africa became **World Economic Nursery Bed** due to the rat race to Africa that spurred world industrialization.

It is also pertinent to consider how Africa became the World Economic Spiritual House where the G8 could go to 'libate' and solicit for economic advantage in world economic system. China also followed suit; which now leads to what is described as; Sino-African Relations.

China saw resources of many kinds just like any other power in the world. This made them to pitch their economic tents in Africa with many strategies to sustain their economic ties with Africa.

In this write up, there is the need to consider the following as strategies which glue the Sino-Africa: the contemporary relations of China with Africa, Diplomatic relations of China with Africa, economic diplomatic ploy of China in Africa, military diplomacy of China in Africa and criticisms of their relations with Africa.

China and Africa Relations

In the 1960s, the People's Republic of China established diplomatic relations with a host of African countries in quick succession when many African countries regained their independence.

The establishment of modern Sino-Africa relations began in the late 1950s, as noted by Asiedu, when China signed bilateral trade agreements with Algeria, Egypt, Guinea, Somalia, Morocco, and Sudan. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai made a ten-country tour of Africa between December 1963 and January 1964. Zhou Enlai visited Ghana and established close relations with Kwame Nkrumah, who desired a united Africa relations.

At that time China's foreign policy in general "began to cultivate ties and offer 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 both superpowers", (Asiedu, 2021).

Diplomatic Relations between China and Africa

The early modern bilateral relations were mainly affected by the Cold War and communist ideology. China originally had close ties with the anti-apartheid and liberation movement, **A**frican National Congres**s** (ANC), in South Africa, but as China's relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated and the ANC moved closer to the Soviet Union, China shifted away from the ANC towards the Pan-Africanist Congress. The Soviets supported Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union, and supplied them with arms; Robert Mugabe's attempts to gain Soviet support for his Zimbabwe African National Union were rebuffed, leading him to enter into relations with China. China adopted several principles; among them was the support of the independence of African countries while investing in infrastructure projects, (Genin, 2019).

Again, according to Genin, in the 1970s, the expulsion of Soviet military advisers from Egypt and Sudan was welcomed with arms supplied by China. China and Zaire (and Safari Club) shared a common goal in Africa, namely to do everything in their power to halt Soviet gains in the area. Accordingly, both Zaire and China covertly funneled aid to the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) (and later, UNITA) to prevent the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which was supported and augmented by Cuba, from coming to power. China and Safari Club sent assistance to support the Mobutu regime during the Shaba I conflict in 1977. Also, in Somali Democratic Republic which established good relations with the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War era, Somalia sought to create a Greater Somalia. It declared war on Ethiopia and took the Ogaden region in three months with Soviet aid. When the Soviet Union shifted its support from Somalia to Ethiopia, the latter retook the Ogaden. This angered Somalian President, Siad Barre, who expelled all Soviets advisors and citizens from Somalia. China and Safari Club supported Somalia diplomatically and with token military aid.

Economic Diplomatic ploy of China

In 1980, Dankwah, acknowledged the total Sino-African trade volume which according to him amounted to US$1 billion. In 1999 and US$10 billion in 2000; by 2005, the total Sino-African trade volume had reached US$39.7 billion before jumping to US$55 billion in 2006, making China the second-largest trading partner of Africa after the United States, which had US$91 billion in trade with African nations. The PRC also passed its traditional African

economic partner and former colonial power, France, which had trade worth US$47 billion. In 2010, trade between Africa and China was valued at US$114 billion and US$166.3 billion in 2011. In the first ten months of 2012, it was US$163.9 billion. Findings from 2017 estimate 10,000 Chinese corporations doing business in Africa, most of which are private companies investing in the infrastructure, energy, and banking sectors Investments from Chinese entrepreneurial migration has culminated in positive (indirect jobs) and negative (displacing local traders) effects in local African societies, (Dankwah, 2019).

More so, one-third of China's oil supplies come from the African continent, mainly from Angola. Investments of Chinese companies in the energy sector reached US$78.1 billion in 2019. In some cases, as in Nigeria and Angola, oil and gas exploration and production deals crossed $2 billion, (Dankwah, 2019).

In agriculture, Benin and the Sahel countries of Burkina Faso and Mali supply up to 20% US$39.7 million in 2001 to $113.5 million in 2005 shipments of coffee are imported from Kenya. As for fish products, Namibia remains one of the main providers as noted by Lee, (Lee, 2004).

During the year 2011, trade between Africa and China increased a staggering 33% from the previous year to US$166 billion. This included Chinese imports from Africa equaling US$93 billion, consisting largely of mineral ores, petroleum, and agricultural products, and Chinese exports to Africa totaling US$93 billion, consisting largely of manufactured goods. Outlining the rapidly expanding trade between the African continent and China, trade between these two areas of the world increased further by over 22% year-over-year to US$80.5 billion in the first five months of the year 2012. Imports from Africa were up to 25.5% to $49.6 billion during these first five months of 2012 and exports of Chinese-made products, such as machinery, electrical and consumer goods and clothing/footwear increased 17.5% to reach $30.9 billion. China has been Africa's largest trading partner since 2009 when it surpassed the United States, and continues to be the largest trading partner as of 2020, albeit with a Coronavirus-induced drop in volume, (Asiedu, 2021)

The need to protect China's increased investments in Africa has driven a shift away from China's traditional non-interference in the internal matters of other countries to new diplomatic and military initiatives to try to resolve unrest in South Sudan and Mali.

During the December 2015 FOCAC meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa, China's paramount leader Xi Jinping pledged $60 billion over three years in loans and assistance to the African continent. The stated aim of China's effort was to support factories

manufacturing goods for export. Along with roads and ports, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari showed his desire to finish stalled railway projects along the coastline, specifically a 1,400 km railway from Lagos to Calabar representing approximately 200,000 jobs (Keith, 2014).

In a nutshell, the economic diplomacy of China is the investments they consider in Africa, infrastructural development, and Official Development Assistance. These became Africa economic diplomatic tools use in gumming Africa to themselves. This became true when African countries consider Chinese services to be cheaper and considerate when compared with that of Europe and America services and relations.

Communications infrastructure

To improve commercial relations in telecommunication services which form part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), significant investments in fiber networks have been undertaken.

The PEACE Cable (Pakistan & East Africa Connecting Europe) is a 9,300-mile (12,000 km) submarine fiber optic cable owned by a subsidiary of the China-based Heng tong Group and supplied by Huawei Marine. It is expected to reach initial completion in 2021–2022. The Cable's landfall in Pakistan provides for low-latency overland connection to China. The Cable's route is around the Arabian Peninsula, first dividing north into the Red Sea, crossing land in Egypt and then proceeding through the Mediterranean to the Interxion MRS2 Data Center in Marseille, France. The southern fork extends along the east coast of Africa, which in Phase 2 will reach South Africa. Additional landfalls are in Cyprus, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, and Seychelles.

In August 2021, China announced more digital projects on the Continent in areas such as the digital economy, smart cities and 5G. These projects are thought to be part of the Digital Africa initiative that was proposed during a trip of Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Africa in 2020, (Keith, 2014).

Aid and loans

Yours sincerely, China has been given financial succors to African countries. Even in the month of August 2022 according to news report, China has accepted to forgive twenty-three loans for seventeen African countries. They have been very helpful to African countries when it comes to loan and debt forgiveness when compared with some of the Western States.

How Much Loan has Nigeria Taken from China?

According to Nigeria Debt Management Office, as of March 31, 2020 report, the Total Borrowing by Nigeria from China was USD3.121 billion (₦1,126.68 billion at USD/₦361). This amount represents only 3.94% of Nigeria's Total Public Debt of USD79.303 billion (₦28,628.49 billion at USD/₦361) as of March 31, 2020. Similarly, in terms of external sources of funds, Loans from China accounted for 11.28% of the External Debt Stock of USD27.67 billion at the same date; (Nigeria Debt Management Office Report, 2020).

What are the Terms of the Loans from China?

The Total Borrowing from China of USD3.121 billion as of March 31, 2020, are concessional Loans with Interest Rates of 2.50% p.a., Tenor of Twenty (20) years and Grace Period (Moratorium) of Seven (7) years. The Terms and other details of the Loan are available at www.dmo.gov.ng. These Terms are compliant with the provisions of Section 41 (1a) of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2007. In addition, the low interest rate reduces the Interest Cost to Government while the long tenor enables the repayment of the principal sum of the Loans over many years. These two benefits make the provisions for Debt Service in the Annual Budget lower than they would otherwise have been if the Loans were on commercial terms.

What Were the Loans Used for?

The USD3.121 billion Loans are project-tied Loans. The projects, (eleven – 11 in number as of March 31, 2020), include: Nigerian Railway Modernization Project (Idu-Kaduna section), Abuja Light Rail Project, Nigerian Four Airport Terminals Expansion Project (Abuja, Kano, Lagos, and Port Harcourt), Nigerian Railway Modernization Project (Lagos-Ibadan section) and Rehabilitation and Upgrading of Abuja – Keffi- Makurdi Road Project. See a Full List of the Projects at www.dmo.gov.ng.

The impact of these Loans is not only evident but visible. For instance, the Idu – Kaduna Rail Line has become a major source of transportation between Abuja and Kaduna. Also, the new International Airport in Abuja, has improved air transportation for the populace, while the Lagos – Ibadan rail line when completed, will ease traffic on the busy Lagos - Ibadan Expressway.

The projects also have the added benefits of job creation, not only by themselves but through direct and indirect service providers, several which are Small and Medium Enterprises.

It is widely accepted that investment in infrastructure is one of the most effective tools for countries to achieve economic growth and development. Using Loans from China to finance infrastructure is thus in alignment with this position. **Debt-trap diplomacy**

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Chinese government supported African Independence Movements and gave aid to newly independent African nations. Among the most notable early projects were the 1,860 km TAZARA Railway, linking Zambia and Tanzania, which China helped to finance and build from 1970 to 1975. Some 50,000 Chinese engineers and workers were sent to the continent to complete the project. By 1978, China was giving aid to more African countries than the United States. In 2014, the US gave four times what China gave to Africa in official development assistance.

According to Marxist journalist, Martin Jacques in his book, *When China Rules the World*, Chinese aid is "far less restrictive and doctrinaire" and comes with fewer strings attached than Western aid. Unconditional and low-rate credit lines (rates at 1.5% over fifteen years to twenty years) have largely taken the place of more restrictive and conditional Western loans, Dahir, Abdi Latif (2019).

An estimate regarding the amount of African debt cancelled by China varies. Since 2000, over $10bn in debt owed by African nations to the PRC has been cancelled, according to *Le Monde diplomatique*. According to a 2020 report by the China Africa Research Initiative, "China has only offered debt write-offs for zero-interest loans", which account for at least $3.4 billion of cancelled debt in Africa between 2000 and 2019, (Dahir, 2019).

Scott N. Romaniuk, a researcher at the University of Alberta's China Institute, cautioned that Africa should "beware of 'no strings attached'" regarding development financing from China. He said that China's low-interest loans have been used to trade for extraction rights of proven deposits of natural resources, constraining African countries' future use of these resources. Patrick Bond said, "the conditions on Chinese loans and investments become very clear when the recipient countries have a debt crisis" (Wan, 2018*).*

In 2015, the China Africa Research Initiative identified 17 African countries with loans from China facing potential default. Kenyan economist Anzetse Were has argued that some African nations' narratives of Chinese debt-trap diplomacy stem from a lack of fiscal transparency and a weaker bargaining position vis-à-vis China, (Dahir, 2019*).* As of 2021, China is estimated to hold at least 21% of all African debt.

Allegations of Espionage

The African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa was built and fully funded by the Chinese government. The Chinese government was alleged to have spied on the computer servers at the headquarters from 2012 to 2017. Chinese officials and African Union denied the accusation, yet the African Union replaced their servers after the report of backdoor hacks, African Union Bugged by China (2021).

Military Diplomacy of China in Africa

Military cooperation goes back to the Cold War period when China was keen to help African liberation movements. Eritrea's first president Isaias Afwerki, a leader in the fight for independence, received military training in China, Apart from some traditional allies such as Somalia and Tanzania; China also had military ties with non-aligned countries like Egypt.

Military equipment worth $142 million was sold to African countries between 1955 and 1977 In July 2017, China set up its first overseas military base in Djibouti, which is a small town located in the Horn of Africa between the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, as a logistics facility for peacekeeping missions on the continent. Bertil Lintner, as well as various Indian analysts, have described the base in Djibouti as part of China's "String of Pearls" geopolitical and military strategy in the Indian Ocean (Luke, 2021).

Peacekeeping Missions

According to Puska (2004), China deployed around 1,500 military personnel between Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since 2011, it has sent infantry troops describable as 'combat' forces'.

Also in July 2007, China supported the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1769 and contributed troops to African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). China also has fourteen attachés in fourteen different African countries as of 2007, while eighteen African countries maintain attachés in Beijing (Puska, 2007).

Arms Sales

An increasing number of African countries have shifted their source of munitions from traditional providers such as Russia to China due to the competitive prices offered by Chinese suppliers. It is estimated that between 2013 and 2017, Chinese arms imports to Africa totaled 17%, representing a 55% increase compared to the period covering 2009 to 2013. It also sold more arms than any other supplier, with sales to 23 African countries.

Arms sales by China to some African states have troubled critics who point out that some buyers like Sudan are accused of war crimes Chinese drones have proliferated across Africa, and have been utilized in hundreds of attacks in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Nigeria, (Holland, 2020).

Former U.S. military contractor Erik Prince's Frontier Services Group has close ties to the Chinese state-owned CITIC Group and provides security training services to Chinese firms operating in Africa (Holland, 2020).

Culture

In 1724, Idris Abubakar noted that a few Chinese convicts were brought as laborers to South Africa from the Dutch East Indies (modern-day Indonesia) by the colonial Dutch Empire. In the early nineteenth century, another wave of immigrants was brought to South Africa by the British to work in agriculture, infrastructure building, and mining. In recent years, there has been an increasing presence of Chinese in Africa with one estimate numbering Chinese nationals at one million (Idris, 2021).

In 2012, state media broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) opened its first office in Africa, in Kenya, which is currently called CGTN Africa. China has also been increasingly involved in sport in Africa. Since 1970, Chinese-owned companies have been building sports stadiums throughout most African countries. Each project costs dozens of millions of dollars, a fee that China gives as a soft loan. The stadiums strengthen China's diplomatic and commercial ties with African countries. African governments accept China's loans because they enable them to promote development projects. On the other hand, concerns have been raised as to the working conditions at these stadiums. Also, some of the stadiums turned out to be white elephants given their meager usage (Dubinsky, 2021).

Criticism

There are a variety of critical perspectives scrutinizing the balance of power relationship between China and Africa, and China's role concerning human rights in Africa this is to show that the relations is not a perfect one devoid of criticisms. Increasingly, concerns have been raised by Africans and outside observers that China's relationship with Africa is neocolonialist in nature. As a response to such criticism, China issued the *Nine Principles to Encourage and Standardise Enterprises' Overseas Investment*, a charter and conduct guide for Chinese companies operating abroad *as noted by Sautman, and Hairong, 2008.* In 2002, Sautnan and Hairong observed that the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that China and Africa are making "joint efforts to maintain the lawful rights of developing

countries and push forward the creation of a new, fair and just political and economic order in the world"

According to Qui Winston, in 2020 there is close to a hundred studies on Africa-China economic relations which supported Africa's economic transformation. At the same time, criticism against China has been growing from labour unions and civil society groups about the "poor labor conditions, unsustainable environmental practices, and job displacement" caused by Chinese enterprises. According to Qui, China is also thought to be taking advantage of African governments' weaknesses, thereby encouraging corruption and wasteful decision-making, (Qui, 2021).

Migration and Racism

The expansion of Chinese companies and their investments in Africa has raised issues of Chinese racism against the local population. For example, after a video shot by a Kenyan worker whose Chinese boss referred to Kenyans as "monkeys" went viral in 2018, more examples of discrimination by Chinese nationals in the country, such as separated bathrooms, have emerged (Goldstein, 2018).

International observers have highlighted the generalized view in China of Africans as "backward or primitive and blackness as unattractive", with racist attitudes specifically on social media going untouched by censorship, (Hangwei, 2021).

Zimbabwe

The China-Zimbabwe relationship drew the attention of critics to their involvement in some of the crises in African States. China was accused of supplying Zimbabwe with jet fighters, vehicles, and other military equipment. China declared in 2007 claiming that it was limiting assistance to humanitarian aid. In July 2008, Chinese diplomatic channels asked Mugabe "to behave", though critics see that as a way for China to protect its interests in this country should a regime change, (Evans, 2008). Their interest is change in regime in Africa so it can favour their own foreign policy even if it requires the loss of lives and property in Africa.

War in Darfur

Another high-profile event of concern for critics of China in Africa was in the run-up to the 2008 Summer Olympics. Human rights groups criticized China for its supportive relationship with the government of Sudan, which had been accused of mass killings in Darfur. China is Sudan's largest economic partner, with a 40% share in its oil, and also sells Sudan small arms. China has threatened to veto UN Security Council actions to combat

the war in Darfur. In response, a 2008 editorial in the CCP-owned daily tabloid *Global Times* stated that "As the Darfur issue is not an internal affair of China, nor was it caused by China, to link the two together is utterly unreasonable, irresponsible and unfair." *"China: Darfur-Olympic link 'unfair'"* (Aljazeera.com. 14 February, 2008).

Conclusion

In this article on Sino-Africa relations, Africa is seen as a continent the world cannot do without especially in economic relations due to the abundance of natural resources that are transforming nations that have ever established relations with them and ready market since they are not yet ready for tsunamic industrial revolution. China stepped into Africa to win the prestige attached to relations between Africa and the major powers like America and Europe. Economic reason remains the key factor that attracted Africa to China. All other activities dance round this reason with much comparison.

Their humanitarian services were only to consolidate the relations with Africa and not because of love they have for Africa. This has become the tradition Africa has been having with the wider world. The common intention of driving their foreign policy spurred them t use any diplomatic tools to nail down their national interest.

It is confirmed that China introduced some development in Africa, and it is left for Africa to polish it and picks up from there. They would not have contributed to those developments if they were not benefitting from their trade and investment in Africa.

The Sino-African relations is a photocopy of the world superpowers relations with Africa which led to Chinese development. But it is discovered that Africa is still staggering behind China. This is where African foreign policy and national interest should torchlight to see how they would not be universal donor and at the same time remaining sick cell when it comes to development.

Corruption is the main anemia in the African system which hampers growth and development. With this, there is the need to cremate corruption in Africa; just the way China did and today they are giants in all ramifications before Africa.

China secured the benevolence and hospitality from Africa/s large heart due to the strategy it employed with all other diplomatic tactics to cement their relations with Africa especially given Africa loans with meagre interest rate and other investment opportunities. Continual collection of loan is not a good habit for developing nations like Nigeria. This is because Thomas Sankara, former Burkina Faso President once said, "he who feeds you controls

you". This remains solid; Africa needs to learn fast from China's approach on investment model so they can duplicate them on their soil for speedy development. This would be a major fruit that would balance the Sino-African relations.

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