

Reality and prospects of Sino - African cooperation in the context of China's new global perspective

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### Abstract:

China has developed its own perspective on the world and the international system, reflecting its desire to rise as an influential and responsible global power. This Chinese perspective aims to expand its influence globally, including in Africa; This cooperative case between China and Africa is studied through an analytical inductive approach and content analysis techniques. The study posits that China's new global perspective is unique and different compared to its Western global counterpart, granting China a positive image worldwide, including in Africa, which is systematically and continuously strengthening its relations with China. Despite some criticisms of China's policy in Africa, it is still considered the best, compared to the policies of other powers, especially Western ones.

**Keywords:** China -Africa – Cooperation – New Global Perspective – Diplomacy.

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## **1. Introduction**

Today, China is an influential global player on many levels: political, economic, technological and even cultural and civilizational. It is the world's second-largest economy, the third-largest military arsenal, a leading technological force, its cultural and civilizational reputation is essential worldwide. This has helped it to develop and strengthen its soft power and compete with traditional Western great powers, such as the United States of America and the European Union, as well as other powers such as Russia and Japan.

Since President Xi Jinping came to power, China has announced its global intentions and goals to make Beijing a leading global superpower between 2035 and 2049. China has its own vision and perspective for building a multipolar world and rebuilding the world order on new foundations of trust, cooperation and mutual interests, as promoted by Chinese officials. On the economic front, China has adopted policies of a global nature that do not recognize regional borders and areas, but include all parts of the world, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and other peaceful development policies.

Given that the cooperative relationship between China and Africa is one of the most important examples of China's ability to penetrate the different continents and to establish constructive and mutually beneficial cooperative relations, China's leaders regard the achievements in this relationship as one of the greatest successes of China's foreign policy and one of the most important indicators of the strength of China's new global vision, enabling it to overcome narrow local and regional boundaries in Asia and to reach out to much more distant geographical areas of interaction. This raises the following research problem: **to what extent can China's new global perspective strengthen cooperation with Africa?**

Accordingly, we ask the following questions:

- What is the context in which the China's new global perspective has evolved, and what are its foundations?
- How does this perspective help the development of Sino-African cooperation?
- What are the main manifestations of Sino-African cooperation in various fields?

The analysis of this problematic relies on an inductive analytical approach that tracks the developments of China's new global perspective, as well as the various stages and manifestations of Chinese-African cooperation. It also employs content

analysis techniques through examining the prevailing Chinese discourse in this context to extract the foundations, principles, and characteristics of Chinese-African cooperation under the new global perspective of China.

The key elements of this research are:

- The context for the emergence of China's New global perspective.
- The foundations of this new perspective.
- The Factors of convergence between Africa and China's new global perspective.
- China's diplomatic package in Africa.

## **2. “Thinking and acting globally”, The emergence and evolution of China's new global perspective**

Throughout its history, China has been known as one of the world's oldest civilizations, and is the oldest unbroken civilization to date. During this civilizational journey, China has presented the world with timeless personalities, inventions, concepts and principles, which have acquired the status of on human and global ownership and, thus, have not remained limited to Chinese thought or life. China has presented to the world philosophers as great as Confucius, a brilliant strategist with the reputation of Sun Tzu, and a sailor and explorer in the form of Xing He, in addition to material inventions that have decisively influenced the development of mankind, such as paper, the compass, gunpowder, among others. This is the motive behind Samuel Huntington's description of China as a ‘civilization disguised as a state’.

The tendency towards centrality and leadership was present in the Chinese history and consciousness throughout this civilization, particularly in its regional environment. First of all, even its ancient name had strong and important connotations indicating prosperity, progress and excellence, since it was known as “The Middle Kingdom”, an expression derived from the word “Zhongwu” 中国, meaning “the middle country”. The entire region around the Yellow River was considered the cradle of Chinese civilization. Today, this region is called 中中 zhōngyuán, which means “central plains region”. When China came into contact with the Western world, the name Zhongguo was used to refer to the whole country.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the setbacks suffered by China during the so-called century of humiliation, it has begun to regain its status and self-awareness as a civilizational power deserving a better place in the world since the era of Mao Zedong, who

reunified China and created a contemporary political entity and identity, starting from 1949. If Deng Xiaoping, the father of economic reform in China, set out to develop the capabilities of the Chinese economy and try to break out of the circle of poverty and underdevelopment, working discreetly and out of sight, according to the principle of “hidden capabilities”. The current President Xi Jinping, who arrived at a time when the country has made an enormous leap forward in various fields, has brought with him a new vision and perspective on China's position and role in the world, thanks to his theme of “showing strength and capabilities”. This is why President Xi's era marks the beginning of China's presentation to the world as a superpower that seeks to lead and change the long-prevailing international rules.

Since 2013, a major shift in China's foreign policy has begun with President Xi coming to power and announcing the “Belt and Road” initiative, comprising the Economic Belt, the Green Belt and the Maritime Silk Road. This led to the consequent change in China's international identity, from a major developing country to a major responsible country. Deng Xiaoping's policy of “waiting and hiding capabilities” will be replaced by Xi's policy of “showing strength, capabilities and seizing strategic opportunities”, which is linked to Xi's grand national strategy of building a socialist state with strong, modern Chinese characteristics, and requires a realignment of China's national interests. The building of this state requires the creation and formulation of a major global role for China, the attainment of great influence in a multipolar world order rather than in the present one. This is closely linked to the Chinese dream of unifying the Chinese nation by returning Taiwan, protecting its interests in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, and extending its economic and military influence in Asia, particularly in East Asia and Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup>

China's interests lie primarily in protecting the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity and regime security against anything that might compromise them, in particular the Taiwan question, consolidating the power of the Chinese Communist Party and controlling internal issues such as Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang, among others. These interests are closely linked to the doctrine of Chinese foreign policy based on non-interference in the internal affairs of countries and respect for their sovereignty, in exchange for other countries' respect for China's unitary perspective, strengthening the country's military and economic power, serving the State's political and ideological interests by supporting Third World countries, promoting the identity and policy of “South-South” cooperation,

and building multilateral cooperation, seeking to promote the restructuring of the current international system towards a world of multilateralism.<sup>3</sup>

The realization of these interests and goals has led to a revolution in Chinese strategic, political and economic thinking, from local and regional to global, as China's Xi Jinping leadership believes the time has come to move beyond the limits of regionalism to Think and Act Globally. This is supported by the country's increasing financial capabilities and resources, and its growing influence in international institutions, reflected in a series of policies and initiatives at various levels, particularly under the era of President Xi Jinping. Because China has achieved a major breakthrough since the coming to power of its President, observers see Xi's reign as the end of the era of hesitation and of China's consideration as a developing country, and the beginning of its declaration as an open world power, deserving a better position in a more balanced and open international system.

Under Xi's leadership, China has adopted the most ambitious national goals since its foundation, with President Xi believing that China has: “achieved great transformations, risen and become more powerful and wealthier”. Xi's perception of the reality, future of China and the Asian continent as a whole has reached its zenith, involving into what can be called the “Chinese Monroe Doctrine”, declared in May 2014: the prerogative of the peoples of Asia to manage Asia's affairs, solve Asia's problems and maintain Asia's security. The way to achieve this is to remove the United States from Asian security affairs and establish a Chinese “security architecture” in the region”.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. China's new global perspective foundations**

More precisely, China's new global perspective on the world and the international system rests on the following foundations: the structural and institutional foundations, the economic and development foundations, and the human foundation.

#### **3.1 Structural and institutional foundations:**

China has emerged as a risen power dissatisfied with the international status quo, characterized by Western hegemony led by the United States of America since the early 1990s; within the framework of a unipolar system. This system has long been accused of exclusion, unilateralism in international decision-making, lack of democracy and of serving the interests of the West, the United States of America

and a few allies, to the detriment of the interests of the vast majority of the world's countries and powers.

China today ranks among the powers dissatisfied with the international status quo and power's distribution in the international system, as well as with the dominant role of the United States. It is working hard at various levels, both bilateral and multilateral in order to achieve a more just, democratic and pluralist international system. This is demonstrated by its concern for:

- The peaceful and cooperative character of its policies: China argues that its foreign policy has always been peaceful and cooperative, governed by the famous five principles of peaceful coexistence.<sup>5</sup>
- Rejecting US-led Western domination of the international system, and working to restructure this system by striving to establish a multipolar international system.
- China's influence is increasing on a global scale, particularly within international political, economic and financial institutions.
- Contributing to several ambitious projects to establish and create alternative institutions and interaction structures to those currently existing Western ones. The results of China's efforts in this direction include its pivotal role in the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the BRICS group and its recent expansion, as well as its leadership of a bold campaign to create new financial institutions such as the New Development Bank within the BRICS framework, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. It has also set up multilateral forums for cooperation, like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation since 2000.

The FOCAC, reflects the key tenets of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence which guides China's foreign policy objectives. The process is expected to promote political dialogue and economic co-operation, with the long-term aim of common economic development and prosperity framed squarely on a one-China ideology. The first such meeting held in Beijing from 10 to 12 October 2000, was attended by over 800 officials from China and 44 African countries. Representatives of 17 regional and international organisations, as well as business representatives also attended the conference. "South-South" cooperation with its "natural allies" and the creation of "a equitable and just new international political and economic order" were key tenets of the movement. Economic and diplomatic interaction with Africa had taken centre stage and would define future relations.<sup>6</sup>

- China as a responsible power in the international system, capable of bearing the burden of achieving security and stability globally. One of the most important of these models is the “peace diplomacy model”, which reflects China's role as a responsible major power in the international system, in line with its long-term goal of becoming a leading world power by 2049. These are sought to be achieved through engaging in conflict handling, sending peacekeeping forces to hotbeds of tension, participating in mediation, peace-building, reconstructing, and engaging in humanitarian efforts, among other initiatives, in line with the affirmation of its principles in the “Global Security” initiative document published in February 2023. This document has previously promoted as one of the means of reforming the current international system, which is the initiative based primarily on respect for the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, taking the security concerns of all countries seriously and resolving all disputes peacefully.<sup>7</sup>

This reflects the reality of a Chinese foreign policy characterized under Xi Jinping by a willingness to assume international responsibilities instead of abandoning them; China's efforts in resolving international crises have recently become remarkable and undeniable.<sup>8</sup>

This is embodied on the ground, by the initiatives and efforts to establish peace at world level through his efforts in several conflicts and political disputes, such as his participation in several UN peace missions, its role in the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, its initiatives to resolve the crisis in Syria and the Palestinian question, the initiative to establish peace and stability in the Middle East, besides the initiative to stop the Russian-Ukrainian war.

### **3.2 Economic and development foundations:**

China regards sustainable economic development as a key priority for its fundamental national interests. In fact, its economic development is linked to its global influence as a great power and its ability to protect its national interests abroad, which is in turn, tied to its policy of diversifying its sources of raw materials and energy and investing in strategic areas e.g., economic zones and ports of geostrategic importance in order to guarantee stable and sustainable supplies. These interests extend to vital interests in social stability and sustainable economic development to guarantee the security of the regime, because the Communist Party links the survival of the Chinese state to the survival of the Party, and the basis for maintaining the Party in power is sustainable economic development. This is why China has launched a “grand strategy” that targets national interests expressed in

medium- and long-term objectives. The strategy's priorities include maintaining political control and social stability, sustaining economic growth and developing science and technology.<sup>9</sup>

The Belt and Road project, considered the largest infrastructure project in human history, is the most important example of the global dimension of Chinese thought and action. It encompasses three major continents, namely Asia, Europe and Africa.

China has also adopted the “development and peace model” approach, on the premise that development is a prerequisite for achieving peace and economic and social stability, which requires a secure, peaceful and stable environment conducive to economic development, within the framework of a multipolar international system that guarantees non-interference in the internal affairs of states the Belt and Road project is part of this framework, according to the Chinese. The trend towards neutral partnerships that do not impose political diktats non-conditionality and that seek to deal with countries on a win-win basis, in opposition to the interventionist Western liberal model based on political and economic conditionality, political diktats and meta-dealings.<sup>10</sup>

### **3.3 Human foundation:**

China expresses its desire to achieve a secure and stable environment through an innovative concept of their own, the “Community of Shared Destiny for Humanity” or Renlei Mingyun Gongtongti in Chinese. The characteristics and objectives of this notion are as follows: “a project with cultural, civilizational, economic and developmental aspects, based on the Chinese nation's concept of universal harmony and the application of equitable policies, so that the world can be for all. Global stability and prosperity cannot be achieved without the development of developing countries and the promotion of South-South cooperation, and the ‘Belt and Road’ project is an important launching pad for China's international development cooperation.”<sup>11</sup>

Chinese President Xi Jinping first introduced the concept of building a “community of shared destiny for mankind” in 2013, and in a speech on October 23, 2022, he reaffirmed China's commitment to implementing the principles of this concept: “We will work with the people of all other countries to promote common human values, such as peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom, to safeguard world peace and promote its development, and we will continue to

promote the work of building a community of shared destiny for humankind... When all countries pursue the cause of the common good, we can live in harmony, engage in mutually beneficial cooperation, and join hands to create a brighter future for the whole world.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. Factors of convergence between China's global perspective and the process of cooperation with Africa**

We can identify a number of different contexts and facts that constitute the points of intersection between Africa, on the one hand, and China and its global vision, on the other hand, as represented by the following main elements:

##### **4.1 China's positive image in the African collective consciousness:**

Africa, and more specifically its eastern coastal areas, was one of the important stations where the ships of the Treasure Fleet docked, led by the Chinese Muslim sailor “Zheng He”, whose Islamic name is Haji Mahmoud Shamsuddin, who, from 1405 onwards, led a series of exploratory, diplomatic and commercial voyages to showcase China's power and greatness and strengthen its peaceful and cooperative relations with the peoples of the world, through seven voyages that stretched from China's eastern coasts to the coasts of East Africa. These voyages can be seen as the first milestones in China's global trend towards openness, border-crossing and peaceful approaches to other peoples, forming the initial backdrop to China's global orientation.<sup>13</sup>

The history of these voyages, still, gives a positive image of China's imperial and global behaviour, as a peaceful power that has not used its military and material capabilities to conquer or enslave others, and this impression still feeds into Africans' good perception of China as a power distinct and different in its policies and orientations from the Western colonial powers that occupied them and stole their wealth.

##### **4.2 Shared colonial pains and tragedies:**

China assures the world and its partners, especially poor countries and regions that have long suffered from colonialism and exploitation including the African continent, that it is a completely different kind of power that has nothing to do with its Western colonial counterparts. China itself was a victim of Western colonialism, and the century-long experience of humiliation has been highly influential in the Chinese collective imagination and consciousness. For example,

on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the handover of Hong Kong to Great Britain, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared: "This handover has put an end to China's humiliation and enabled the Chinese people to feel more at ease in their own country. This gesture put an end to the humiliation and pain Britain inflicted on China when it seized the city in 1842."<sup>14</sup>

This colonial past, was reflected in China's orientations and relations from the earliest days of the People's Republic of China. Political interests were central to Beijing's relations with Africa. In its search for friends in the post-Cold War bipolar international system, Beijing identified the Newly Independent States of Africa as a key group to deal with, based on common ground and on a sense of empathy with Africa, arising from their shared historical experiences. Both Africa and China were victims of "colonization by capitalists and imperialists" and faced the same quest for national independence and liberation after the Second World War.<sup>15</sup>

### **4.3 The necessity and mutual interests of cooperation and rapprochement between the two sides:**

Despite the great economic differences between Beijing and African countries, Africa possesses many advantages and human and natural resources which China lacks. Conversely, Africa lacks China's potential, perceptions, financial, technological strengths and global diplomatic power, so needs and interests are mutual, which is a prerequisite for a bilateral relationship to grow and prosper.

In human and economic terms, Africa accounts for 20% of the world's population and is the world's second most populous region after Asia, with a population of over 1.4 billion by 2023, double that of Europe 743 million. The continent has also become the home of the global green economy, holding 30% of the planet's mineral reserves, many of which are essential for renewable and low-carbon technologies. According to the World Bank, to meet the expected rise in global demand, production of minerals, metals, lithium and graphite must increase by 50% by 2050; this cannot be achieved without Africa's resources.<sup>16</sup> African territories also hold around 9% of the world's oil reserves, and 8.5% of the world's natural gas reserves.<sup>17</sup>

From a political and strategic point of view, African countries represent the largest voting bloc at the United Nations 54 countries, with more than a quarter of the world's votes. As America and the West have repeatedly pointed out, African

voices played a decisive role in the adoption of General Assembly resolutions against its ally, Israel. China's and even Russia's reliance on African voices in international forums to support their proposals and positions on issues –such as Taiwan and the Russian-Ukrainian war – has shown Washington that all these voices must not be neglected in a world moving towards change.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4.4 Shared views on the state of the international system:**

Most African countries' leaders have a perception similar to that of their Chinese counterparts on the need to change the international system, by reformulating and rebuilding it away from Western unipolarity, moving towards a multipolarity to balance the Western side and allow the visions and perceptions of these non-Western powers and their allies to be presented at the level of the various international institutions.

China is playing on the heartstrings of international contradictions and Africa's suffering in the face of the current world order. It has mastered the art of promoting itself through the tools of soft power and by adopting the discourse of South-South, as the Chinese perceive the African continent as an essential element in the escalating geostrategic competition for global influence between China and the US-led West. Beijing's strategy here aims to integrate the continent into an international subsystem that includes many “countries of the South” over which China is dominant, so China is declaring itself the spokesperson for developing countries, calling for the creation of a multilateral international environment and the reshaping of the global economy. This discourse resonates favourably with decision-makers in many African countries, such as Senegal; its president, Abdoulaye Wade, declared: “China understands our needs, China's understanding of our needs is better than the slow and sometimes arrogant understanding of European investors, donor organizations and NGOs; it's not just Africa that needs to learn from China, but the West too.”<sup>19</sup>

Sino-African convergence on the need to reshape the international system has emerged through China's work with the continent's leading powers to develop an institutional approach to confront US unilateralism in international decision-making, such as South Africa's membership of the BRICS group. China has also strongly supported the expansion of the BRICS group to include other African countries, like Egypt and Ethiopia, who were approved to become members of the group.<sup>20</sup>

While the USA still has no grand strategy or vision for increasing its presence in Africa, or even for achieving its economic and security objectives therein, China has a strong presence there and in a variety of areas, which explains why American researcher specializing in international and strategic affairs, Irina Tsukerman has asserted that “China will probably dominate Africa in the years to come, as it has the resources and political will at the top to pursue its agenda, and is focusing on effective economic influence”.<sup>21</sup>

To reinforce its determination to make Africa a support for its global vision, China gave its relations with Africa an institutionalized multilateral character for the first time in its history. It was the first to organize summits with African countries other world powers followed, such as the United States, Russia and others. In 2000, it created the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, which has since been held regularly every three years, which is an important mechanism for promoting Chinese political and economic interests in the continent, and since its creation, relations between the two sides have undergone unprecedented transformations.<sup>22</sup>

Today, China is striving to align the objectives of its various policies and programs, in particular the “Belt and Road” project, with Africa-specific programs, policies and plans, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the two sides' concerted efforts to implement the “Ten Cooperation Plans”, the “Eight Initiatives”, the “Nine Programs”, and the drafting of the “Vision for China-Africa Cooperation 2035”.<sup>23</sup>

## **5. China's diplomatic package in Africa**

To take advantage of the intersections and common axes between Africa and its global perspective, China has adopted various tools and means to deepen its relations and realize its interests and objectives in Africa, based on the development of a diverse set of diplomacies corresponding to the diverse objectives of its cooperation with the continent. This package comprises a number of diplomacies; the most important of which are the following:

### **5.1 Peaceful development diplomacy:**

African countries in general tend to trust China to help them develop and modernize, given the disappointments they have experienced after following the Western model of modernization. Meanwhile, China offers a different development model, as it avoids the mistakes and conditions imposed by Western powers in its economic transactions with the countries on the continent. One of the foundations

of China's peaceful development is the pursuit of mutual profit based on a win-win formula, the absence of preconditions and any kind of dictates, respect for the sovereignty of the countries, and commitment to non-interference in their internal affairs.

China has resorted to its peaceful development diplomacy to facilitate Africa's participation in the "Belt and Road" initiative, of which the continent is a key element, given its strategic situation and enormous assets. Statistics indicate that 52 out of 54 African countries have signed or expressed their interest in signing framework cooperation agreements under the BRI and have benefited from construction projects included in the initiative, such as airports, roads, railways, ports, energy, communications, and others, with the aim of opening African countries to trade by facilitating the construction of key local and regional infrastructures and opening transport routes to China.<sup>24</sup>

All of this, has led to a significant increase in the volume of trade between the two parties; as of 2023, the trade between China and Africa reached a historic peak of 282.1 billion dollars, and China is also the developing country that invests the most in Africa. By the end of 2022, China's direct investment stock in Africa exceeded 40 billion dollars, and more than 3,000 Chinese companies have invested and established businesses in Africa, creating jobs and promoting Africa's economic transformation. China has built and modernized more than 10,000 kilometres of railways, nearly 100,000 kilometres of roads, nearly 1,000 bridges, and nearly 100 ports in Africa, and has constructed electricity and telecommunications networks for many countries. Moreover, it also helps Africans achieve "Made in Africa" by transforming resource advantages into development advantages to better serve the interests of the African people,<sup>25</sup> while boosting Chinese investments in the continent, which have surpassed those of the United States, since 2014.<sup>26</sup>

Africa is a key center of the Belt and Road project. In 2023, China's total economic engagement in Africa has been calculated at \$21.7 billion under the Belt and Road Initiative BRI; For example, It is estimated that \$8-10 billion of these engagements are focused on base metals projects.<sup>27</sup>

## **5.2 Energy Diplomacy:**

Given its significant and growing energy needs, China has adopted the option and mechanism of "energy diplomacy," a tool linked to the foreign policy of

energy-consuming countries in particular, towards regions and countries that produce energy resources, engaging in activities and avenues related to energy in general negotiation, signing agreements, providing facilities to businesses, and others.<sup>28</sup>

From this perspective, China operates on the principle that energy security is so important that it must participate in its management and cannot be left to the markets and their rules to control it.<sup>29</sup> It is the reason why China has made energy diplomacy an essential component of its foreign policy.<sup>30</sup>

China's energy diplomacy including its activities in energy-producing African regions relies on an alliance between the state and its state-owned oil and gas companies, notably CNOOC, Sinopec, and CNPC China National Petroleum Corporation. The state strongly and substantially supports the three main public oil companies to ensure net investments in oil and gas fields abroad.<sup>31</sup>

Today, China is very present in various oil and gas production areas in Africa and has made enormous investments across the continent, in countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Angola, Sudan, Libya, Chad, Niger, and others; its three main companies have become competitors to major international energy companies in Africa. Making the continent the second region that supplies the most oil and gas to China after the Middle East, with more than 25% of its oil and gas 13% for oil and 12% for gas.<sup>32</sup>

### **5.3 Peace diplomacy:**

Based on its peaceful perspective on international relations and its efforts to achieve global economic and development goals, China has sought to contribute to the establishment of a safe, stable, and development-friendly environment in Africa. One of its main approaches in this regard has been its concept of peace diplomacy, which reflects the Chinese vision of spreading peace in the world, particularly on the African continent, and presents China as a responsible global power seeking to solve systemic problems.

Chinese peacekeepers have participated in nearly 30 United Nations peacekeeping operations, and China has sent more than 50,000 soldiers to over 20 countries and regions around the world, including missions in African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, and the Central African Republic. This makes China the country that has sent the most peacekeepers among the permanent members of the United Nations Security

Council. The former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan once praised it, saying: “As a builder of peace, contributor to economic development, defender of the international order, and provider of public goods, China has made great contributions as a responsible member of the United Nations.”<sup>33</sup>

#### **5.4 Health diplomacy:**

Since China sent its first medical team to Algeria in 1963, the total number of medical teams sent to Africa has reached over 24,000 members, and a total of 45 medical teams are currently working at more than 100 sites in 44 African countries.<sup>34</sup> Since 2006, China has built more than 30 hospitals and 30 malaria control centres in Africa; during the Corona crisis, China played a major role in distributing vaccines and protective clothing to a number of African countries as part of what is called vaccine diplomacy.<sup>35</sup>

The coronavirus pandemic has been both a challenge and an opportunity for China to assert its presence on the African continent, by developing vaccine diplomacy or health diplomacy in general, and it is a fact that China is already seeing the benefits of being a global leader in vaccine diplomacy, receiving messages of respect and observing tangible changes in foreign policy in its favor.<sup>36</sup> At the height of this crisis, China shipped more than a million doses per week to the regions of the world that needed vaccines the most, particularly Africa, and successfully delivered 10 million doses of vaccines to developing countries through the World Health Organization's COVAX program. Significant vaccine deliveries were made to Equatorial Guinea, Zimbabwe, and Sierra Leone, and it is expected to meet the needs of 16 other countries on the continent. At a time when support from the United States and Western Europe for the continent during this pandemic has been less significant than expected, this has allowed China to strengthen its image and position itself among African countries.<sup>37</sup>

#### **5.5 Cultural / Popular Diplomacy:**

China is gradually moving towards the development of cultural and popular diplomacy in order to further attract the peoples of the world and strengthen the culture, arts, traditions, and values of ancient China, and the African continent has been a true laboratory to test China's strength and effectiveness in this field.

Throughout Africa, China has opened 67 well-known Confucius Institutes and 10 Confucius Classrooms, 16 Luban Workshops have been completed in 14 African countries, tens of thousands of African students are studying in China, African songs and dances have appeared at the Chinese Spring Festival, Chinese films and television series are very popular in Africa, and the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum, the China-Africa Youth Festival, the Women Forum, the Media

Cooperation Forum and alikes have been established. In August 2023, President Xi Jinping introduced the "China-Africa Cooperation Program for Talent Development" during the China-Africa Leaders Dialogue meeting, giving a new impetus to youth exchanges and talent training between China and Africa. In this regard, the Chinese ambassador to Algeria stated: "The close exchanges between the Chinese and African peoples closely connect the Chinese dream and the African dream, writing a more dynamic chapter of the Sino-African community for a common future." Humanitarian and cultural cooperation is an important pillar of Sino-African relations.<sup>38</sup>

China also places great importance on higher education or lower education, in order to spread its language and culture and improve communication and understanding with Africans. To this end, 40,000 annual scholarships are awarded to African students to study at Chinese universities, especially since many of these students are expected to occupy prestigious economic and political positions in the future and be part of decision-making centers.<sup>39</sup> China has also helped African countries establish Chinese departments or specializations in the same language. In cooperation with Beijing, 16 African countries have integrated the Chinese language into their national education systems, and since 2004, China has sent a total of 5,500 Chinese teachers and volunteers to 48 African countries.<sup>40</sup>

### **5.6 Arms diplomacy:**

In addition to its military base in Djibouti, China is seeking to build other bases in several African countries and to increase its arms exports to the continent, noting that it is currently the second-largest military supplier after Russia for the armies of sub-Saharan African countries. According to recent reports, 70% of the countries on the continent possess Chinese armoured vehicles, and Africa imports 20% of all military vehicles from China.<sup>41</sup>

Faced with the exacerbation of problems such as illegal immigration, transnational organized crime, the escalation of terrorist group activities, and the wave of political instability, resulting from the spread of coup contagion, China has sought to increase its share of arms sales to Sahel countries to demonstrate a shift in its strategy, reinforcing its objectives regarding the formation of new allies and extending its influence, given the decline of French influence in this region. This follows certain changes within the limits of its role by strengthening the military dimension, whether through the presence of private security companies or through

arm sales, with Senegal in particular, the country hosted the 8th Ministerial Conference of the China-Africa Forum CAF in October 2021.<sup>42</sup>

## **6. Conclusion**

Driven by factors of interdependence, necessity, and common interests the Sino-African cooperation has become an indispensable necessity for both parties, particularly due to their historical close ties since the era of African liberation movements supported by China. This has evolved into a relation between the two parties towards horizons that transcend political and ideological contexts, towards broader spaces in the economic, technological, commercial, and even cultural and popular fields, seeking to achieve mutual benefits for each party. This relation is crystalised within the framework that both origins want to be according to the formula of mutual profit win-win. Africa wants it to be an entry point to help it achieve development, overcome its economic difficulties, and weave the threads of distinctive and strong relations with a global power that should be a major pole in any multilateral system. As for China, it possesses even more Chinese ambitions seeking to give this ancient civilization and empire the status of an uncontested superpower.

The global vision that China has established by formulating a number of policies, implementing a number of major projects, and crafting a number of narratives that reflect the ambition and awareness of Chinese power to compete with Western narratives, within the framework of a continuous race to win the battle of concepts and promote its narratives within the theory of knowledge production. The latter is no less important than physical battles in the bid to bring forth Chinese concepts that are increasingly spreading around the world, such as the model of peaceful development, peaceful development, a community of common destiny for humanity, peace diplomacy, the revival of the Belt and Road Initiative idea, among others, and Africa finds itself in this Chinese perspective with a long way to go.

The numerous and vital intersections between China's global perspective, on the one hand, and Africa's desire for cooperation and mutual benefit, on the other, have accelerated the pace of cooperation, overcoming bureaucratic and political obstacles to any cooperation with China. This is reflected in the increase in Chinese investments in the continent, the involvement of the most important African countries in the "Belt and Road" initiative, the unprecedented figures in the level of trade exchanges between the two parties, and the increase in the volume of cultural and popular exchanges as well, with thousands of African students sent to study in

China, the adoption of joint training and qualification programs shows China's growing influence across the continent.

This great momentum in the relations between the two parties also imposes more challenges on them, as it is necessary to work towards achieving a kind of parity or balance in the relations between the two parties, which often lean in Favor of China. African countries are required, within the framework of cooperation structures with China e.g., the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation to formulate policies and orientations that make them a force of proposal and initiative, not just a recipient of China's initiatives and policies. They must also develop a practical mechanism that allows for the implementation on the ground of agreements between the two parties on the various initiatives within the framework of this forum, not to mention the fierce competition observed on the continent between China and other powers that are seeking to dominate the continent and to minimize China's role namely, The United States, The EU, Russia, Turkey.

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