

China's Diplomacy in Africa

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With the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, Africa lost its much-valued geopolitical status. As a result, the attention the West devotes to Africa has been constantly on the decline. The continent is being marginalized in the diplomatic strategies of major Western countries. However, China is as always committed to developing relations with Africa. While cementing their economic and trade ties that began to expand in the 1980s, China sees great value in fostering an across-the-board relationship with Africa by forging closer political, cultural and educational links.

FOCAC and China-Africa Summit: A New Milestone

There is no doubt that Africa is high on China's diplomatic agenda in recent years. Along with the releasing the very first White Paper on China's Africa Policy on January 2006, a number of high-level official visiting to Africa have been taken by President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and other cabinet members and the members of the Political Bureau.

A new milestone in the history of China-Africa relations has been created when African leaders gather in Beijing with their Chinese counterparts for the First Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and its Third Ministerial Conference in early November 2006. In fact, the year 2006 marked the 'Year of Africa' in China's diplomacy. Also in the same year, China became Africa's third largest trading partner following the United States and France, making Africa one of China's major overseas origins for strategic resources, investment opportunities and greater product markets.

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, established in 2000, provides an institutionalized platform for enhancing bilateral exchanges and cooperation. Over the last four FOCAC meetings in 2000, 2003, 2006 and 2009, China has offered a series of incentive measures to boost China-Africa ties, such as debt write-off to African countries, tariff-free for some African commodities exporting to China as well as establishing and increasing the Fund for African Human Resources Development, etc. At the opening ceremony of China-Africa Summit in early November 2006, President Hu Jintao announced China's eight-point proposal supporting African development:

- double the 2006 level of assistance by 2009
- provide \$US 5 billion in preferential loans and credits within the next three years
- \$US 5 billion to support Chinese companies to invest in Africa

- construct a conference center for African Union
- cancel debt owed by the heavily indebted poor countries
- increase zero-tariff export items to China from 190 to over 440 from the least developed countries
- Set up three to five Sino-African trade and economic zones
- Send 100 Chinese experts to Africa and train 15,000 African professionals in areas of agriculture, health, education, science and technology; build 100 rural schools and 30 anti-malaria centres, etc.

And at the 4th Ministerial Conference of the FOCAC in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh in November 2009, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao announced eight new measures the Chinese government will take to strengthen China-Africa cooperation in the next three years. The eight new measures, succeeding the above eight measures put forward by Chinese President Hu Jintao at the landmark Beijing Summit of the FOCAC in 2006, are aimed at improving people's living standard in the Continent. The new eight measures are committed to:

- Establish a China-Africa partnership in addressing climate change, to build 100 clean energy projects for Africa.
- Enhance cooperation with Africa in science and technology, carry out 100 joint demonstration projects with Africa and receive 100 African postdoctoral fellows to conduct scientific research in China.
- Help Africa build up financing capacity, provide 10 billion U.S. dollars in concessional loans to African countries, and set up a special loan of 1 billion dollars for small- and medium-sized African businesses.
- Further open up China's market to African products, offer zero-tariff treatment to 95 percent of the products from the least developed African countries having diplomatic relations with China.
- Further enhance cooperation with Africa in agriculture.
- Deepen cooperation in medical care and health.
- Enhance cooperation in human resources development and education.
- Expand people-to-people and cultural exchanges.

These moves, covering an unprecedented wide scope, show that China cares very much about Africa's development. All these measures, quantified and having very particular content, are easier to implement and fulfill than generally stated goals. The experience and practice of FOCAC over the past seven years since its founding indicate that it is not an empty-talk club. It is an important platform and effective mechanism conducting collective dialogue between China and African nations and exchanges in governance, promoting mutual trust and carrying out pragmatic cooperation. During the Summit in 2006, the Chinese and African leaders have also reached consensus on bringing about a new type of China-Africa strategic partnership.

Renewed partnership

The new-type China-Africa strategic partnership features cooperation in the political, economic, cultural and security fields as well as in international affairs. In the political sphere, China and Africa have always been equal strategic partners that trust and support each other. China respects African countries' right to choose the path of development independently. It supports these countries' efforts to seek renewal through strengthening unity. It also takes an active part in the international efforts to promote peace and development in Africa. African countries, for their part, support the one-China policy and are opposed to Western countries' interference in China's internal affairs in the name of "human rights."

China has been ready to offer material and moral support to the African national liberation movement and their struggle against imperialism, colonialism and racism since the 1950s and 1960s. In recent years, it has efficiently participated in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. To date, it has dispatched more than 3,000 peacekeepers on 12 UN missions in Africa. Today, over 1,000 Chinese service people are working on eight missions there.

In 1971, the People's Republic of China was restored to its lawful seat in the UN thanks to the support of African countries. With their support, China has defeated 11 consecutive anti-China motions tabled by Western countries in UN human rights sessions and prevented 14 proposals raised on the General Committee before the annual UN General Assembly for Taiwan to "rejoin or participate in the UN" from getting on the formal agenda since 1990. They also helped China frustrate Taiwan authorities' attempts to access international organizations that only sovereign states are entitled to join.

Economically, China and Africa are mutually complementary partners that benefit each other. Africa is a promising continent with rich natural and human resources and a huge market. However, having suffered from colonialism and regional conflicts, it is still mired in economic backwardness and lacks the funds, technology and experience for development. China has achieved a remarkable economic takeoff since the advent of economic reforms 30 years ago.

Despite the progress, it faces new problems such as a severe energy shortage and escalating competition in its domestic market. Given these factors, the Chinese Government encourages Chinese firms to invest in Africa in various fields such as trade, agriculture, infrastructure construction, mining and tourism while offering an increasing amount of assistance with no political strings attached.

To date, China has spent 44.4 billion RMB assisting African countries with over 800 projects, including textile factories, hydropower stations, stadiums, hospitals and schools. At present, trade between China and Africa is undergoing rapid growth. The bilateral trade volume rose from \$12.11 million in the 1950s to \$10.5 billion in 2000 and \$70 billion in 2007. In 2008, the volume exceeded \$100 billion for the first time in history. This goal was achieved two years earlier than the expectation. In recent years in particular, China has increased imports from African countries and thus maintained a trade deficit with them, enabling these countries to earn a large amount

of foreign exchange.

In an effort to facilitate the country's access to African goods, China exempted the tariffs on 190 categories of goods from 29 least developed African countries in 2003. Under this policy, these countries' exports of such goods to China more than doubled last year. In 2005, Africa posted a trade surplus of \$2.4 billion with China. In addition, China canceled 156 debts owed by 31 heavily indebted African countries totaling 10.5 billion RMB.

In recent years, Chinese firms have redoubled their efforts to penetrate the African market. Direct Chinese investment in Africa grew from \$491 million in 2003 to \$7.8 billion in 2008. Over 800 companies are currently operating in Africa, engaged in trade, manufacturing, natural resource exploitation, transportation, agriculture and agricultural processing. Chinese companies have helped create employment opportunities in African countries, increase their tax revenues, introduce practical technologies to these countries, enhance the competence of local workers and improve their productivity.

On the cultural front, China and Africa should become equal partners that jointly promote the prosperity and progress of human civilization. China and Africa are both origins of human civilization, boasting brilliant cultural heritages. At its source, African culture has a lot in common with Chinese culture. For example, both value community spirit and the tradition of yielding personal benefits to the interests of the community. Given these common values, China and Africa are expected to further strengthen their cultural linkages with a view to building a harmonious world where different civilizations coexist in the spirit of tolerance and equality while learning from each other.

In a broader sense, cultural exchange is not only limited to exchanging students and teachers, and holding arts performances and exhibitions. Chinese medical teams and other flourishing programs such as China's training of African workers and the exchange of experiences in pursuing development are also part of the China-Africa cultural exchange.

In the field of security, China and Africa should enhance exchanges and consultation, thus raising the awareness of collective security in the international community, promoting a new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation and shaping an international environment favorable for common development. Clearly, the future of China-African cooperation also holds significant relevance in non-traditional security field, such as preventing major infectious diseases, including bird flu, and addressing cross-border crimes so they can jointly deal with the challenges posed by globalization. Hence, the new impulse in China-Africa relations can be felt on many fronts. This multi-dimensional approach to strengthening relations is markedly different from that which Africa has managed with its traditional development partners. With both sides observing that this relationship can only be a win-win situation, the future for China-Africa relations is definitely moving into an era of rapid development.

Mutual Benefit in Energy Cooperation

It is common for Western media and scholars to attribute the development of the China-Africa relationship mainly to the Chinese demand for resources, in particular energy resources. Whenever a Chinese leader visited Africa, they tended to label the visit “an energy journey,” or “an oil trip”.

However, this explanation ignores the fact that China has only become an energy importer since 1993. In fact, the Sino-African relationship has been developing steadily since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, and Africa has maintained an important position in China’s diplomacy. Furthermore, China’s relationship with Africa, both past and present, is not limited to those countries rich in resources. Most of the African countries that benefit from China’s policy efforts, including debt reduction, low or zero tariff trade agreements and aid are among the least developed in Africa and are not rich in natural resources.

Although energy trade between China and Africa is developing rapidly, it currently comprises a mere 8.7 percent of Africa’s total oil exports, still paltry compared to Europe and the United States (36 and 33 percent respectively). China’s presence in Africa’s energy field is still quite limited and has a long way to go for achieving the kind of dominance in this sector like the western powers have. Furthermore, most Chinese companies are developing oil fields in areas the European and American companies have little interest in. In Nigeria, for example, two of the four oil fields that Chinese companies have a license to exploit are located around Lake Chad where Western companies have no presence due to the harsh natural conditions there.

Of course, even though China’s Africa policy transcends a mere quest for resources, we also admit that there is an increasing importance of African oil for China’s energy security. As a large developing country with a huge population and a lack of resources, China certainly needs to import oil to meet the growing domestic needs. Since it became a net oil importer in 1993, China has intensified efforts to secure energy in the international market by forging mutually beneficial cooperation with many countries, including African countries. China has never denied this, nor is it necessary for it to do so. According to the statistics given by the Chinese Customs, the crude oil from Africa has accounted more than 20% of the total importing since 1999, and reached record high 30% in 2005 (38.47 million tons). In the first half of 2006, Angola alone has supplied 18% of oil imports to China, overtaking Saudi Arabia as the most important external source of crude oil. Apart from Angola, Sudan, Libya, Congo-Brazzaville and Equatorial Guinea are also other important suppliers.

However, unlike colonialists who plundered Africa for its resources by brutal means, China cooperates with African countries on the basis of their mutual demands and in line with the principle of mutual benefit. The cooperation does not target any third party, either. In the White Paper on China’s Africa Policy published in January 2006, in terms of resources cooperation, it states clearly that “*the Chinese government encourages and supports competent Chinese enterprises to cooperate with African nations in various ways on the basis of the principle of mutual benefit and common*

*development, to develop and exploit rationally their resources, with a view to helping African countries **to translate their advantages in resources to competitive strength, and realize sustainable development in their own countries and the continent as a whole.***¹ That means the purpose of resources cooperation should be common development and helping African countries to transform from “resources curse” to “resources blessing”.

In order to reach this goal, China has balanced energy trade with aid, investing in infrastructure, sanitation, electricity power and health to the tune of \$US 4 billion. Among them, active participating in the building of infrastructure in African countries is one of main features regarding China’s resource cooperation with African countries. Whenever an oil exploitation deal has been signed, there are always associated with a package of infrastructure contracts. For example, in May 2006, China promised to invest \$1 billion to help repair Nigeria’s old railway lines and install new rolling stock and equipment. Later the same year, a Chinese conglomerate, the Guangdong Xinguang International Group, is set to build another huge project that is to build a fast rail system linking Nigeria’s biggest city Lagos with the political capital Abuja. In 2004, China’s Ex-import Bank approved a \$2 billion line of credit to rebuild infrastructure ruined by the 27-year civil war in Angola. This includes the Benguela railway, which links the port in Lobito with mining areas in Zambia and Katango province in DR Congo, it has been refurbished for \$500 million. The two private companies, Huawei Technologies and ZTE have been actively involved in telecommunications sector in Africa. Frankly speaking, they have contributed a lot for the rapid development of African telecommunication industry.

Take Nigeria as an example, the Chinese companies pose no threat to the interests of multinational companies in Nigeria. Instead, they will help Nigeria explore its virgin lands, while diversifying its foreign investment sources. China made commitments to invest \$4 billion in the construction of related infrastructure and \$5 million in purchasing anti-malaria medicine, training Nigerian malaria and bird flu control personnel and conducting technical cooperation in this field.

At present, five major multinational companies dominate Nigerian oil production. Some Nigerian scholars have noted that Western countries are only interested in investing in strategically important oil resources rather than in developing Nigeria’s manufacturing industry. While exploiting oil resources, they do not take effective measures to protect the environment, resulting in widespread ecological degradation and worsening the living conditions of local residents. Worse still, the oil companies have long neglected the maintenance of oil pipelines. As a result, much farmland polluted by oil leaked from the pipelines became infertile.

Apart from energy cooperation, Chinese companies cooperate with Nigeria in a variety of other areas such as agriculture, infrastructure construction, electricity and telecommunications. And Nigeria also earned \$500 million from China with its non-oil exports in 2006.

Moreover, China’s energy cooperation with Sudan is another good example. Chinese companies started to explore for energy resources in Sudan in the mid-1990s.

¹ China’s African Policy, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t230615.htm/>

By the end of 2003, their investment totaled \$2.7 billion, with which they built 1,506 km of oil pipelines, a crude oil processing plant with a capacity of 2.5 million tons a year and several gas stations.

With the Chinese investment, Sudan turned itself from an oil importing country into an oil exporting country. More importantly, it established its own oil industry consisting of prospecting, exploitation, refining and transportation facilities and sales networks with China's help. In addition, China spent over \$20 million in building schools and hospitals for the country.

In contrast, Shell has been engaged in oil exploitation in Nigeria for over 50 years. Nigeria still exports crude oil and imports gasoline. Not owning any oil production and processing facilities, it remains a raw material exporting country.

In the future, China's energy cooperation with Africa is facing some challenges as well. These challenges are three aspects at least, such as how to coordinate the contradiction between the resources cooperation and African countries domestic conflicts, how to coordinate the contradiction of different approaches, norms of behavior and even principles between China and other Western powers, and how to coordinate and cooperation between the Chinese oil companies and the Western multinational oil companies. And all the challenges need closer international cooperation to deal with.