
China's Foreign Policy in the New Scramble for Africa

By Jephias Matunhu



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Abstract:

The first scramble for Africa by the West culminated in partitioning of the continent in 1884. The whole continent, except Ethiopia became an extension of the North. The aim of the scramble was to control the continent of its resources. The end of colonial rule brought the second scramble for the control of Africa. In the new scramble, the East and the West compete for the control of the continent. This paper investigates China's diplomatic mission on Africa. Two policy positions are under the spotlight of this paper. The policies are; Foreign Policy and National Policy on Economic Development. The paper concludes that China has established a stable foreign policy and economic policy for its continued dominance in Africa ahead of the North.

1. Introduction

The notion that development in Africa was sparked by Europe is a fallacy. The truth of the matter is that on arrival in Africa in 1441, Europeans found an already developing continent. For instance, by 1400 Mani Congo had already established a strong economy in the present Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Similarly, the British altered the development path in Malawi, Ghana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and many other parts of the continent. France changed the development direction in Liberia, the DRC and other parts of the continent. In Ghana (then Gold Coast), South Africa and Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) Europeans surveyed abundant gold; Cote-d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) massive availability of ivory; Nigeria, fertile land and oil (Needham 1994). The list is endless.

This is a reflection of Europe's scramble for Africa, which led to the partitioning of the continent in 1884 at the Berlin Conference. In doing so Europe considered Africa as their God-given inheritance. They partitioned Africa¹ with no consultations with the indigenous people of Africa, who later suffered at the hands of the imperialists. Africans suffered slavery and forced labour in the construction of roads, in mines and on farms. European occupation of Africa robbed the continent of its right to decide its political and economic destiny. The continent lost its legitimacy to control the exploitation of its economic resources for its people. In due course, the Africans took up arms to fight the colonial system in the continent. With the help from China and Russia, Africa attained political independence from Europe. The last country to attain political independence in Africa was South Africa, which liberated itself from apartheid in 1994. Despite the removal of the colonizers in the continent, economic structures like roads and railway lines set up to exploit Africa by the Europeans are by and large still serving the same purpose. Much of Africa's business entities are foreign owned. English and French continue to be the official languages in most former European colonies in Africa. Today, both the West and the East are fighting over Africa's resources. This is a new scramble for Africa.

This paper analyses China's policy on Africa. The two (Africa and China) are developing regions of the world. The Sino-Africa relationship links a continent with a country. Africa has 55 countries, which is 33% of all the developing countries in the world. It also constitutes about 25% of the total membership of the United Nations (IMF 2006a). Africa is the second largest continent in the world and also the least developed continent. It has one third of the world's unutilized arable land. The continent is rich in minerals, oil and gas. Yet, the continent's economies largely rely on China, India, Europe and America for development. The above statements about Africa mean three things: first, the continent is capable of feeding herself; second, Africa could be net supplier of food to the rest of the world and third, the underdevelopment problem in Africa is structural, which arise because of a culture of foreign aid dependency. The dependency

¹ Prior to 1884, European countries raced to occupy Africa. The race created conflict between the colonizers as each country wanted to grab a bigger chunk of Africa. In 1884 at Berlin Conference, Europeans officially subdivided Africa and allocated each other portions. The present day countries and boundaries of Africa are largely an outcome of the 1884 Berlin Conference. In subdividing Africa, the Whites did not consult the people of Africa.

has disincentivised Africa from implementing policy reforms that could set the continent on a path to sustainable development. Aid and development programmes, set up ostensibly to support and benefit the recipient countries, have all too often effectively brought their greatest to investors (Osler 1994).

Sustainable development is a process involving the re-organisation and reorientation of entire socio-economic systems in Africa in order to improve people's lives. Africa's lethargic development pace is principally a result of the imperialist practices of the colonial era (Hope and Timmel 1985). Two major strategies supported the exploitation of Africa by the imperialist countries in Europe. First, raw materials and labour were systematically drained out of the continent to develop Europe (colonizer). Second, Europe designated Africa to be the prime market of their manufactured goods. Unfair international terms of trade and price regimes were dominated by Europe for its continued existence in Africa. These exploitative conditions supported Europe's 15% per capita income growth each decade during 1800 to 1950 (Hope and Timmel 1985; Taylor 1998). Upon achieving political sovereignty, Africa was to sign itself into another exploitative relationship with the West. The former colonial powers transferred financial assistance to Africa. Stringent conditionalities were attached to the assistance (Matunhu 2012). The financial packages later became the main tools for indebting the African economies. Africa's failure to pay its debts resulted in the imposition of the economic structural adjustment programmes (ESAP) of the 1990s by the North (Sachs 2004). The results of ESAP were increased poverty and desperation in the continent, a situation that led to policy inertia² in Africa.

China, the second fastest growing economy in the world is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The country has a large population (1, 3 billion people), low per capita income, and a large agrarian sector which accounts for a significant contribution to the economy's gross domestic product (GDP). The country has forged strong economic and political relations with Africa. The Communist Party of China (CPC) is the vanguard³ party in building and maintaining the Sino-Africa relationship. The current discourse explores China's foreign policy in the scramble for Africa's wealth.

2. History of the Sino-Africa Relationship

The relationship between China and Africa was first formalized in Egypt in 1956 soon after the Bandung Conference⁴ of 1955. China's political and economic involvement in

² Policy inertia is a situation where government abdicates its responsibility, giving way to Non-Governmental Organisations (the third sector) and other players. In Africa, the third sector and other players underwrite the supply of education, healthcare and other human needs.

³ Theories, strategies, policies and plans for Africa are put in place by the CPC and the government implements policies and strategies of the ruling party.

⁴ This was a conference of Asian and African states. The conference was organised by Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India and Burma. The aim of the meeting was to forge economic and cultural ties between Africa and Asia. The meeting also aimed at opposing colonialism by either Soviet Union or the United States of America. The 29 countries that were represented at the conference constituted a quarter of the earth's surface and about 1.5 billion people. The conference laid the foundation of the non-aligned

Africa intensified in the early 1960s. Two factors prompted China's keen interests in Africa. First, China wanted to spread its political and ideological influence in Africa ahead of Europe, which believed in capitalism. Both Africa and China believed in communalism rather than individualism. China favoured Africa because of its large population. By spreading its political and ideological influence to Africa, China was laying a strong foundation for further exploitation of the continent's resources ahead of the West, which believed in capitalism. Indeed, Africa found it easier to agree with socialism rather than capitalism from Europe. The second motive for China to cooperate with African countries is that of establishing long lasting economic links with the resource-rich continent.

Presently, both China and Africa cooperate in the South-South Forum, which encourages countries located south of the Equator should use their comparative advantages for their economic and political prosperity. The first Sino-Africa Cooperation Forum was held in 2000 (Kiefe 2005). The forum set up regular consultative mechanism and determined the direction of the new strategic partnership between China and Africa. The first high level meeting of the Sino-African Cooperation was held in Ethiopia in November 2002, and the second meeting was also held in Ethiopia in December 2003. China has set up a follow up action committee⁵ of the Sino-Africa cooperation forum. According to Zhou Alugan in Kiefe (2005), this committee is working very well to the extent that Europe is beginning to realize its fall from grace in Africa. The above claim is vindicated by President Hollande of France who in October 2012 admitted that the relationship between Africa and Europe needs a new page. The French President believes in creating a mutual relationship and considers African people as mutual economic partners. With both the East and the West courting Africa, a new scramble for Africa emerges.

3. China's Foreign Policy and Africa's Development

Seven aspects of China's foreign policy are presented. These are treating partners with good will, high level mutual visits, non interference, afro-optimism, debt reduction, customary relations, and democratization of international relations.

Treating partners with good will

Achieving a strategic position in the scramble for Africa depends on a number of policies, among which is foreign policy. A major component of China's foreign policy is to treat its partners with goodwill. With this policy, China reinforces economic

movement (NAM) during the cold war. The Bandung conference was preceded by the Bogor Conference of 1954 and was followed by the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity conference in Cairo in 1955.

⁵ Since the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was convened, China and African have earnestly implemented the Sharm el Sheikh Action Plan (2010-2012). The major aim of the Committee is to carry out various follow-up actions, and deepened the new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa. The relationship is expected to feature political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchanges. The Committee has helped the two parties to increase political exchanges and cooperation, mutual support in international and regional affairs, and political mutual trust.

cooperation with Africa. For instance, Chinese medical teams have been dispatched to the continent to provide services in medical institutions. Apart from sending medical teams to Africa, China has in the past years delivered medical equipment, facilities, medicine and training to medical personnel, and promotes cooperation in the use of traditional medicine and pharmacy. Because of that, traders in African flock to China for cheap goods. The two are collaborating in areas such as infant and maternal mortality rates, preventing and treating HIV/AIDS, malaria, tropical and other diseases. The country has also sent Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) experts and mining engineers to Africa under bilateral and multilateral agreements. Notably, China is the largest producer and marketer of cheap solar panels in Africa as well as being the fifth world's largest manufacturer of arms of war. It is also one of the largest suppliers of arms of war to African countries. In supplying arms to Africa, China takes into consideration that nation states need arms to protect themselves against subversion. Cognisant of the above, Kinfe (2005) described China as an all weather friend of Africa.

High level mutual visits

High level mutual visits between the two worlds have consolidated and preserved the Sino-Africa relationship. The former President of the Republic of China, Jiang Zemin, the former chairman of the National Congress, Li Peng and many other high level personalities have visited the continent. In reciprocation, over 30 heads of States and Government from Africa have visited China in the past ten years. Both China and Africa have exchanged visits between parliaments and political parties. In all the visits, both China and Africa have pledged to support each other in times of need.

Non interference

A major component of China's foreign policy is that of non-interference with the political systems in African countries. It believes that African countries have the right to make political decisions suited to their conditions. This part of China's foreign policy has faced criticism (Hofmann 2007) from some European countries; they have argued that China has financed repressive regimes of President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe and Mumar Gaddafi in Libya. In 2008, China vetoed the West's decision to table Zimbabwe's political crisis on the UN Security Council. Europe and America are of the opinion that China is a stumbling block to democracy in Africa. Yet, China supports African states in their just struggle to safeguard their independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and in their struggle against foreign interference. In the 20th century nationalist movements in Africa received military hardware, military training, ideological, and logistical support from China. It is this support that helped Africa fight out colonialism in the continent. In the post-colonial Africa, China's foreign policy is one of promoting unity among all African countries. In cases where there are conflicts, China has maintained that African countries must solve their conflicts through peaceful means. It is for this very reason that China did not participate in the forceful removal from power of President Mumar Gaddafi of Libya.

Afro-optimism

China believes that Africa is capable of fighting its development challenges. In line with this, the country has appealed to the international community to believe in Africa's potential to solve its developmental problems. In 2008 China vetoed United Nations Security Council's proposal to discuss Zimbabwe's internal politics. This afro-optimistic approach is a departure from Europe's afro-pessimistic view of the continent; in 2010, the former President of France; Nicholas Sarkozy appeared to consider Africa as offside of history (Matunhu 2012). Contrary to Sarkozy, the current seems to be President of France, Mr. Francois Hollande is optimistic of Africa's development potential. The President calls Europe to reconcile with Africa after the mistake of colonizing the continent. Colonization supported imperialism, which allowed Europe to extend its dominion in Africa, an arrangement which never meant anything good for Africa, but selfish interest of Europe (Matunhu 2012). President Hollande seems to see Europe losing steam and momentum in the race to control Africa, and so he has appealed for African countries to open a 'new page' with Europe.

Debt reduction

One of the components of China's foreign policy is debt reduction. According to Matunhu (2012), China has cancelled debt of more than 30 Africa countries, nearly all of which are highly-indebted and debt distressed Least Developed Countries (LDC). This gesture of good will by China has increased Africa's confidence in the Sino-Africa relationship. The confidence has allowed China to expand its operations in the continent for its benefit. For instance, China's state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has invested in oil assets in Sudan and Chad while China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) has acquired energy interests in Morocco, Nigeria and Gabon. China already procures 28% of its oil and natural gas from Africa; and Chinese Transnational Corporations operating in Sudan and Angola are the leading exporters to the country (Alden and Davies 2006). China became a member of the 159 member World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001. This has enabled it to cement its relationship with countries like America and Britain which dominate the WTO and marginalize economies in the WTO like those in Africa. In dealing with the global economy, China vigilantly guards against the impact of international economic risks in order to safeguard its national economic security; China also advocates a strategy of self-reliance, and socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Customary relations

China is committed to the establishment of customary relations with all nations on the basis of the principles of peaceful co-existence. The country's position on this regard is consistent and stable (Kinfu 2005). China persistently implements a peaceful foreign policy with the goal of safeguarding world peace and promoting development. It opposes the illegal proliferations of arms in the global economy, However, China is ready to assist Africa defends itself militarily. In China's view, the illegal proliferation of small arms and light weapons in South Africa, the Democratic Republic Congo (DRC), Somalia,

Nigeria, Sudan, and other hot spots constitute a threat to 'peace, stability and development in Africa. China has pledged to cooperate fully with Africa to prevent illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons. China's position on the proliferation of arms is being expressed in an environment that practices terrorism. Terrorism is capable of reversing the development gains of the global economy. Faced with the new international security situation, the former President of China, Jiang Zemin put forward the concept of new security perspective in his report to the 16th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) which was convened in November 2002. The core content of the new security concept could be summarized as one of 'mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination. President Zemin argues that,

The old security concept which heavily relied in military alliances did not serve a good purpose in safeguarding international security, nor in building everlasting peace. With the 'new security perspective, mutual trust is the basis, mutual benefit is the objective, equality is the guarantee and coordination is the means. All these constitute an inseparable and organic whole that supplement and complement each other. Its essence is to enhance mutual trust through mutual beneficial cooperation (Kinfu 2005).

The above view is diametrically discarding Cold War mentality and power politics by transcending differences in ideological and social systems. During the Cold War, superpowers were racing for support from the developing countries to which Africa belongs.

Democratisation of international relations

China's foreign policy advances the thinking of democratization of international relations. It advocates for the establishment of a fair political order in the world. In this case a fair political order is where countries respect each other politically, consult each other, and not impose their own will on others. Thus, in China's foreign policy hegemony has no place, instead, different civilizations, and paths should be respected and acknowledged. Contrary to that, European presence in Africa has been for trade, and in trading, the preoccupation has been to make profit and perpetually render Africa ignorant and unconscious of being exploited. The purpose of European presence in Africa is not to better the lots of Africans (Phelps-Stokes Commission's Report of 1922).

Seemingly, the implementation of China's foreign policy has improved relations with African countries, expand convergent points of common interests with them and appropriately reserve differences in the basis of the principles of peaceful co-existence. China's foreign policy enhances good neighbourliness, which augurs well with the *ubuntu*⁶ philosophy of the people of Africa. China actively reports the efforts of African

⁶ The philosophy centres on oneness and mutual respect of member states. The ideals of the Frontline states during the struggle against colonialism in Southern Africa and pan-Africanism for Africa's independence were both built on this *ubuntu* principle. The recent military involvement of Southern African Development

countries in consolidating the African Union and implementing New Partnership for Africa's Development strategies and plans. China together with Africa Union countries launched the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2000 via the successful convening of the first ministerial conference in Beijing. This was in order to further expand cooperation and promote the level of political and economic consultations during the new century.

4. Pros of China's Foreign Policy on Africa

China's foreign policy on Africa is clear; it is one of opening up its economy to Africa and the rest of the world. The basic aim of the opening up strategy is to expand exchange and cooperate with African countries for its development. The 'going out' strategy has been designed to promote economic development and to go out timely, seizing all opportunities in order to open up and expand international market for Chinese capital, manpower resources and products. As a result of this economic policy, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and China Minmetals Corp are leading the way in the extractive industries in Africa (Alden and Davies 2006). These companies externalize profit to China under the guise of remittances to their families in China. Apart from that the countries link up in business with their sister companies back in their home countries. Appropriate reform and opening up have enabled China to build a strong economy over a period of four decades. The GDP of China in 2001 was 9.5933 trillion Yuan (US\$1.16 trillion) almost thrice that of the year 1989 and for the first three quarters of 2001, the economy grew by 8.5%, the GDP by USD 953 billion (Yao 2005). China's economy is likely to continue to grow in the future. A sustainable, sound and stable economic development has brought about social development and progress in China. The Chinese people have made a historic leap forward from having meager food and inadequate clothing to leading a comfortable life. This has laid a strong foundation for the further strengthening and prosperity of China and for building a wealthy economy.

China brings to Africa interest-free and low-interest loans. The timeline for repaying the loans is flexible. The idea is to keep Africa in its hold for raw materials and also for Africa to remain a market place for the goods and services produced by China. The strategy has been applied to Africa by the West. After transferring sovereignty to its former colonies, Europe extended loans and aid to keep hold of its former colonies. In providing aid and cheap loans to Africa, the aim of China is not to make the continent of Africa dependent on it but to help it to embark step by step on the road of self-reliance and independent economic development. This is a sharp contrast to the loans from the West which has fostered a dependency syndrome in Africa. During Cold War, aid from Europe was used as a foreign policy tool in the battle for the control of independent African states ahead of the Soviet Union. Aid packages from the West to Africa were first centred on the trickle-down effect (the emphasis was on development of industries). When this failed to alleviate poverty in the continent, aid to Africa changed to become welfare

Committee's against the insurgents in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique demonstrated how the people of Africa stand by each other in times of need.

based. Focus was now on provision of food, health care and education. The aid packages have not been sustainable. The aid to Africa from China has been mainly to support industrial development (Fernandez-Teranco 2008). What worries development practitioners is that despite being the largest recipient of foreign aid, Africa has more civil wars and unrests than the rest of the world.

China's reform and opening-up policy is about creating opportunities for enriching its people (Giessman 2006). The country seizes all opportunities to accelerate economic development, both in Africa and in China. Currently, it is constructing a multimillion dollar complex at the African Union Conference Centre in Addis Ababa as a gift to Africa. It is not an innocent gift, but a way of appeasing African leaders for natural resource. It is also a way of winning a market for its products. Africa is a fast growing, relatively young market of almost a billion people.

China believes that growth challenges could be overcome only through an emphasis on the development of productive forces (human resources). The assumption is that it is only productive forces that can create wealth. In view of the above, China has agreed to expand cooperation in education and human resources development with the African countries. The country pledged to grant more scholarships to students from Africa to study in China. China has also established an African Human Resources Development Fund and gradually increases financial contribution to the fund for the training of professionals of different disciplines for African countries. China is also sending its experts to Africa to provide expertise. China's approach is a departure from that of the West; instead of teaching Africans the skills, the West sent experts and NGOs to come and do it for Africans. This created a dependency on the West.

China regards science and technology as vital factors of productive forces and implements strategy of rejuvenating the country through science and technology. Huawei Technologies, ZTE Corporation, Lenovo and TCL are rapidly invading the ICT sector in Africa.

China does not condone corruption because it is morally wrong to be corrupt. Recently, the former Chongqing CPC Secretary, Xilai fell from grace as he was arrested for corruption. His wife was convicted for murdering a British business tycoon in 2011. This is a demonstration of a need for spiritual/moral civilization. Without it, development resources are diverted away from their intended purposes. Africa should fight corruption from all fronts. Indeed, development and spiritual civilizations are interconnected and they strongly influence each other; one cannot exist without the other.

5. Cons of China's Foreign Policy on Africa

Africa has to be aware of China's potential to invade the information security system of African governments. This is common these days as large volumes of data are hacked throughout the world. By relying a lot more on China's security systems the more Africa fall victim of invasion by the same firms that would have installed the security systems.

Economies of scale have made China a great producer of clothes, footwear, solar panels and kitchen ware. However, China produces substandard goods for the African market (Matunhu 2012). The above view by Matunhu, opposes Knife's (2005) view that China stands for sustainable development by paying special attention to quality and effectiveness.

China claims to pay special attention to the protection of the environment; however it remains one of the most polluted parts of the world. Nevertheless, it is good that the country supports international efforts towards environmental management. In fact, the country has continued to support the key elements of the various environmental conventions and it has also forged closer cooperation and joint participation in capacity building for integrating environmental management in national development. The specific areas of co-operation between China and Africa include; pollution control, biodiversity conservation, protection of forest eco-systems, fisheries and wild life management in order to ensure economically sustainable human development. Regrettably, China's economic growth has not matched pollution control. Empirical evidence suggests that thousands of people die in China every year due to ailments caused by particles from their factories.

The country advocates harmonized development of all economic sectors so as to prevent any economic imbalance (Kinfe 2005). China's persistent emphasis is on improving the livelihood of its people by letting people see and enjoy the fruits of their labour. This has motivated the people of China to strive for further progress in the path of accelerated economic development.

China regards political stability as the most crucial factor of any economic endeavour. It follows the strategy that some people and regions need to be developed first so as to gradually enrich other people. However, the trickledown effect should be managed properly. This will defuse conflicts of interest among people. It also helps maintain internal political stability. Political stability guarantees reform and opening-up to be carried out smoothly. A successful reform and opening up reinforces and improve political stability and harmony in societies.

6. Conclusion

China's economy expands at an average of 8.4% while some parts of Africa grow at an average of 5% in four years. The sluggish growth in Africa explains why extreme poverty has increased given that 50% of the population in the continent lives below the poverty datum line. Africa's growth rate casts doubt on the continent's ability to achieve the MDG of halving poverty in Africa by 2015. China's foreign policy supports African countries in their efforts to settle their disputes through peaceful consultations. The policy is built on seven main features; namely, treating partners with good will, high level mutual visits, non interference, afro-optimism, debt reduction, customary relations, and democratization of international relations. By and large the policy supports the desire of the African peoples to achieve unity and solidarity in the manner of their choice. The paper demonstrated that like the North, China's involvement in Africa is one of trying to modernise the continent in the image of China. The process of modernizing Africa is

marked with exploitative relations between the two worlds. While making great efforts to accelerate economic development, Africa and China should exert significant efforts to upgrade the spiritual civilization of their peoples. This could be achieved by upgrading all superstructures of the society by providing string motivation and intellectual support to drive of all aspects of modernization for the benefit of both China and Africa.

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