

China's presence in Africa : An opportunity to be grasped ?

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Received: 12/04/2023

Accepted: 15/05/2023

Published: 05/06/2023

Abstract :

China's emergence as an influential actor in the African continent has been analyzed, extolled and questioned. Critics have highlighted its more exploitative aspects, while supporters have emphasized the benefits brought by China's presence, considering it as an opportunity that must be grasped by African governments.

A more objective analysis will conclude, as we will see, that China's impact on Africa has been mixed. There are instances where the Chinese role in the continent is clearly positive and appreciated. Equally, there are issues where China is sometimes playing an equivocal role, which unravels some of the positive efforts accomplished until now.

Key-words: China; Africa, Threat; opportunit

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Introduction :

China has become a key economic player in the African continent, developing a pattern of relations that merges trade, investment and aid. In 2009, it replaced the European Union and the United States as Africa's major trading partner. China also became the fourth investor in Africa and its Foreign Direct Investment flows amounted to USD 2.07 billion in the first seven months of 2021. China is also becoming an important provider of development aid to African countries according nearly half of its total foreign aid to the continent, differentiating deeply itself from western donors by its singular approach of "no political strings attached aid".

China's increasing presence in the continent brought the imperative to secure its growing economic interests and to ensure the safety of its nationals present on the ground. It is why China is today more and more involved in the security issues of the African continent leading it to call into question one of the most sacred principles of its foreign policy which is that of non-interference, pushing its limits until opening a military base in Africa.

This paper tries to evaluate China's policy towards Africa, by highlighting the opportunities it offers to the continent, as well as the threats that this policy could generate, if African countries fail in managing the increasing interest that China has for their continent.

The impact of china's engagement in Africa:

Owing to the impressive China's emergence as an influential actor in Africa, it may be considered as one of the most significant developments that the continent has known over the first two decades of the 21st century (Moore, 2020). The People's Republic of China has established itself as an increasingly influential actor across the African continent. No other country comes near the depth and breadth of China's engagement in Africa (Gady Epstein and John McDermott, 2022). While certain countries, including Ethiopia, Angola and Zambia, have been a priority, China has grown its presence in most every African country (B. Sheehy, 2022).

China enhanced its political relations with African countries, intensifying diplomatic activities and strengthening its soft power to improve its image. It is more and more engaged in several cultural and social fields ranging from multiplying Confucius Institutes and intensifying people to people exchanges, to providing health assistance and training courses. Nevertheless, China's presence in Africa remains essentially economic. China's economic influence in the continent redefined Africa's traditional ties with the international community (Riordan Roett, 2008). China's African policy has its own characteristics quite different from that of the West. This uniqueness has been analysed, extolled and questioned. To its supporters, it represents the enduring partnership between Africa and China engendered by the historical affinities of struggles against Western imperialism. It is seen as an opportunity that must imperatively be grasped by African governments. To its critics, China's African policy is reminiscent of European colonisation a century earlier, with Africa serving as a cheap source of raw materials, and a lucrative export market for Chinese manufactured goods.

We will begin by evaluating the political impact of this involvement:

I-Political Impact:

In the political sphere, China has been heavily criticised concerning its political engagement which helped, according to western officials and scholars, legitimise, or at least support, a number of autocratic regimes. China's investment and sales of weapons and military materiel to some states, regardless of their human rights records, has provided these governments, according to western criticism, with the resources needed to remain in power and to continue to oppress their populations (Hanauer Larry, 2014, p. 46). However, the Chinese model of development, which gives the priority to the development of economic partnerships and non-interference in the political affairs of other states, comes in contrast to the West's neo-liberal development agenda. The Chinese approach highlights the fact that sanctions often miss their target, punishing normal citizens without achieving the objectives they have been programmed for. They also refuse political conditionality and western countries' attempts to impose their political system on other peoples in other countries where the conditions are deeply different. Rather than

interfering in other countries' internal affairs, the Chinese view sustainable economic development as a sure way towards increased peace and stability (Williams, 2014).

That said, an objective analysis reveals that China has never been alone in providing support to African “despots”, as called by western analysts. While the United States and other Western powers bar the others countries from working with “repressive regimes”, they have cooperated with many dictatorial governments in Africa and elsewhere. Many countries receive Foreign Military Financing (FMF) from the United States, although Transparency International ranks them among the most corrupt countries in the world (Hanauer Larry, 2014, p. 47). Some private Western companies also operate in African countries wherever there is potential for profit, regardless of the political environment. For example, in 2005, the highly political IMF conditioned the financing of post-conflict reconstruction in Angola to improvements in revenue transparency, but private Western banks, led by Standard Chartered and France's Calyon, provided several rounds of loans to Angola totalling over 2 billion USD. Therefore, Chinese companies are singled out for engaging with authoritarian governments, whereas private Western companies do the same (Williams, 2014).

In addition to that, it is important to notice that the Chinese accept to engage where Western enterprises refuse to take risks. Chinese enterprises appear more willing to invest in difficult countries or areas, including countries considered as fragile states and thus abandoned by Western enterprises unwilling to invest in unstable and unsecured political and economic environments. In opposition to such stances, Chinese investors show willingness to launch economic projects in such areas defying the political risks they could encounter (ECA, 2010, p. 2).

II-Economic Impact:

China has created 25 economic and trade cooperation zones in 16 African countries and has continued to invest heavily across the continent throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a government report about Chinese–African economic and trade ties. The zones, registered with China's Ministry of Commerce, had attracted 623 businesses with a total investment of USD 735 billion at the end of 2020. China has been Africa's largest trading partner for 12 years, even though bilateral trade declined 10.5% to USD 187 billion in 2019. China is still also the fourth-biggest investor in the continent (EISD I. , 2021).

China's emergence as Africa's largest trading partner, its growing direct investment and increasing aid to African countries since 2000 have contributed to faster growth and poverty reduction in the continent. Economic researches assert that demand from China for the continents' main exports – oil, iron, copper, zinc, and other primary products – led to better terms of trade and higher export volumes, an important factor in the growth acceleration (Chen Wenjie, 2015). Four of the five largest exporters to China (Angola, Sudan, Congo and Equatorial Guinea) sell nearly exclusively oil to China. These are also the countries which have shown the most robust economic growth over that period (Vogt, 2012, p. 142).

In April 2013, China's Foreign Ministry assessed that Chinese aid and investment led African economies to grow by more than 20 percent since 2000. A study led by Canadian economists reported notable, though more modest impacts, claiming that in the few years before

and after the 2008 global financial crisis (2005–2009), Chinese investment alone contributed as much as a half-percent per year to individual countries' GDP growth, suggesting that “a significant, even if in some cases small, portion of the elevated growth in sub Saharan Africa in the three years before the Financial Crisis and also in the two years afterwards (2008–2009) can be attributed to Chinese inward investment.” (Hanauer Larry, 2014, p. 48).

In 2019, total Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Africa amounted to USD 44 billion, which corresponded to 2 percent of global Chinese FDI (Uddhammar, 2021). China's investments have created jobs, developed critically needed infrastructure, and contributed to economic growth, particularly in sectors or geographic areas in which international financial institutions and Western governments and companies have been unwilling to engage. Its expenditures on education, health, training, and economic development have contributed positively to improve Africans' standard of living and economic opportunities (Williams, 2014). It has cancelled debt worth US\$10 billion from African countries, sent doctors to treat Africans, and hosted thousands of African workers and students in its universities and training centres (Kinfu Adisu, 2010, p. 5).

That said, China's engagement has had negative effects as well. Its emphasis on investing in natural resources has reinforced many African countries' dependence on raw materials. Growing trade between China and Africa has contributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs in industries such as textiles that could not compete with less expensive Chinese imports. The nature of some Chinese investment deals has also contributed to high levels of debt in addition to some economically unviable decisions (Williams, 2014). Some analysts consider China's political rhetoric and generous loan as a means to achieve exploitative goals, while others argue that Chinese businesses are depriving locals of their jobs, and damaging Africa's environment through illegal practices. Some consider that China is plundering Africa's natural resources by signing short-sighted deals with African countries that allow it to obtain large amounts of natural resources at low prices. Other critics emphasise Chinese companies poor labour condition standards and consider that low cost Chinese manufactured goods imported to Africa hurt local manufacturing. Where is the truth?

I will evaluate China's activities in each of the previous fields, by assessing their positive as well as their negative impact:

1-Resource exploitation:

When analysing the ground reality, we will find that China does not exclusively focus on oil producing States, or those rich in natural resources, to essentially monopolise and exploit their natural wealth. Rather, China's focus has been quite pan-African. Chinese investments cover 49 countries in Africa. According to a report by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, from 1979 to 2000, 46 percent of Chinese investment in Africa went to manufacturing (15 percent to the textile industry), 28 percent to mining, 18 percent to services and seven percent to agriculture. In 2009, only 29 percent of Chinese investment went to mining (Williams, 2014). By contrast, the mining sector accounted for nearly 60 percent of U.S. FDI in Africa in 2009. According to

the *Economist*, in Ethiopia, for example, two out of three resident Chinese firms are manufacturers. Chinese non-resource investments are largely market seeking (Jafrani, 2012).

These data suggest that Beijing's economic engagement with Africa has been generally balanced, trading with African partners in proportion to their national economic capacity, rather than targeted and exploitative (Williams, 2014).

2-Raw material exports:

Another concern is about Africa's continued exports of raw materials to China which risks to maintain African countries dependent on the export of natural resources, rather than pushing them to diversify their economies, develop a manufacturing sector focused on higher-value production, and expand intra-regional trade. Some oil-rich countries in which China has invested, write academics Kweku Ampiah and Sanusha Naidu, demonstrate that "the economies of the African states are quickly becoming overly dependent on commodity exports to China, while at the same time ignoring the need to devise robust and coherent national industrial policies." (Ampiah, 2008, p. 11). According to Jacob Zuma intervening in the 2012 FOCAC conference: "This kind of (resource based) trade is unsustainable in the long term and Africa's past economic experience with Europe dictates a need to be cautious when entering into new partnerships". (Mancheri, 2012). Former Nigerian central bank governor Lamido Sanusi said: "China takes from us primary goods and sells us manufactured products. This was also the essence of colonialism." (Gumede, 2014, p. 20).

These tensions have pushed China, first, to rethink the pattern of its trade with Africa. One important adjustment was delivered by China's special representative on African affairs, Zhong Jianhua, who acknowledges the negative impact of the remaining "familiar trade pattern which is the export of African raw materials to the outside world, including China, and the sale of manufactured goods from China and other countries to Africa." In a keynote addressed at the 2012 "China and Canada in Africa" conference in Ottawa, Ambassador Zhong responded indirectly to criticism of China's large-scale imports of natural resources from Africa by emphasising that the contributions of the "buyer" in natural resources trade should not be underestimated: "The financial value of the resources is only realised when there is a buyer. The existence of multiple and strong buyers help to drive up the value of those resources, which is of benefit to the exporter." He further added: "Every country needs a starting point.... If African countries want to compete, the revenues need to be managed and invested well. No country can industrialise simply by selling raw materials." (Chin, 2014).

Some may argue that although China's demand for African oil has had some negative consequences, China is not solely responsible of African dependency (Langan, 2012), but the African governments at first instance. Furthermore, one cannot deny the obvious short-term benefits for Africa, essentially the increasing growth rate that should be exploited by African decision makers within a rational policy in order to build diversified economies.

3-Trade:

Chinese exports to Africa amounted to USD 113 billion in 2019, while imports from Africa reached USD 78 billion; the volumes have been steadily increasing for the past 16 years. With a total trade of USD 200 billion in 2019 (Uddhammar, 2021).

Many African countries have complained that mountains of tariff barriers prevent finished African products which create jobs, profits and growth from access to China's markets, strengthening the imbalance in China Africa trade.

Responding to this criticism, and according to the Chinese White Paper on Chinese-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation, China has made concerted efforts to ensure viable, mutually beneficial trade agreements, such as regulation in 2010 that served to control the quality of Chinese products being exported to Africa. Another mechanism to ensure better trade regulation was the Special Plan on Trade with Africa which served to facilitate African exports to China by the slashing of trade tariffs. The thirty least developed countries in Africa have already had trade tariff barriers removed for 60% of their export products according to the Information Office of the State Council (Rossouw GJ, 2014, p. 10).

Another growing concern for African countries is that of food security crisis exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. In this context, China's dominant position in the global food and oil supply chain as well as its integration into Africa's economies mean that Beijing's policies will significantly impact the continent's worsening crises of food and fuel. China's Belt and Road Initiative offers room for a timely intervention through established logistics and connectivity networks that facilitated COVID-19 response in Africa. African countries will probably look to China to close the gap in food supplies given China's large reserves of grain and other food products. In the same vein, Chinese and African opposition to sanctions imposed by the West on Russia, as well as Beijing's new "strategic partnership" with Moscow, means that China can likely still access Russian grains that could be supplied to Africa and other regions of the world (Mboya, 2022).

4-Loans:

China has emerged as Africa's largest bilateral lender. Indeed, the Chinese government and its state-owned banks have lent record amounts to governments in low- and middle income countries since the early 2000s, making China the world's largest official lender. It is estimated that 62 percent of African bilateral debt is owed to Chinese creditors. According to estimates provided by the SAIS China Africa Research Initiative, Chinese credits to Africa amounted to USD 148 billion in 2019. Of this, USD 44 billion (29.7 percent) are allocated to investments in infrastructure, USD 36 billion to energy, and USD 18 billion to mining and extraction. Chinese loans to Africa have helped finance large-scale investments with potentially significant positive effects for growth. At the same time, however, large lending flows have resulted in the build-up of debt-service burdens.

Over the past decade, China has embarked on a massive lending to developing countries, mainly as a way of promoting the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Bearing in mind that many developing nations in Africa have become heavily indebted because of the Covid-19 pandemic, China as lender may have to confront a situation where several of its foreign borrowers will have

difficulties to honor their contractual commitments. This could lead to a situation where future Chinese international lending will be more restrictive. Indeed, Chinese foreign lending to developing countries already seems to have been reduced in the last few years. From a record figure of USD 75 billion in 2016, Chinese lending in 2019 shrunk to USD 4 billion (Uddhammar, 2021).

In 2021, 30 percent of African debt payments went to China. This growing debt burden has been cause for some concern, with 38 African countries now eligible for Group of Twenty (G20) debt relief (Daniel F. Runde, 2021). Chinese creditors have restructured loans in the past and appear willing to renegotiate arrangements, on a strictly bilateral basis, and to allow borrowers to defer payments (Uddhammar, 2021).

5-Job creation:

Chinese companies have created thousands of jobs in mining, construction, manufacturing, and other sectors, though most of them are unskilled. The vast majority of managers and foremen are Chinese, and Africans have little to no chance of advancing to such positions. The most pessimistic critics argue that even for unskilled positions, Chinese firms import thousands of labourers from China rather than hire local workers, and pay Chinese workers better than their African counterparts (Rossouw GJ, 2014, p. 10).

The Sino-African expert Deborah Brautigam, in an attempt to contradict the widespread misapprehension that Chinese firms do not hire Africans, carried out an advanced study at the end of which she asserted: “I have not yet seen a case of a Chinese company in Africa hiring no local workers at all, but the percentage of Chinese and Africans varies widely.”

Overall, according to calculated numbers, the ratio across the continent is of around one Chinese worker for every five Africans. It should be noted, however, that these numbers remain approximated. Chinese enterprises are by nature opaque, and African governments likewise. Meanwhile, the numbers suggest that Chinese mega-projects employ Africans, often in large numbers (Richard, 2015).

Two other scholars Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong carried out a study on some 600 Chinese enterprises exercising in Africa which revealed that an average 85% of their employees are Africans, with many learning industrial skills (Link, 2021). In the same range, a 2017 McKinsey & Company study found that in the 4,832 Chinese-owned firms in Africa it surveyed, 89 percent of employees were African—with nearly 300,000 jobs created for local workers (Link, 2021).

Other researchers suggested that if Chinese enterprises have sometimes a preference for Chinese workers, it is because they are more productive than their African counterparts. Chinese textile workers in Mozambique, for example, appear to be nearly twice as productive per day as domestic labourers (Thrall, 2015, p. 52).

6- labour conditions:

Another concern is the poor labour conditions in Chinese factories and other workplaces constructed in Africa. Many Chinese factories pay low salaries while subjecting workers to long hours of work in unhealthy environments.

Nevertheless, the conditions of these factories are not considerably worse than those in China, an assessment that rejects the idea that China is bringing a form of “neo-colonialism” to

Africa, and that the Chinese are imposing worse conditions upon those they are “colonising” in an attempt to exploit them (Brautigam, 2009, p. 39). This denies accusations of any kind of Chinese colonialism.

7-Competition to local businesses:

Another critic addressed to Chinese businesses is about their competition to local ones which are forced to close or eliminate jobs. The “flood of cheap goods” from China, according to Robert Rotberg, has put “hundreds of thousands of Africans out of work” (Hanauer Larry, 2014, p. 49), because local manufacturers could not compete on price with less-expensive Chinese imports.

According to available statistics, the import of inexpensive Chinese fabrics alone forced the closure of hundreds of textile factories, and the loss of thousands of jobs, in Nigeria, South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mauritius, and other countries (Hanauer Larry, 2014, p. 49). Analyses vary among scholars; some are critic and argue that cheap Chinese products contribute to undermining the development of African economies as they impede the development of a real African manufacturing sector, which could create considerable jobs and wealth, whereas others are more moderate as Liang who counters this opinion by pointing out that 51% of Chinese imports into Africa is machinery and transportation equipment, which is necessary to develop the industrial sector in Africa (Rossouw GJ, 2014, p. 9).

It is worth noting, in this context, that in the positive side, we cannot deny that cheap imports from China have provided many Africans with access to goods that would otherwise be too expensive. Access to cheap consumer goods has also provided a source of living for many poor communities by buying and then selling these goods. Ghana’s Minister of Trade and Industry explained that “Most products Ghana imports from China are imported at literally half the price. The quality is lower, but lower income people cannot afford the more expensive products...the economy of Ghana is liberalised now and it’s up to the private entrepreneurs to decide from where they want to buy, and they often buy from the cheaper source” (Williams, 2014).

8-The quality of Chinese built infrastructures:

Since 2011, China has been the biggest player in Africa’s infrastructure boom, claiming a 40% share that continues to rise. Meanwhile, the shares of other players are falling precipitously: Europe declined from 44% to 34%, while the presence of US contractors fell from 24% to just 6.7% (Shepard, 2019).

China’s presence in Africa’s construction sector has raised questions about norms and standards. The rapidity of constructing big infrastructure projects, the norms that do not always meet international standards, the deterioration of the infrastructure shortly after delivery, and the lack of transparency in financing. All these issues raise major concerns about China’s contribution to infrastructure development in Africa (Daouda, 2015, p. 23).

A multitude of visible and widely publicised examples of poor-quality Chinese work (exaggerated or not) have created the perception that Chinese construction is sub-standard. These impressions, in turn, have created a widely held view against Chinese infrastructure projects considering that government spending on large-scale Chinese projects is wasted (Hanauer Larry, 2014, p. 63).

However, African host governments have to bear their responsibility for this negative impact of Chinese infrastructure projects. Often, Chinese institutions and companies involved in funding and building projects carry out no impact assessment, the thing that seriously harms the sustainability of the projects (Daouda, 2015, p. 23). Furthermore, some African governments should assume their responsibility in setting poor quality requirements. In Angola, for example, the local government gave a Chinese construction company directives to build roads quickly (and cheaply) in order to show results in the run-up to an election (Hanauer Larry, 2014, p. 62).

On the other hand, and aside this wave of criticism, Chinese infrastructure projects in Africa have been highly praised by other sides. We could give the example of the 2011 study carried out by the World Bank's Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic program, which claimed that infrastructure has been responsible for "more than half of Africa's recent improved growth performance, and has the potential to contribute even more in the future." Given that Chinese investments represent about one- eighth of external support to African infrastructure, China is a significant driver of this growth (Hanauer Larry, 2014, pp. 49, 50).

9-Environment violations:

Chinese companies are criticised for being environment polluters by adopting some harmful practices such as surface mining which pollutes water supplies and destroys vegetation. Others are concerned about the poaching of prized African animals for sale in Asian markets (Kshetri, 2014, p. 235). Indeed, many of these complaints are legitimate. Some studies reveal that Chinese syndicates are involved, for instance, in the illegal trade in abalone, an endangered species harvested illegally in South Africa. A connection has been created between South African gangs and Chinese organised crime syndicates operating on a transnational level, with local gangs in Western Cape villages poaching the abalone for the Chinese syndicates. These illegal activities also exist in other fields such as rhino and elephant poaching in Southern, Eastern and Central Africa for the lucrative Asian markets of rhino horn and ivory.

Chinese demand for African timber has led to significant black-market activity. In 2017, the Environmental Investigation Agency detailed how 1.4 million illegally harvested logs in Nigeria with a market value of \$300 million were laundered into China. Furthermore, in 2018, Chinese entities owned around 90 percent of Ghana's industrial fishing fleet, despite Ghanaian law forbidding foreign ownership or control. This sort of illegal fishing has cost the Ghanaian economy an estimated \$65 million per year. Lastly, the Chinese market for ejiao, a traditional medicine made from gelatin extracted from boiled donkey skins, has put donkey populations at risk throughout several African countries such as Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Kenya. For many vulnerable populations, donkeys are a vital labor resource to transport food, water, firewood, goods, and people.

It is, however, worth noting that these kinds of environmental practices are common in developing countries. It would seem unfair to raise China's standard of environmental protection higher than other countries, especially if we consider China itself as a country where environmental protection is not enough performed (Williams, 2014). This situation could only be redressed if

African countries strive to enhance their legislation towards a better control of environmental activities.

Although negative environmental impacts have resulted from Chinese economic engagement in Africa, China has nevertheless endeavored to counterbalance these negative effects. For instance, China's government made positive contributions to Africa's renewable energy development, by donating in 2014, \$800,000 worth of solar street lights to Uganda's Kampala Capital City Authority. Moreover, in 2016, the Zambian government signed a loan from the China Development Bank worth \$170 million to finance solar-powered milling plants. With the help of Chinese contractors, Kenya launched a 50-megawatt solar power plant, one of the largest photovoltaic electricity stations in Africa. China also took an important energy engagement expressed by President Xi Jinping's announcement that China "will not build new coal-fired power projects abroad." (Link, 2021).

10-Corruption:

Many cases of corruption have been noted in deals between China and some African governments due to the vast amounts of money involved in some infrastructure and construction projects. We should objectively argue in this context that if Chinese enterprises practice corruption in Africa, it is because African economic environment favours such violations. Chinese businessmen are not acting in isolation but rather according to practices considered acceptable in local business environments. However, other analysts are more moderate in assessing the weight of corruption in the business deals between China and Africa. *The Economist* points out that money typically goes straight to Chinese companies, giving African leaders little control over the funds. David Shinn, a professor at George Washington University, notes that "opportunities for corruption in Chinese-African business deals usually manifest themselves during the negotiation phase, as Chinese enterprises maintain firm control over projects after agreements have been signed" (Hanauer Larry, 2014, p. 52). Nevertheless, large opportunities remain available for African officials who are tempted to use Chinese (or other) resources for their personal enrichment.

We have, however, to stress on the fact that if both Chinese companies and African governments are responsible of these illegal practices, a more rigorous African legislation and a strict respect of the law is the unique solution to put an end to such practices.

III-Security impact:

China is showing increased interest in African security affairs at the price of scarifying its sacred principle of non interference in other states internal affairs, in order to protect its growing economic interests and the security of its nationals present on the continent. China is today, more actively involved in African security issues including its intensive participation in peace keeping operations, anti-piracy efforts as well as counter terrorism endeavours, in addition to its active participation in African conflicts' resolution as it did in Sudan and South Sudan.

It remains that China's approach to African security issues is different from that of western powers, always prioritising the respect of the concerned state's sovereignty. China has always argued that any peacekeeping intervention must be based on precise unavoidable principles: an intervention can be legitimate only with the authorisation of the United Nations Security Council,

State sovereignty must be respected and the consent of the host country must be obtained; many crises must be considered as internal problems and not as threats to international security; and force must be used only in case of self-defence.

Concerning peace-building, in post-conflict countries, China has so far considered this kind of intervention as interfering too heavily in the domestic affairs of sovereign States, and refused to be involved in such operations.

China remains very cautious in its counterterrorism support in Africa, working closely with the UN, the African Union and individual African governments. It has shown much less willingness to collaborate with Western governments, and continues to express its refusal to participate to missions associated with Western political agendas, such as democratisation.

When it comes to military bases, China places significant strategic focus on countries around the Horn of Africa and Gulf of Aden, including Djibouti, where it opened its first military facility outside China. This choice has received significant comment, as the base will only be six miles from a US military base in the same country. China has also expanded its network of defense attaches in Africa, while increasing defense sales in the continent, which experienced 55 per cent growth between 2012 and 2017.

What is not proven, however, is that the Chinese are planning to open other bases on the African continent, despite rumors of plans for new bases in Equatorial Guinea and Cape Verde. China could be looking at berthing rights in these countries for its naval vessels, but there is little evidence of plans for a full-fledged base so far (Alex Vines Obe, 2023).

IV- Opportunity or threat?

The impact produced by China's wide engagement towards Africa has been mixed and mitigated: China's increasing influence on the continent redefined Africa's traditional ties with the international community, enhancing the position of the continent with the arrival of a new concurrent to the traditional colonial powers.

Economically, and as a result of intensified trade links with China, Africa has enjoyed better terms of trade, increased export volumes, and higher public revenues. China's investments have created jobs, provided Africa with needed infrastructure, and played a role in the continent's economic growth, particularly in sectors or areas in which international financial institutions and Western companies have been unwilling to engage because of high political risks. China's high amounts of aid provided, without conditionality, to the continent in several realms including education, training, and economic development have contributed positively to improve Africans' standard of living and to create economic opportunities. It has cancelled debt, provided particular health assistance to the poorest African countries, and hosted thousands of African workers and students in its universities and training centres.

On the other hand, China's engagement has had negative and harmful effects as well. Its emphasis on investing in natural resources has reinforced many African countries' dependence on raw materials and unskilled labour. Growing African imports of manufacturing products from China has contributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs in industries such as textiles that could not compete with less expensive Chinese imports. Chinese enterprises

have also been criticised on their poor labour conditions and non respect of environmental standards. Furthermore, the nature of many Chinese investment deals has contributed to high levels of debt, economically unviable decisions, and official corruption (Hanauer Larry, 2014, p. 45).

Nevertheless, China is not responsible alone of these negative effects. African governments have to bear an important part of responsibility and deserve blame for their own shortcomings in their relationship with China, because they can shape the nature of the interaction. African governments must have control over the terms of the deals they conclude with China, and could thus impose stricter conditions on environmental or labour standards. Africans are facing an important challenge which is to develop new models for doing business with China, by imposing ethical codes, including quality control and better linkages with local economies. Africa has the responsibility to convert Chinese interest for the continent into maximum benefit, especially that the flows of trade, investment and aid emanating from China provide African countries with a unique opportunity to translate these external supports into overall gains.

Beginning by the investment field, Africa must adopt a constructive policy framework that will guarantee that Foreign Direct Investment helps to make a positive contribution to African economies and societies. Africa's population is growing faster than anywhere else in the world, and thus African countries need to encourage Chinese investment into more labour intensive sectors, in order to respond to job creation which is becoming a top priority.

In their trading interactions with China, and in order to obtain better terms of trade, African governments must deploy more efforts to obtain from China wider market access for African goods, and to continue to reduce tariff barriers for the less African developed countries. By dealing multilaterally with China according to a coordinated policy, African countries could diversify their exports to China based on their respective comparative advantage, and set common prices for exports.

African countries should also grasp the opportunity of China's generous aid policy and adapt it to their own needs by making well-calculated and rational demands.

African countries must strive to use all these opportunities in order to diversify their economies by developing their agriculture and manufacturing sectors, the main sources of added value and employment, and thus economic development. Some African countries succeeded in taking advantage from China's interest, by directing China's investments towards industries that employ local labour and thus produce technology transfer. They also took profit from high revenues, partly due to increasing Chinese imports of commodities, in order to build diversified economies and to reduce their exclusive reliance on raw materials' exports. The most obvious example is that of Ethiopia which, more than any other country in Africa, has deployed tremendous efforts to build an industrial base. Ethiopia has also adopted a specific approach to develop its agricultural sector relying on China's investments and technical assistance. These endeavours made of Ethiopia today the second-largest maize producer in sub-Saharan Africa.

If such a strategic vision is followed by the other African countries, China could then play a big role in African economic development process.

Conclusion:

Number of analysts consider that if African governments don't succeed in taking full advantage from their interactions with China, it is because of African countries' relative inferiority in size and power, compared to China, making of them powerless counterparts. This situation could be redressed and African countries could take full advantage from their relationships with China, but only if African governments negotiate not only as leaders of individual countries, but also as members of the collective mechanism of the African Union. Africa's failure to form a unified voice hampered its ability to determine the terms and general direction of the interaction because rather than working as a bloc, Africa continues to negotiate with China on a country-by-country basis.

China has a considerable interest for the African countries, and this interest must be converted into a negotiating power in order to maximise gains from China-Africa interactions on one hand, and on the other hand, attain more balanced relations with the other powers competing with China on the continent. The Chinese are knocking on the door, but the African governments must decide whether, and under what conditions, to give them entrance.

The interests between African states and China can actually coincide and can, indeed, create better win-win situations, if the African side negotiates more strongly the deals, because the advantages are unlikely to be given by a benevolent China without tough negotiations.

China could be an efficient partner to African states at various levels, provided that African countries become more strongly engaged on the basis of a common set agenda directed towards the continent's high interest. Only then, can Africa achieve the best results and take full advantage from the interest that China has for the continent. Otherwise, if China's engagement will continue to be poorly managed, Africa risks Chinese exploitation, and ultimately misses a unique opportunity to achieve its political, economic and social development.

As Ed Brown, a Ghanaian senior executive at one of his country's leading independent think tanks said: "This [relationship] is going to determine Africa's future for the next fifty years. The big question is whether African countries are dynamic enough to take advantage, and whether they'll end up being the appendage of somebody else all over again."

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