

China and Africa: Building a Strategic Partnership

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on China's growing engagement with Africa – a subject that has not been given due attention in African studies. Following a review of the various shifts and continuities in Sino-African relations since the 1950s, the study sets out to explain the renewed interest of China in Africa since the end of the 1980s. Africa's interests in China complement much of the agenda being promoted by Beijing. Governing and business elites within Africa see new opportunities in China: trade (growing Chinese markets for African products) and investment opportunities, ways to bolster regime stability, and strategically important partnerships. Particularly attractive for many African rulers is the alternative development model propagated by China: non-interference in state sovereignty, freedom from 'western hegemony', and absence of any conditions in giving aid. However, there are also points of tension. One of them is trade since the balance of trade favours China. Local industries (especially manufacturing and textiles) and merchants have been hard hit by the flood of cheap Chinese imports. In addition, the newly created Pan African organizations like the African Union and the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) represent a challenge to non-interference in state sovereignty, and call for 'good governance'.

Keywords: Africa, China, trade, foreign direct investment, South-South relations

China's phenomenal growth rate has seen the country rise to world leadership status, causing many analysts to ponder its regional and global aims and intentions. China's position is unique: it has one foot in the developing world and another in the developed one, with a seat in the United Nations (UN) Security Council. This dual status gives it considerable leverage in the pursuit of its interests, and Africa now appears to be playing a significant role in China's foreign policy.

Regrettably, very little attention has been paid in African Studies to Sino-African relations and most of the existing literature deals with the

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Cold War era (cf. Larkin, 1971; Ogunsanwo, 1974; Weinstein, 1975; Snow, 1981; Hutchinson, 1975). Some authors aptly distinguish two phases in Sino-African relations during the Cold War era (Bräutigam, 1998; Jacobeit, 1998; Taylor, 1998a, 2001). The first was the Maoist era when China's Africa policy was marked by mainly ideological and strategic considerations. China saw itself as a member, and even the leader, of Third World struggles, trying to undermine western and Soviet influence, and to isolate Taiwan on the world stage. As part of that policy, China supported a limited number of highly visible aid projects on the continent, including the construction of roads, railways, agricultural schemes, and prestigious buildings, as well as some of the liberation movements that were not funded by Moscow. Africa-China trade, however, remained limited. The second phase started with Deng Xiaoping's economic modernization policies. For pragmatic reasons, China subsequently strove for economic cooperation with the West and, as a result, its interest in Africa was starkly reduced, all the more so because of the growing economic stagnation and crises on the continent.

In the first part of this article, I review the main findings of the Cold War literature, which will help to underline the shifts and continuities in China's Africa policies. However, the main focus of my study is on China's renewed interests in Africa during the era of neoliberal globalization. For some scholars (Jaffe and Lewis, 2002; Pan, 2006), the drive to secure energy resources for the country's rapid economic expansion is behind China's growing engagement with Africa. This certainly captures an important dimension of Chinese interests on the continent, but it would be a mistake to ascribe a single motive to the relationship. Conversely, the impetus for Africa's embrace of China has not been adequately examined (Alden, 2005).

My main argument in this study is that China sees Africa as a partner in the fulfilment of its strategic goals, namely resource security, new markets and investment opportunities, and the re-establishment of a political alliance. While China's growing presence in Africa is most visible on the economic front, which is a natural consequence of its economic growth, one should not overlook its political objectives. China is aiming at forging an alliance with African states to combat perceived western hegemony, especially in the UN and other multilateral organizations, and to circumscribe Taiwan's diplomatic space on the continent. The China-Africa Cooperation Forum, founded by China in October 2000, provided the institutional expression of a strategic China-Africa partnership in economic and political affairs.

I show here that Africa's interests in China complement much of the agenda being promoted by Beijing. Governing and business elites within Africa see new opportunities in China in trade and investment, and ways to bolster regime stability and strategically important partnerships. What is particularly attractive for many African rulers is the alternative development paradigm propagated by China: non-interference in state sovereignty, freedom from western hegemony, and an absence of any conditions in giving aid (with the exception of the 'one-China' principle). There are certain tensions, however, one of which is trade. The balance of trade currently favours China, and African manufacturers and businessmen have been hard hit by a flood of cheap Chinese imports. Another potential source of friction is political. A discourse on human rights and democracy is gradually taking root in Africa, albeit unevenly, promoted by newly created African organizations like the Africa Union (AU) and the NEPAD. This poses a serious challenge to the previously cherished principle of non-interference. For Beijing, this has troubling implications: a bloc of states that could once be counted on to defend the prerogative of sovereignty in multilateral settings is no longer completely wedded to this position.

China and Africa during the Cold War: From Ideology to Pragmatism

The People's Republic of China's original Africa policy was largely based on ideological and strategic considerations. It tried to project an image of being a fellow member of the Third World and a protagonist of South-South cooperation, and it claimed that it would combat colonialism, imperialism, and superpower influence on the continent. Since the mid-1960s, however, its Africa policy has become increasingly interlocked with its overriding global concerns to solidify its international position and play a leadership role in the Third World, in particular through winning the seat in the UN Security Council that was previously held by Taiwan. The idea that independent African states constituted a voting bloc in the UN, which could determine the outcome of the China-Taiwan rivalry, was to further increase China's interest in Africa (cf. Bräutigam, 1998; Hutchinson, 1975; Jacobeit, 1998; Larkin, 1971; Ogunsanwo, 1974).

China's first official contacts with Africa occurred during the Bandung Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in April 1955. The attendance of Chinese leaders at this conference was testimony to China's new identification as a member of the Third World. Six of the 29 states represented at

the conference were African: Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Liberia, Libya and Sudan (Larkin, 1971: 15–18). Bandung initiated an international campaign for Afro-Asian solidarity based on the contention that Asians and Africans shared common economic and political objectives that could be better achieved through cooperation. This philosophy has remained a key component of China's Africa policy (Shelton, 2001).

From the late 1950s onwards, there was a remarkable increase in China's contacts with Africa. Following the deterioration in its ties with the Soviet Union, China was eager to find allies on the continent to establish a counterweight to both Soviet hegemony and western imperialism. Africa subsequently became transformed into a battlefield for political influence between China and the two superpowers, whereby China presented itself as a developing country that had been victorious in its struggle against colonialism and hegemony and had devised an alternative development model. Against the backdrop of growing Sino-Soviet rivalry, it is understandable that China came to view the Soviet Union as its principal enemy (Akindele, 1985; Hutchinson, 1975; Larkin, 1971; Ogusanwo, 1974; Snow, 1981).

Prime Minister Zhou Enlai's visit to 10 African countries early in 1964 signalled the importance China placed on relations with the continent. During this visit, he outlined the five guiding principles in China's policy towards Africa. Zhou indicated that China supported African struggles against imperialism, African non-alignment, the African striving for unity, African efforts to settle disputes through peaceful consultation, and the sovereign independence of all African states. At a farewell dinner in Ghana on 15 January 1964, Zhou added an important element to China's Africa policy by proclaiming that the continent's potential for revolution was excellent.

China strongly supported African struggles for independence. In the first phase of independence, it tended to concentrate on African states that appeared to be following a self-reliant, socialist course, for example, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Zambia and Tanzania. In other, so-called reactionary African states, however, it was inclined to support radical or revolutionary dissidents and oppositional groups. One example is Cameroon, where China continued to support the radical nationalist party, the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), against the Ahidjo regime (Joseph, 1977). In July 1963, President Ahidjo severely criticized Chinese conduct: 'China is one of the states supporting terrorism in Cameroon. We have proof, for Cameroonian terrorists are in Communist China. As long as that situation

exists, we shall vote against China's admission to the UN' (Ogusanwo, 1974: 173). China even set up guerrilla training camps in some loyal African states like Ghana and Tanzania.

From the mid-1960s onwards, an important shift could be observed in China's Africa policies. On the one hand, China began to appeal to all legitimate governments in Africa, irrespective of their political inclination. Of course, this objective could only be achieved by abandoning its erstwhile support for dissidents and oppositional groups and offering African states generous aid on favourable terms. One reason for this change in policy was that China had come to the painful realization that most African states lacked socialist revolutionary fervour. Another even more important reason was that China needed to acquire support from as many African countries as possible in order to gain the seat it so desired at the UN. The investment in the search for allies in Africa paid up handsomely in 1971 when 26 of the 50 African states in the UN voted for the Albanian resolution to seat Communist China in the UN (Akindele, 1985; Hutchinson, 1975; Weinstein, 1975).

On the other hand, China started to compete with the Soviet Union for supporting the armed struggles of nascent liberation movements, especially in southern Africa. With the worsening of Sino-Soviet relations, China reversed its earlier policy of broad support for liberation organizations and became more circumscribed in aiding movements that had links with Moscow. Faced with the Soviet Union having developed close links with the major liberation movements in southern Africa, such as the ANC (South Africa), SWAPO (Namibia), MPLA (Angola) and Frelimo (Mozambique), China felt obliged to back rival movements that, in most cases, tended to be unrepresentative, ineffective, and even discredited (Akindele, 1985; Hutchinson, 1975; Taylor, 2000). A somewhat extreme example occurred during the Angolan war of liberation when China put itself in the embarrassing position of supporting the CIA-financed FNLA and UNITA. In Zimbabwe, China backed the liberation movement of Robert Mugabe, while Russia backed that of Joshua Nkomo. President Mugabe's ultimate election victory laid the foundations for the close relationship that still exists between China and Zimbabwe today.

In the course of its Africa policy, China has employed traditional foreign-policy instruments like the establishment of diplomatic relations, the use of military and economic aid, and the expansion of trade relations with as many African countries as possible. Beginning with Egypt in 1956, China built up a wide network of diplomatic relations with as many as 46 African

states during the Cold War era (Akindele, 1985). Despite this impressive achievement, aid nevertheless formed the most important component of China's foreign policy, providing resources for political, strategic and economic objectives. China used aid to offset the influence of the Soviet Union and western countries, to win diplomatic recognition away from Taiwan, and to support various liberation movements. Aid programmes strengthened China's efforts to support economic development and political unity among the disparate developing countries, including those in Africa, moulding them into a 'Third World', with China at the head (Weinstein, 1975; Bräutigam, 1998; Hyden and Mukandala, 1999).

Given the special character of Chinese foreign, economic and technical aid, it is necessary to refer to the eight principles guiding Chinese aid outlined by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai in Mali in 1964. China's aid, the guidelines asserted, would be based on equality, mutual benefit, and respect for the sovereignty of the host. Loans were to be non-conditional, interest-free, with repayment easily rescheduled, and projects would be designed to make the recipient self-reliant rather than dependent on China. To do this, the Chinese promised to select income-generating projects that could be constructed rapidly. Finally, China pledged to provide countries with top-quality Chinese equipment and materials at international prices, and experts who would transfer their technical knowledge fully and would live among their local counterparts (Bräutigam, 1998: 43; Akindele, 1985). These principles underscore the fundamental differences between China's economic aid and that of other major donors. Chinese aid was particularly attractive to African rulers because it was supplied on terms that apparently posed no obstacles to state sovereignty and economic independence. According to Hyden and Mukandala (1999: 157), the major thrust of China's aid was to ship tonnes of Chinese-made equipment, Chinese goods, and large groups of experts to the recipient countries to build 'complete plant projects' or turnkey projects.

Considering that China itself was still a developing country, one has to acknowledge that it has an impressive record of giving aid. Between 1960 and 1989 it provided Africa with nearly \$4.8 billion in economic aid, an amount that constitutes almost half of China's total aid budget during this period (see Table 1). Southern Africa was high on the list of recipients of economic aid, mainly due to political considerations and to support the struggle against colonialism and white racist rule (Taylor, 1998b, 2000; Yu, 1975). The most obvious case was China's willingness in 1967 to finance and construct the Tanzam (or Tazara) railway, which Yu (1975) perceived

Table 1.
Chinese aid to Africa in comparative perspective,
1960–89 (in millions of US dollars)

Region of Chinese aid	Amount
Africa	4,728
Middle, East and South Asia	4,053
East Asia	514
Latin America	314

Sources: Bräutigam (1998: 44); Bartke (1992).

as a benchmark in Sino-African relations (see also Bailey, 1976; Hall and Peyman, 1976; Taylor, 1998b). Its positive decision occurred after the two frontline states in southern Africa, Tanzania and Zambia, found it hard to transport goods through former Rhodesia, which had announced its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), and South Africa. Despite its domestic difficulties (at the height of the Cultural Revolution), China agreed to support this gigantic 1,860 km project connecting Dar-es-Salaam with the Copperbelt in Zambia, and finished the construction in 1975 with a total funding of some \$700 million.

Trade with Africa, however, still remained a modest part of China's imports and exports (Larkin, 1971: 89). The volume of Chinese trade with Africa increased from \$110.5 million in 1960 to \$177.2 million in 1970, comprising \$112.1 million in exports and \$65.1 million in imports (see Table 2). Two patterns were already emerging during this period. First, Sino-African trade as a proportion of China's world foreign trade had not been significant, representing 1 to 2 per cent only. Second, China had been exporting more to Africa than it imported from the continent.

As the 1970s drew to a close, there was a remarkable decline in Sino-African relations because China began to concentrate on its internal modernization and to pursue closer cooperation with the West for economic and pragmatic reasons. The end of the Cultural Revolution and the downfall of the radical Gang of Four in 1976 paved the way for the open-door policies and the socialist market system that have dramatically reformed China's previously isolated command economy (Bräutigam, 1998: 39–40; Houweling, 2004). Deng Xiaoping's reforms largely terminated the strong ideological content of China's foreign policy, elevating instead the objectives of promoting inward investment and international trade, both regarded as essential for domestic economic development (Aicardi de Saint-Paul, 2004; Segal, 1992; Shelton, 2001; Taylor, 2001). China joined the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and relied

Table 2.
China's trade with Africa, 1950–2005 (in millions of US dollars)

Year	Exports	Imports	Total trade
1950	8.9	3.2	12.1
1960	33.8	76.7	110.5
1970	112.1	65.1	177.2
1980	575.7	384.0	959.7
1990	659.6	275.3	934.9
1991	1,001.8	438.4	1,440.2
1992	1,390.8	659.8	2,050.6
1993	1,527.5	1,003.1	2,530.6
1994	1,749.0	894.0	2,643.0
1995	2,493.8	1,427.5	3,921.3
1996	2,566.6	1,464.0	4,030.6
1997	3,200.0	2,470.0	5,670.0
1998	4,059.3	1,476.5	5,535.8
1999	4,109.0	2,375.0	6,484.0
2000	5,043.0	5,555.0	10,598.0
2002			12,390.0
2003			18,500.0
2004	13,820.0	15,646.0	29,466.0
2005			37,00.0

Sources: Bartke (1992); Hongming (1999); and various reports.

on the industrialized West and Japan for high technology imports crucial for its continuing economic development.

Though Chinese officials continued to pay rhetorical lip service to such issues as South-South cooperation, the reality of the situation was that Beijing was mainly interested in maintaining good relations with countries from which it could benefit economically. This can be seen in the relative absence of high-level Chinese visits to Africa since the mid-1980s. Chinese diplomacy instead was almost completely oriented towards its new donors (Taylor, 2001).

Beijing's concern with modernizing as fast as possible also had a negative effect on trade and aid relations with Africa. Due to Africa's growing economic crisis and its failure to develop its economy efficiently in the 1980s, Sino-African trade showed little development. While trade levels were maintained or in some years increased, the trade figures remained unremarkable and subject to a high degree of fluctuation (see Table 2). With China itself receiving aid from abroad, its level of aid to Africa began to decline or stagnate (Taylor, 1998a). Moreover, with China's new preoccupation with economic results, efficiency and profits, there was a major

reshaping of its foreign aid programme. During his visit to Africa in December 1982, Chinese Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang announced that henceforth four principles – equality and mutual benefit, stress on practical results, diversity in form, and common progress – would guide China's economic and technical cooperation. While economic gain for China was not originally a primary concern in its aid programme, Zhao's announcement signalled a shift in objectives. Cooperation for development should benefit both partners and Chinese aid would hopefully become more market-oriented and lead to foreign exchange earnings and profits (Bräutigam, 1998: 49–51).

China's Renewed Interest in Africa in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization

Since the end of the 1980s one can observe a renewed Chinese interest in Africa (Lyman, 2005). A series of economic and political factors were responsible for this remarkable change of policy, but two would appear particularly important. One major factor was the western powers' condemnation of China's bloody suppression of the democratization movement in Tiananmen Square in Beijing on 4 June 1989, which abruptly ended China's 'honeymoon' with the West. Isolated and strongly resenting the West's new-found critique of its human rights record and the perceived meddling in its domestic affairs (Committee on International Relations, 2005), China embarked on a concerted campaign to renew and widen its contacts in the developing world in an attempt to counter and resist the criticism endured at the hands of the West (Jacobeit, 1998; Taylor, 1998a). What was typical of this diplomatic offensive was the offering of aid and promotion of economic linkages and investment to supportive states.

Partly as a reward for its position towards the Tiananmen Square crackdown, Africa again became a cornerstone of Beijing's foreign policy. In sharp contrast to western sanctions, Africa's reaction had been far more muted, if not openly supportive, for various reasons. First, there was the blatant self-interest of the corrupt and authoritarian African political elite who felt threatened by internal and external demands for the introduction of political liberalization and democratization. Second, there was widespread Third World solidarity and resentment of western 'neo-imperialist' interference in the affairs of a fellow developing country. And third, there was a pragmatic understanding among African leaders that overt criticism

of Beijing could result in a withdrawal of Chinese developmental aid. Following the Tiananmen Square incident, non-interference in state sovereignty and freedom from hegemony were increasingly reasserted as key themes in China's foreign policy, no less so in Africa where it has been music to the ears of many African dictators. Combined with this has been Beijing's aggressive posturing as the developing world's most vocal defender of a culturally relative position on human rights (Taylor, 1998a, 2001, 2005). China's aid has become particularly attractive to African leaders, precisely because it comes with no conditionality on governance, fiscal probity, and the other concerns of western donors. China proudly touts this approach and its deputy foreign minister Zhou Wenzong recently told an interviewer: 'Business is business. We try to separate politics from business. ... You [the West] have tried to impose a market economy and multiparty democracy on these countries, which are not ready for it. We are also against embargoes, which you have tried to use against us' (French, 2004).

Another even more significant factor for renewed Chinese interest in Africa is the formidable growth of its domestic economy. In the early 1990s, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC) came to recognize Africa's vital role in the sustainable growth and development of China's economy on the basis of four main considerations (Shelton, 2001). First, Africa is rich in the natural resources required to feed Chinese industry. Second, Africa's population of over 700 million was singled out as an enormous potential market for China's relatively inexpensive low- and medium-grade consumer products. Third, economic reform in many African countries has opened the door to economic cooperation. And fourth, several African countries were identified as key targets for profitable long-term investments, where the emphasis was clearly on oil-producing nations and those with growing economies. At the same time, Beijing restructured its foreign aid programme, shifting from interest-free loans to guaranteed discounted loans offered through Chinese banks and aimed at building up trade, investment and joint ventures in Africa. Whether this linkage of aid to the construction of joint ventures with Chinese firms amounts to conditionalities is a moot point.

China's renewed interest in Africa was consolidated in 2000 when it created the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, which meets at ministerial level every three years. After its first meeting in Beijing on 11–12 October 2000, two important documents were issued: the 'Beijing Declaration of

the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation' and the 'Programme for China-Africa Cooperation on Economic and Social Development' (Government of China, 2000a, 2000b). In these documents, Chinese and African leaders agreed upon the establishment of a strategic partnership on the road to economic development and the hoped-for restructuring of the global economic and political architecture. After its second meeting in Addis-Ababa on 15–16 October 2003, an 'Addis Ababa Action Plan for the Period 2004–06' was launched (Government of China, 2003). In this plan, China committed itself to enhancing its assistance to Africa. It announced the cancellation of the debts of 31 African countries totalling \$1.3 billion and also promised support for NEPAD and increased participation in UN peace-keeping operations in Africa. In addition, it declared it would represent Africa's economic and political interests in multilateral organizations. And, last but not least, it pledged to gradually increase aid to Africa, provide professional training for 10,000 Africans over three years (including military officers), grant duty-free access to Africa's least developed countries, promote tourism, and encourage investment in Africa by Chinese firms (Aicardi de Saint-Paul, 2004; Thompson, 2004). On 12 January 2006, the Chinese government promulgated a white paper entitled 'China's African Policy' in which it presented the objectives of its Africa policy, measures to achieve them, and proposals for cooperation in various fields in the coming years (Government of China, 2006). It stated that China would develop a new type of strategic partnership with Africa featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation, and cultural exchange.

Close study of these documents and China's current activities in Africa reveal that Chinese motives for establishing a strategic partnership with Africa are primarily economic: the drive for resource security as well as new markets and investment opportunities are all of great significance to the sustainable growth of China's economy. Political collaboration remains a secondary concern. Chinese leaders continue to be interested in forging a political alliance with African states in a determined effort to combat western, and in particular US, hegemony and circumscribe Taiwan's diplomatic space on the continent. While Chinese leaders are claiming that these strategic objectives are of mutual advantage, the truth of this claim needs to be examined. What benefits has Africa actually gained from this much-heralded cooperation with China? (Muekalia, 2004; Taylor, 2005)

Resource Security

China's dynamic economic growth is fuelling an ever-increasing demand for oil, minerals, timber and other natural resources. Guaranteed long-term access to Africa's relatively underexploited natural resources clearly tops China's agenda (Alden, 2005; Council on Foreign Relations, 2006). China is now the world's second largest importer of oil after the United States and accounts for 31 per cent of the world's growth in oil demand. China imports 28 per cent of its oil from Africa, mostly from Sudan, Algeria, and the Gulf of Guinea. But it is active in every part of Africa, seeking exploration rights, the ownership of facilities, and import agreements. The Chinese government imposes no political conditions on African governments before signing contracts for exploration or production and African governments, not surprisingly, are welcoming this new and undemanding investor (Jaffe and Lewis, 2002; Pan, 2006). Chinese oil companies have a number of competitive advantages over their western rivals. Unlike their increasingly publicity-sensitive western counterparts, the Chinese have no qualms about making deals with oil-rich dictators, however corrupt they may be. Moreover, they are willing to offer what is referred to as a 'total package': cash, soft loans, investments, bribes, technology, the construction of infrastructure and prestige objects, arms sales, political protection from international pressures, using China's seat on the UN Security Council and other incentives to bolster their competitive advantage.

Sudan is a good example of how China can benefit from western concerns over terrorism and human rights (Committee on International Relations, 2005; Council on Foreign Relations, 2006). Since the late 1980s, US concerns over Khartoum's tactics in the war against the south and its ties to terrorist groups have persuaded many western oil companies to withdraw from Sudan. Although Chevron had invested \$1 billion in exploration that confirmed more than one billion barrels of proven reserves, the company sold its shares back to the Sudanese government in 1989. Canada's Talisman entered the Sudanese oil arena but, under pressure from the United States and public opinion at home, it sold its interests to an Indian company. Like Malaysia and India (Harsch, 2004), China quickly filled the gap left by western companies. Several Chinese government officials and managers have publicly stated: 'We import from every source we can get oil from'. In 1996, China's state oil company, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), bought a 40 per cent interest

in a consortium to develop Sudan's Heglig and Unity oil fields. In 1998, CNPC's construction arm participated in building a 930-mile pipeline from these oil fields to the Red Sea, and also built a refinery near Khartoum. At one point, China had 10,000 labourers in Sudan working on CNPC projects. China also controls most of an oil field in southern Darfur, and 41 per cent of a field in the Melut Basin. Another Chinese firm is building a pipeline from there to Port Sudan, where China's Petroleum Engineering Construction Group is constructing a \$215 million export tanker terminal. China now gets 7 per cent of its oil requirements from Sudan.

Economic cooperation extends beyond the oil sector and includes the construction of electric substations and transmission lines; financing for the Kajbar Dam; a \$345 million pipeline that will channel water from the Nile to Port Sudan; and a \$325 million water system. Chinese investment in Sudan totals approximately \$4 billion, making it Sudan's largest foreign investor. Military cooperation has grown as well. Deliveries of Chinese weapons to Sudan have included ammunition, small arms, towed howitzers, anti-aircraft guns, anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, tanks, helicopters and fighter aircraft. China has 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 ensure security around its investments.

These activities have all taken place while Sudan was under sanctions imposed by the UN and several European countries, and in the midst of a civil war and the genocide in Darfur. As the Darfur crisis worsened in 2004, China used its position on the UN Security Council to dilute repeated resolutions on the crisis, preventing almost any mention or threat of sanctions against the Sudanese government. Only in March 2005, when world opinion was focused on Darfur, did China abstain from voting on a Security Council resolution that referred the possible war crimes and charges of genocide there to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and set in motion a UN study of possible sanctions. The Security Council has not yet imposed sanctions on Sudan.

China has more recently become a significant participant in the oil sector on the west coast of Africa, the continent's largest oil-producing area. Nigeria and Angola are the main producers and China has increased its activities in both these countries. In connection with a bid to win exploration rights for a block in Angola, China provided it with a \$2 billion soft loan as part of a longer-term aid package. China won the bid. Significantly, this loan, along with rising oil prices, enabled Angola to resist IMF

and other western aid donors' recommendations for economic reforms and the introduction of good governance.

In July 2005, China and Nigeria signed an \$800 million crude-oil sale agreement, setting in motion China's purchase of 30,000 barrels a day for five years. Much more significant, however, is the fact that in January 2006 China won a licence to operate four oil blocs in Nigeria, following an agreement to build a hydro-power station and take over a privatized Nigerian oil refinery – a money-losing proposition that no western company was ever likely to have touched. China is reportedly considering \$7 billion in investments in Nigeria, covering a wide variety of sectors including agriculture and the sale of fighter jets to Nigeria. China has without doubt taken risks in Nigeria. The oil blocks are in contested areas of its delta region, where insurgency, banditry, and the illegal appropriation of oil are endemic. China may lose considerable amounts of money on the refinery, but it will retain a significant foothold in the Nigerian energy sector. Its willingness to invest where private western companies and the United States are unwilling to go adds to the attraction of China to African governments (Council on Foreign Relations, 2006).

Besides oil, the Chinese economy has increased its appetite for a range of commodities in mineral-rich African countries. China's demand for minerals is driving up world prices for commodities such as copper, zinc, aluminium and nickel, reversing a long decline in prices and giving the African exporters of these materials a much-needed economic boost. China has invested \$170 million in copper mines in Zambia, and it is also active in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country gripped by civil war and instability. Despite these conditions however, China is investing in cobalt and copper mines, beginning work on roads to facilitate mineral exports, and examining power projects. Similarly, in the midst of a tenuous peace in diamond- and mineral-rich Sierra Leone, China is constructing a luxury hotel, investing where others would fear to tread. They are also considering investment in a titanium mine in Kenya (Council on Foreign Relations, 2006; Lafargue, 2005).

Logging and timber, too, have become a major focus of Chinese involvement in Africa. China is the largest importer of forest products in the world, with its imports of such products having tripled in less than a decade. Many of China's imports from Africa are from unlicensed loggers or from companies with environmentally unsound logging practices, which are nonetheless condoned by the Chinese. Illegal timber exports to China from Gabon have been estimated to be as high as 70 per cent of Gabon's

total timber exports. China was a major importer of Liberian timber during Charles Taylor's rule and he relied heavily on timber resources to support his own military efforts and fund mercenaries in both Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast. Harvested timber was transported to Liberian ports and bartered to the Chinese and others in exchange for weapons and munitions (Committee on International Relations, 2005; Council on Foreign Relations, 2006).

Finally, food security is a growing concern. With a projected increase in population, the loss of vital agricultural land to industry and increasing consumption amongst its urbanizing population, Beijing sees a need to obtain stable sources of key foodstuffs. Recognizing the sensitivity of this issue, President Hu Jintao commissioned studies into food security in the wake of China's diminished grain output in 2003. The Soviet Union's humiliating dependence on American and Canadian wheat is a scenario Beijing possibly fears. One solution has been the wholesale embrace of genetically modified crops. Another is Chinese investment in agriculture, fisheries, and related secondary production facilities in Africa. For example, Chinese investors have set up joint fish-processing ventures in Gabon and Namibia with some of the richest fisheries in the world, and have leased agricultural land in Zambia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe (Alden, 2005; Eisenman, 2005). It is noteworthy that many Chinese fishing trawlers operate illegally along the west coast of Africa.

New Markets and Investment Opportunities

While China's principal interest in Africa is access to natural resources, the continent also provides new markets and investment opportunities for China's growing economy. The ever-growing range of imports from China, varying from shoes and textiles to high-tech goods, is flooding African markets (Alden, 2005; Hongming, 1999; Servant, 2005; Shelton, 2001). African consumers, whose purchasing power has sharply declined during the economic crisis and economic liberalization, appreciate these relatively cheap goods in spite of regular complaints about their quality compared to western products. Zimbabweans, for example, have even coined a term for what they consider 'substandard' Chinese goods, namely 'zhing-zhong'. Small and large African traders and manufacturers have especially been hard hit by the flood of cheap Chinese imports, particularly, when they are linked to new Chinese wholesale and retail shops that use established networks to access goods. Traditional products and retailers

have been edged out by Chinese business across the continent and a new feature of virtually all African cities is the emergence of a ‘Chinatown’, a district in the hands of Chinese citizens, just like the Chinatowns anywhere else in the world.

The so-called ‘textiles tsunami’ clearly illustrates the adverse impact of the massive Chinese export machine on local African industries (Alden, 2005; Committee on International Relations, 2005). Chinese textile exports are increasingly undermining the national and international markets of African textile manufacturers. Until January 2005, African textile manufacturers operated under special arrangements permitted by the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA), including the US Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This allowed the United States to place quotas on clothing and textile imports from China and to provide African producers with duty-free access to the US market. This promoted the rapid growth of African textile exports, particularly in countries like South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Ghana, Uganda and Kenya. Unexpectedly, some Chinese businesses were even able to benefit from the MFA and AGOA arrangements by setting up textile factories in Africa that enabled them to make garments that could get into the United States duty-free. Once the MFA expired in January 2005, however, Chinese exports to the United States soared and African exporters found that they could not compete. The effects were immediate. Many factories closed and thousands of workers lost their jobs. While the owners were aware of the coming World Trade Organization (WTO) changes, they had no way of anticipating that the yuan would be undervalued by 20–40 per cent at the same time, hitting Africa with a lethal double-whammy. South African manufacturers and trade unions have begun to protest against growing cheap imports from China, and have requested protective action from their government.

China’s trade with Africa has been rising sharply in the aftermath of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum in 2000. Chinese exports and imports showed spectacular growth from 2000 to 2004: exports increased from \$5 billion to \$13.8 billion and imports from \$5.6 billion to \$15.6 billion (see Table 2). China is now the continent’s third most important trading partner after the United States and France, and ahead of the United Kingdom. Strikingly, Sino-African trade is no longer vastly unbalanced in China’s favour: its growing oil imports from Africa largely account for its trade deficit in 2004.

A major barrier to increased Sino-African trade is, however, the fact that African countries do not have much to sell to China apart from raw

materials (Konings and Meilink, 1998), whereas China exports the full gamut of its manufactured goods and is rapidly overtaking Africa's traditional European suppliers. As a consequence, it seems doubtful whether a more accommodating Chinese trade policy, as promised in the Chinese government's Africa Policy paper, would help Africa:

The Chinese government will adopt more effective measures to facilitate African commodities' access to the Chinese market and fulfil its promise to grant duty-free treatment to some goods from the least developed African countries, with a view of expanding and balancing bilateral trade and optimising trade structure.... Efforts will be made to encourage business communities on both sides to set up a China-Africa Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry. When conditions are ripe, China is willing to negotiate a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with African countries and African regional organisations (Government of China, 2006).

Direct Chinese investment in Africa has risen over the past few years, especially since the China-Africa Cooperation Forum in 2000. State-owned enterprises account for a considerable share of Chinese overseas investment, and the Chinese government is encouraging businesses to engage in joint ventures with African counterparts. In its 2006 Africa Policy paper, the Chinese government pledged to support and facilitate corporate investments in Africa with preferential loans and buyer's credit. It mentioned that some 750 Chinese enterprises were active in Africa to date, with a total investment of \$1 billion.

Most African governments welcome direct Chinese investment and are eager to provide the requisite licensing for Chinese entrepreneurs. There has been a steady deterioration in foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa since the end of the Cold War, especially when compared to Asia. Moreover, with the imposition of conditionalities by western donors that are designed to punish any regime that violates standards and practices of good governance (economic and political), African regimes need to find an alternative source of foreign support. China is investing and providing assistance in areas that western private investors and aid agencies have long neglected: physical infrastructure, industry, and agriculture. USAID has not funded heavy infrastructure projects since the late 1970s, and both USAID and the World Bank reduced assistance to agriculture by as much as 90 per cent in the 1990s. Yet these are areas that are once again recognized as essential for Africa's growth. American companies have invested heavily in the extractive industries whereas Chinese companies are

prepared to go into many other fields as well (Committee on International Relations, 2005; Council on Foreign Relations, 2006).

While the focus of Chinese investment has been on large – or relatively large – enterprises, it would be a mistake to see Chinese investment purely in terms of facilitating the growth of government-driven elite networks (Alden, 2005). Indeed, African entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized enterprises have, in the past, benefited from the growth of informal and formal linkages with Chinese and Taiwanese business networks outside government sponsorship. According to Bräutigam (2003), African businessmen in Mauritius and Nigeria were able to use their contacts with Taiwan, Hong Kong and China to access information and new technologies as well as to spur the development of dynamic manufacturing sectors in these two African countries.

Large Chinese firms are aiming to acquire a dominant position in key sectors of the economy: construction, petrochemicals, transportation, communications, electricity, water conservancy, industrial technology and so on. They already appear to have achieved this objective in construction since a number of large contracts for infrastructure projects in Africa, including some financed by the international donor community, have been won by Chinese construction firms. China's bid for Ethiopia's Takazee Dam, one of Africa's largest hydro-electric power stations, to be located at the head of the Blue Nile, beat the bids from several western companies. The Chinese volunteered to construct a proposed stadium in Dar-es-Salaam when European donors balked at the idea of Tanzania using donor budget support for the project. In Botswana, for example, Chinese firms now win approximately 80 per cent of all construction contracts from the government, which in turn commissions 80 per cent of the country's construction projects. This has angered some local firms, which argue that they cannot compete with the prices and the different labour cultures of their Chinese competitors, including the importation of Chinese labourers and a generally tolerated reliance on illegal Zimbabwean immigrants (Committee on International Relations, 2005). A frequently heard complaint in Africa nowadays is that the reliance of Chinese firms upon imported Chinese labour for infrastructure projects, and even some manufacturing ventures, is contrary to the needs of economies where unemployment is already a serious problem. In 2005, Chinese labour in Africa was estimated at around 74,000 (Lafargue, 2005).

Not only African firms but also western multinationals are finding it increasingly hard to compete with Chinese companies. First, Chinese

companies are particularly competitive in countries where an unreliable political situation, sanctions, and corporate-image liabilities keep large multinationals from committing themselves. Second, most of China's investments are through state-owned companies whose individual investments do not have to be profitable if they serve national Chinese goals like establishing positions of influence and staking out future opportunities. Chinese companies can therefore submit low bids for major contracts, even one that would make a loss. And third, Chinese companies receive direct and indirect benefits from the state – subsidized loans, tax rebates, etc. – which allow them to make decisions that private companies could not, making them unfair competitors.

In this section, I have highlighted the remarkable increase in Chinese trade and investment in Africa. However, one has to be careful not to overestimate Africa's place in China's global economic policy. Even with the formidable growth in African exports to China in 2004, Africa only accounted for 2.8 per cent of China's total imports. China's realized FDI in Africa was only \$134 million in 2004, accounting for less than 4 per cent of China's FDI in that year.

Creating a Political Alliance with Africa

China's renewed interest in Africa is not only economically motivated but also derives from its political concerns with both western, and especially US, hegemony in the world since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the persistent presence and influence of Taiwan in Africa. Feeling increasingly vulnerable to the emergence of a unipolar world and determined to reinforce its position vis-à-vis the West, China has again tried to project itself as the leader of the Third World, stressing the need for South-South solidarity and cooperation in the pursuit of a new, just and equitable political and economic world order (Alden, 2005; Jacobeit, 1998; Melville and Owen, 2005; Muekalia, 2004; Taylor, 1998a, 2001). Africa played a prominent role in China's search for the construction of a political alliance among developing countries since it formed the largest single voting bloc in multilateral organizations. By positioning itself at the helm of a coalition of African states, China hoped to use leverage in its position in the UN Security Council and improve its bargaining power in other international institutions. Constant references to the need to create a new, equitable political and economic order reflect China's competitive instinct against the US in the international arena.

In the 2000 Beijing Declaration of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, China and Africa agreed upon close cooperation in the future in international affairs which, they claimed, would result in concrete gains for both sides (Government of China, 2000a). During the second China-Africa Cooperation Forum meeting in Addis Ababa in December 2003, China declared that it was ready to coordinate its position with African countries in the process of international economic and political rules formulation and multilateral trade negotiations (Government of China, 2003). The Chinese government has recently expressed its determination to strengthen its cooperation with African states:

China will continue to strengthen solidarity and cooperation with African countries in the international arena, conduct regular exchange of views, coordinate positions on major international and regional issues and stand for mutual support on major issues concerning state sovereignty, territorial integrity, national dignity and human rights. China supports African nations' desire to be an equal partner in international affairs. China is devoted, as are African nations, to making the UN play a greater role, defending the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, establishing a new international political order featuring justice, rationality, equality and mutual benefit, promoting more democratic international relationship and rule of law in international affairs and safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries (Government of China, 2006).

African votes have been crucial to Beijing's multilateral diplomacy, whether it be blocking resolutions at the UN Commission on Human Rights concerning alleged human rights abuses in China or garnering sufficient support to win their second bid to host the Olympics in 2008. Beijing believes that its strategic alliance with Africa will enable it to secure its interests in the WTO and other multilateral venues at relatively low cost over a long period of time.

For various reasons, African states seem to accept the somewhat paternalistic argument Chinese officials make regarding Beijing's role in preserving their interests in multilateral settings. There is the symbolic attraction of China that appears to offer a positive development model for the Third World, especially as it is widely perceived to be the next superpower. Moreover, China's traditionalist approach to non-interference in domestic affairs accords well with the outlook of even democratically elected leaders in Africa. China has been willing to use its seat on the UN Security Council to protect some of Africa's most egregious regimes

from international sanctions, in particular Sudan and Zimbabwe. It offers an alternative source of support, even for some of the West's closest allies, when they chafe under western pressures for economic and political reform. In addition, China has strongly defended some issues in multilateral organizations that are of pivotal interest to Africa, including the elimination of trade barriers and farm subsidies, increased aid and debt relief, and African representation on the UN Security Council.

Another major reason for China's efforts to establish a political alliance with African states is to circumvent the diplomatic space of Taiwan on the continent. Recognition of the 'one-China' principle has remained a basic element in Beijing's foreign policy. In fact, it is the only political condition to China's cooperation with individual African states and organizations. China's 2006 Africa Policy paper clearly expresses the importance China attaches to this principle:

The one-China principle is the political foundation for the establishment and development of China's relations with African countries and regional organisations. The Chinese government appreciates the fact that the overwhelming majority of African countries abide by the one-China principle, refuse to have official relations and contacts with Taiwan and support China's great cause of reunification. China stands ready to establish and develop state-to-state relations with countries that have not yet established diplomatic ties with China on the basis of the one-China principle (Government of China, 2006).

As the Africa Policy paper acknowledges, China has been quite successful in attracting African support for its one-China principle (Aicardi de Saint-Paul, 2004; Jiang, 2003; Liu, 2001). At present, there are no more than seven African countries that still maintain official diplomatic relations with Taiwan: Gambia, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Malawi, Chad, Swaziland, and São Tomé and Príncipe. Clearly, they are all poor states in Africa where Sino-African strategic cooperation is low, the governments are unstable, but aid needs are high. Generally speaking, such states are likely to welcome Taiwan's 'dollar diplomacy'. In the ongoing diplomatic battle for recognition, Taiwan has lost two of its leading supporters in Africa in recent years. The first was South Africa. On 1 January 1998, Nelson Mandela opted to open diplomatic relations with Beijing after South Africa had unsuccessfully attempted to persuade China to agree to a policy of dual recognition (Alden and Shelton, 1999; Taylor, 2000). The second loss was Senegal when President Abdoulaye Wade severed

diplomatic links with Taiwan on 25 October 2005 after a period of secret negotiations (Seck, 2005).

Although Taiwan's influence has been severely reduced over the years, persistent activism by Taipei in Africa means that China must remain vigilant or thwart any gains Taiwan makes on the continent. In the past, several African countries have played China and Taiwan off against one another, seeking massive aid packages and switching allegiance (Liu, 2001). To compete with China's dominating presence on the continent and support in international forums, Taiwan must offer substantial aid to its African allies and possibly new recruits.

Conclusion

China has had a long involvement with Africa marked by ups and downs, and continuities and shifts in policy. While China and Africa have often had mutual interests in various forms of cooperation, their relations have not always been without friction and tensions. China's initial interest in Africa was primarily motivated by Cold War ideological and strategic considerations. Its main objectives during the Cold War era were to compete with western and Soviet influences on the continent and to shore up votes for the eventual rejection of Taiwan's credentials at the UN. China's anti-western, anti-Soviet and anti-Taiwan thrust, combined with its self-identification with Third World struggles, has shaped its foreign aid activities in Africa. China initially lacked the resources of the Cold War superpowers, but still invested significant energy in the realization of its objectives. It dispatched technicians to Africa to provide modest social and economic assistance, as well as military training and to build infrastructural monuments to China-Africa solidarity, including the first railway to link Tanzania and landlocked Zambia during the period of opposition to South Africa's regional hegemony during apartheid. Its financial and military support to 'revolutionary' dissident groups and liberation movements resulted in frequent conflicts with African rulers. The era of liberation wars in the 1970s saw China choose sides and patronize its favoured forces – an activity aimed at thwarting the Soviet Union's influence on the continent even though it was not always in the best interests of Africa. Chinese interest in Africa receded in the 1980s as development efforts were diverted inwards and Chinese leaders were forced to seek assistance from the West for the necessary modernization of its economy.

With its emergence as a significant world player in the era of neoliberal globalization, China has returned to Africa on a larger scale than ever before and with the ideological and financial resources to compete for political and economic influence. Some of the factors for China's renewed interest in Africa were similar to those prevailing during the Cold War era. China continued to present itself as the leader of the Third World in its efforts to forge an alliance with African states, an alliance that would enable it to better contest the perceived western hegemony in multilateral organizations. China also still needed African political support for its attempt to minimize, and preferably eliminate, Taiwan's presence on the continent. Nevertheless, renewed Chinese interest in Africa was primarily economically motivated. With the enormous expansion of its domestic economy, China was in search of natural resources, new markets, and investment opportunities. China's trade with Africa has subsequently risen sharply.

In its endeavours for economic and political influence, China has a competitive advantage over the West in some areas. China provides a discourse that effectively legitimizes human rights abuses and undemocratic practices in the guise of state sovereignty and attempts to combat western hegemony, which strongly appeals to many African leaders. This stance is then coupled with an opportunistic policy regarding arms sales to all and sundry in Africa, including widely reviled dictators (Alden, 2005; Taylor, 2005). Chinese arms sales to Africa have actually increased since the 2000 Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, in which China promised to cooperate in attempts to stop the illegal production and trafficking in small arms and light weapons in Africa (Committee on International Relations, 2005; Pan, 2006).

Unlike their political leaders, who appreciate the establishment of strategic partnerships between Africa and China in economic and political affairs, several African scholars and civil-society organizations have displayed a more ambivalent attitude towards China's growing presence in Africa. Moeletsi Mbeki, deputy chairman of the South African Institute of International Affairs, for instance, declared recently that China 'is both a tantalizing opportunity and a terrifying threat to South Africa'. On the one hand, he said that China was 'just the tonic' that mineral-rich but economically ailing South Africa needed. But he added that exports from China and Hong Kong to his country are double those from Africa, and almost double what South Africa exports to China. He called the trade

relations between South Africa and China ‘a replay of the old story of South Africa’s trade with Europe’ as evidenced by the fact that ‘we sell them raw materials and they sell us manufactured goods with a predictable result – an unfavourable trade balance against South Africa’. He went on to accuse Chinese companies of flooding the South African market with cheap products, underbidding local firms, and not hiring African labour. As a result, the largest South African trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), has called for a restriction on Chinese imports and demanded that at least 75 per cent of retailers’ stock be locally made goods (Mooney, 2005).

And finally, there are growing internal and external pressures on African leaders to introduce good governance and democracy. The long-standing Chinese principle of non-interference in state sovereignty is being increasingly contested in Africa. The AU’s constitution allows the organization to intervene in a member state should it find that there are gross violations of human rights, or for other humanitarian reasons. The peer review mechanism of NEPAD is structured around an independent review process of an African country’s adherence to good governance criteria. This represents another step towards the institutionalization of norms derived from contemporary neoliberal concerns.

As a result of these developments, China’s diplomacy towards Africa, which is aimed at cementing a strategic partnership and maintaining sovereign protection against the corrosive influence of the West, will have to find new ways to engage the continent – approaches that are not predicated on securing the compliance of the African political elite alone. Otherwise, it will run the danger of being portrayed – as has been the case in Sudan – as a friend of a military regime set on committing violations against African people in the name of the crudest form of self-interest (Alden, 2005).

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