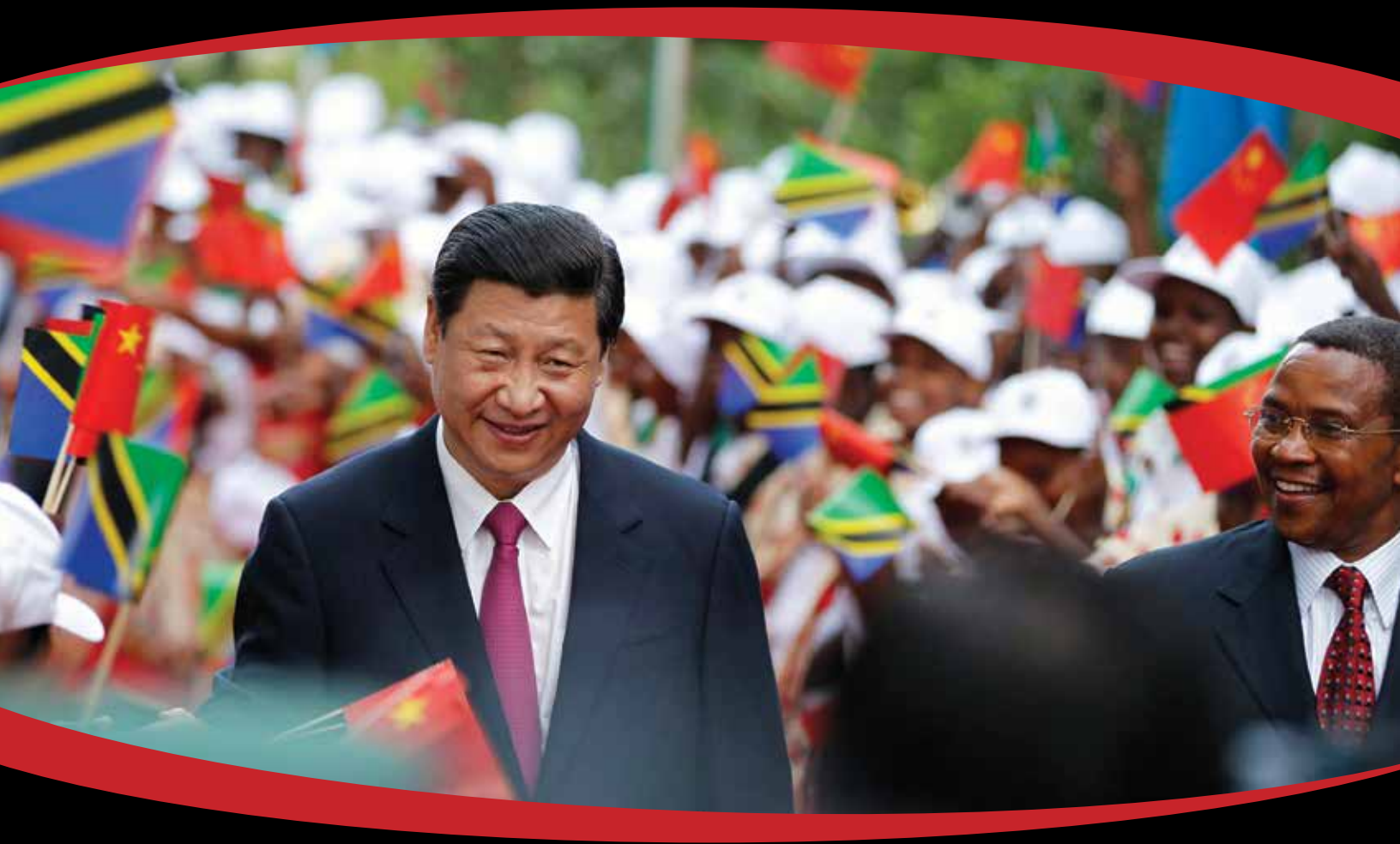


# AFRICA in CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> . . . . .	<a href="#">1</a>
<b>CHINA’S INTERESTS IN AFRICA</b> . . . . .	<a href="#">3</a>
POLITICAL INTERESTS . . . . .	<a href="#">3</a>
ECONOMIC INTERESTS . . . . .	<a href="#">5</a>
SECURITY INTERESTS . . . . .	<a href="#">9</a>
IDEOLOGICAL INTERESTS . . . . .	<a href="#">11</a>
<b>AFRICA IN CHINA’S FOREIGN POLICY</b> . . . . .	<a href="#">13</a>
<b>THE MAKING OF CHINA’S AFRICA POLICY</b> . . . . .	<a href="#">17</a>
CHINA’S FOREIGN POLICYMAKING . . . . .	<a href="#">17</a>
WHERE AFRICA FITS IN POLICYMAKING . . . . .	<a href="#">19</a>
POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH AFRICA . . . . .	<a href="#">20</a>
ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH AFRICA . . . . .	<a href="#">21</a>
CHINA’S SECURITY POLICY IN AFRICA . . . . .	<a href="#">23</a>
<b>CHALLENGES IN CHINA’S AFRICA POLICY</b> . . . . .	<a href="#">26</a>
NARROW ECONOMIC PURSUITS AND THE ABSENCE OF A GRAND STRATEGY . . . . .	<a href="#">26</a>
INTERNAL BUREAUCRATIC CONFLICTS . . . . .	<a href="#">27</a>
PROLIFERATION OF BUSINESS ACTORS . . . . .	<a href="#">28</a>
GOVERNMENT DEFICIENCIES IN MANAGING ECONOMIC TIES . . . . .	<a href="#">29</a>
<b>LOOKING AHEAD</b> . . . . .	<a href="#">30</a>
<b>ENDNOTES</b> . . . . .	<a href="#">31</a>
<b>REFERENCES</b> . . . . .	<a href="#">39</a>

# INTRODUCTION

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During the past decade, China's rapidly growing presence in Africa has increasingly become a topic for debate in the international media and among economists and policy analysts. While China's unique economic approach to Africa meets the African countries' need for funding and infrastructure projects, the model has been widely criticized. In particular, China's natural resource-backed loans raise questions about the continent's future and its capacity for sustainable development.

Studies of China's Africa strategy (or lack thereof) have been overwhelmingly focused on China's economic interests in Africa, the role played by Chinese government and companies, and the economic and social impacts of such activities on the ground. With a few exceptions, there is a strong tendency to assert moral judgments in the assessment: China's activities in Africa are often characterized as "evil" when they are seen as representing China's selfish quest for natural resources and damaging Africa's fragile efforts to improve governance and build a sustainable future. However, they are characterized as "virtuous" when they are seen as contributing to a foundation for long-term economic development through infrastructure projects and revenue creation.

While economic issues are important to the strategic positioning of Africa in China's overall foreign policy, Africa's broader role in China's international

agenda is yet to be thoroughly explored. As China becomes a global economic and political power, a simplistic perception of Africa as China's supplier of raw materials inevitably neglects other key aspects of Africa within China's global strategy. Furthermore, even as China's goals and policies have become more diversified, little effort has been spent examining China's internal bureaucratic processes by which political, economic and security decisions are made regarding its Africa policy. This paper seeks to examine these largely unexamined basic, internal elements of China's Africa policy.

China seeks to satisfy four broad national interests in its relations with the continent. Politically, China seeks Africa's support for China's "One China" policy and for its foreign policy agendas in multilateral forums such as the United Nations. Economically, Africa is seen primarily as a source of natural resources and market opportunities to fuel China's domestic growth. From a security standpoint, the rising presence of Chinese commercial interests in Africa has led to growing security challenges for China, as the safety of Chinese investments and personnel come under threats due to political instability and criminal activities on the ground. Last but not least, China also sees an underlying ideological interest in Africa, as the success of the "China model" in non-democratic African countries offers indirect support for China's own political ideology and offers evidence that Western democratic ideals are not universal.

The popular focus on China's vast economic endeavors in Africa (especially in the extractive industries) seems to suggest that Africa is somehow "critical" for China. In reality, Africa accounts for only a tiny percentage of China's overall foreign economic activities: China's investment in and trade with Africa represents 3 percent and 5 percent of its global investment and trade, respectively. Politically, the continent is of small importance to China's foreign policy agenda, with Africa playing a largely supportive role in China's overall international strategy. Rather than being seen as "key" or a "priority," Africa is seen to be part of the "foundation" on which China's broader strategic ambitions are built.<sup>1</sup> Compared with the "struggle" with big powers or China's strenuous relationship with its neighbors, Sino-African relations have been relatively smooth and free of major disturbances, thanks to a shared sense of historical victimization by Western colonial powers and a common identity/affinity as developing countries. The nature of Sino-African ties is largely transactional and reciprocal.

Given the general low priority of Africa in China's foreign policy agenda, Africa issues rarely reach the highest level of foreign policy decision making in the Chinese bureaucratic apparatus. In practice, policymaking specific to Africa happens mostly at the working level and is divided among several government agencies, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) taking the lead on political affairs and economic affairs, respectively. On security issues such as U.N. peacekeeping operations, naval escort missions and evacuation missions, the

Chinese military plays a significant role in coordination with MFA and MOFCOM. On issues under the mandate of specific government agencies, such as Chinese medical, agricultural or technical assistance to Africa, the policy is coordinated among MFA, MOFCOM and the agency directly involved.

China's Africa strategy is not free of problems or controversies. The most vocal criticism inside the Chinese policy community is that China fundamentally lacks an Africa strategy and commercial interests have overtaken (and even undercut) other national interests. There is a constant tension between the narrow, mercantilist pursuit of economic interests in Africa and that pursuit's impact on the overall health of the Sino-African relationship and China's international image. Bureaucratically, this partly contributes to the abrasive competition between MFA and MOFCOM for the leading role in China's policy toward Africa. This conflict is most evident on the issue of China's foreign aid to Africa.

Meanwhile, the proliferation of China's commercial actors in Africa in recent years has made government supervision and management particularly challenging. Beijing's inability to cope with the rapidly expanding Chinese presence in Africa is exacerbated by the lack of political risk assessment and the absence of a comprehensive commercial strategy for Africa. The resolution of these issues will determine the nature and content of China's future policy toward Africa while exerting critical influence over the future development of the continent.

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<sup>1</sup> According to China's "all-round/all-directional" foreign policy principle, its foreign affairs are categorized as "Big powers are the key; China's periphery is the priority; developing countries are the foundation; multilateral platforms are the stage." (大国是关键，周边是首要，发展中国家是基础，多边是重要舞台.)

# CHINA'S INTERESTS IN AFRICA<sup>ii</sup>

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Contrary to the conventional perception that China is interested only in Africa's natural resources, China's interests in Africa include at least four dimensions of national interest: political, economic, security and ideological. China seeks Africa's support for the Chinese Communist Party's domestic political legitimacy and for China's foreign policy agenda internationally, especially in multilateral forums, given the size of the African voting bloc. Africa's rich natural resources and underdeveloped market potential create abundant business potential for Chinese business players. Enhanced Chinese economic presence on the ground creates a challenge in protecting booming Chinese investment and personnel in Africa. By far, this has been the primary security concern of China in the continent. As China pushes for "democratization of international relations,"<sup>iii</sup> the success of the so-called China Model and relations with non-Western and non-democratic African countries have become an increasingly important goal for China, both for domestic and foreign policy purposes.

## POLITICAL INTERESTS

Since the early days of the People's Republic of China, political interests have been the anchor of and

constant theme in Beijing's relationship with Africa. In its pursuit of friends in the bipolar Cold War international system, Beijing identified Africa's newly independent nations as a key group with which to unite.<sup>1</sup> China saw natural common ground and bore a sense of empathy with Africa as a result of their shared historical experiences: Africa and China were both victims of "colonization by the capitalists and imperialists" and faced the same task of national independence and liberation after World War II.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as a member of the socialist camp, China perceived the neutral position of most African countries between capitalist and socialist blocs as conducive to China's interests because Africa "would be against the invasion and war plans of the imperialists."<sup>3</sup> Under these principles, during China's first official encounter with Africa at the 1955 Bandung Conference, Zhou Enlai actively engaged the leaders of six African countries (Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Libya and Sudan), with special priority given to the courting of Egypt's Nasser given his regional prestige and influence.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1960s, due to the enhanced efforts by the United States and the Soviet Union to engage Africa, as well as China's rising conflict with the Soviets, the competition for Africa was heightened in China's foreign policy agenda. Between 1963 and

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<sup>ii</sup> "China" is a term that could be used to describe the nation, the state, the regime or the people. For the purposes of this paper, "China" means the regime dominated by the Chinese Communist Party. For example, the legitimacy issue discussed here is about the legitimacy of the Chinese communist government.

<sup>iii</sup> Democratization of international relations in China's perspective emphasizes the diversity of countries' political systems, the opposition to power politics and unilateralism.

1964, Zhou Enlai visited 10 African countries and issued the well-known “Eight Principles of Foreign Economic and Technological Assistance.”<sup>iv</sup> These aid principles were designed to compete simultaneously with the “imperialists” (the United States) and the “revisionists” (the Soviet Union) for Africa’s approval and support, as China used its foreign aid to Africa as an instrument to advance China’s political interests.<sup>v</sup>

During the Cultural Revolution, under the influence of radical revolutionary ideology, China provided large amounts of foreign aid to Africa, despite China’s own domestic economic difficulties.<sup>5</sup> This included the famous Tanzania-Zambia Railway: China supplied a zero-interest loan of 988 million yuan (¥), and the railway remains one of the largest foreign aid projects to date that China provides to Africa.<sup>6</sup> Such foreign aid projects contributed to the establishment of diplomatic relations between a group of African countries and China.<sup>7</sup> Nineteen countries established diplomatic ties with China during the Cultural Revolution. These include: Equatorial Guinea (1970), Ethiopia (1970), Nigeria (1971), Cameroon (1971), Sierra Leone (1971), Rwanda (1971), Senegal (1971), Mauritius (1972), Togo (1972), Madagascar (1972), Chad (1972), Guinea-Bissau (1974), Gabon (1974), Niger (1974), Botswana (1975), Mozambique (1975), Comoros (1975), Cape Verde (1976) and Seychelles (1976).<sup>8</sup> By the mid-1980s, Beijing’s political and aid efforts had won it diplomatic ties with 44 African countries.<sup>9</sup> Among the ¥256.29 billion cumulative foreign aid China had given by the end of 2009, 45.7 percent had been to Africa.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, in terms of Africa’s political importance, China’s overarching goal historically has been diplomatic recognition from African nations and the establishment of official ties that strengthen the political legitimacy of the communist regime. Throughout the 1960s, the period when China was “striking with both fists” (in two directions: toward the United States and the Soviet Union), its support for African countries greatly reduced the pressure on China brought about by the international isolation imposed by the two major powers.<sup>11</sup> The emotional affinity of China toward Africa has since then been a constant factor in the relationship.

Second, China relies heavily on diplomatic support and cooperation from African countries on key issues in the international arena and at multilateral forums. Currently, the 54 African states account for more than one-quarter of U.N. member states and votes. China has relied on African countries’ support at the U.N. for its political agenda. In 1972, China learned of Africa’s very real political importance and value when 26 African countries voted for the People’s Republic of China to resume its seat at the United Nations. African votes represented more than one-third of the countries who supported the resolution.<sup>12</sup> In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square event of 1989, Beijing was faced with serious international isolation and Western sanctions. Again, it was six countries in southern Africa (Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Angola, Zambia and Mozambique) that stepped up and saved China from the quagmire by inviting Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen to visit in August 1989.<sup>vi</sup> The first head of state and foreign

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<sup>iv</sup> The principles include: China always bases itself on the principle of equality and mutual benefit in providing aid to other nations; China never attaches any conditions or asks for any privileges; China helps lighten the burden of recipient countries as much as possible; China aims at helping recipient countries to gradually achieve self-reliance and independent development; China strives to develop aid projects that require less investment but yield quicker results; China provides the best-quality equipment and materials of its own manufacture; in providing technical assistance, China shall see to it that the personnel of the recipient country fully master such techniques; the Chinese experts are not allowed to make any special demands or enjoy any special amenities. See “Zhou Enlai Announced Eight Principles of Foreign Aid,” *China Daily*, August 13, 2010. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-08/13/content\\_11149131.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-08/13/content_11149131.htm).

<sup>v</sup> “Our assistance to Asian and African countries is keenly important for our competition with the imperialists and revisionists for the middle strip. This is a critical link. It is the material assistance. It will not work without material (assistance).” “Zhou Enlai’s Report on the Visits to 14 Countries in Asia, Africa and Europe,” [周恩来关于访问亚非欧十四国报告], March 30 and 31, 1964.

<sup>vi</sup> One month later, Qian Qichen also visited Egypt and Tunisia in September 1989. Luo Jianbo, “Why Is Sino-African Relationship Important,” [中非关系为什么重要], *The Study Times*, April 1, 2013 and Qian Qichen, “Ten Episodes on China’s Diplomacy,” [外交十记], January 2006, Ch. 8, <http://www.99csw.com/book/626/20056.htm>.

minister who visited China after the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 were also from Africa. In appreciation for this tremendous political favor, China has reciprocated by making Africa the first destination of Chinese foreign ministers in the new year every year since 1991.<sup>13</sup>

As the 54 African countries account for more than one-quarter of U.N. member states, China has relied on their support at the U.N. for its political agenda.<sup>14</sup> In 2008, before the Beijing Olympics, the issue of Tibet became a controversial sore spot for China at the U.N. Human Rights Council. China relied on African countries to remain silent or issue statements supportive of China's Tibet policy in order to defuse and preempt hostile discussions or actions.<sup>15</sup> Today, on issues ranging from human rights to U.N. reform, from regional security to China's core national interests, China looks to Africa to be on its side.

Another of China's key political aspirations in its relationship with Africa is to end Taiwan's diplomatic presence on the continent. For Beijing, it is a matter of fundamental regime legitimacy that Africa embraces the One China policy and accepts Beijing rather than Taipei as the only lawful representative of China. The tug-of-war between Beijing and Taipei over diplomatic ties with African countries has lasted more than six decades since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Currently, three African countries maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan: Burkina Faso, Swaziland, and São Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>16</sup> The Gambia, which established diplomatic relations with China in 1974, restored relations with Taipei in 1995 but severed such ties in November 2013.<sup>17</sup> It is yet to normalize diplomatic relations with Beijing as of January 2014. Burkina Faso established diplomatic relations with China in 1973 but switched to Taiwan in 1994; and São Tomé and Príncipe established diplomatic ties with Beijing in 1992 and switched to Taiwan in 1997.<sup>18</sup>

Taiwan's "checkbook" diplomacy since the 1990s had, in the past, succeeded in winning recognition

from some African countries, such as São Tomé and Príncipe (1997, a \$30 million loan), Niger (1992, \$50 million loan) and Chad (1997, a \$125 million loan).<sup>19</sup> Today, however, with the substantial financial resources now at Beijing's disposal, China has been winning the diplomatic battle and has gradually edged Taiwan out of Africa. In 1996, 2006 and 2007, Niger, Chad and Malawi, respectively, severed their diplomatic ties with Taiwan to build formal relationships with China.<sup>20</sup> Since 2008, there has been a de facto truce between Beijing and Taipei on gaining diplomatic recognition of foreign countries. This is the result of the improved cross-strait relations after the Kuomintang (KMT) government came into office in 2008. The KMT government has adopted a much more moderate position on the issue of Taiwan independence than that of the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) government of the previous eight years.

## ECONOMIC INTERESTS

There is a debate inside China on whether political interests or economic interests should represent China's top priority in its overall Africa strategy. Chinese officials have consistently emphasized that, for the majority of the past six decades, China's goal in Africa has never been the economic benefits: In 2011, China's then-Premier Wen Jiabao proudly stated that "China had selflessly assisted Africa when itself was the poorest. We did not exploit one single drop of oil or extract one single ton of minerals out of Africa."<sup>21</sup> This seems to suggest that Beijing views Africa first and most keenly through the lens of political ties rather than economic benefits. Since China's political agenda has been a constant theme of Beijing's Africa strategy, some Chinese analysts firmly argue that, with or without the economic benefits, Africa invariably would have been important for China.<sup>22</sup>

However, the counterargument is that, despite Africa's political importance, China has elevated economic considerations to a much higher level in its domestic and foreign agenda since the beginning



of the reform and opening up. This is the immediate result of Beijing's strategy to diversify and consolidate its legitimacy through the delivery of economic development to the general population. According to Chinese analysts, the six decades of Sino-African economic relations could roughly be divided into three stages: From 1949 to 1979, China's economic activities in Africa were primarily motivated by China's political agenda and were focused on providing economic assistance to newly independent African nations so as to build diplomatic relations, to support Africa's "anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism struggle," and to gain their support for the People's Republic of China internationally.<sup>23</sup> From the beginning of reform and opening up in 1979 to the mid-1990s, the focus of China's foreign policy shifted to supporting domestic economic development. This shift directly resulted in the gradual adjustment of China's priorities for its Africa policy from extracting political favors to "mutually beneficial economic cooperation," and from providing assistance to promoting "service contracts, investment, and trade."<sup>24</sup> Beginning in the mid-1990s, the theory of "utilizing both domestic and international markets and resources" began to prevail in China's foreign economic relations.<sup>vii</sup> This change led to a boom in China's international economic cooperation and the initial introduction of the "Going Out" strategy in 1996 by then-President Jiang Zemin after his trip to six African countries.<sup>25</sup> The strategy was then endorsed by the Politburo in 2000 as a national strategy and has remained in effect ever since.<sup>26</sup>

Africa fits perfectly in China's Going Out strategy for several reasons. First of all, Africa's rich energy reserves, minerals and raw materials directly fuel China's quest for natural resources to boost its domestic economic growth. By the early 2000s, China had accumulated a large foreign exchange

reserve, whereas the exhaustion of domestic energy and natural resources was becoming a growing constraint on economic development.<sup>27</sup> Second, China's vigorous cultivation of African countries in the previous decades had resulted in relatively good relationships, making Africa a friendly, desirable partner compared to the challenging states it encountered in other parts of the world. As the government mouthpiece *Global Times* elaborated during President Xi Jinping's visit to Africa in 2013, as the U.S. limited China's geographical options in Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, South Asia and the Middle East, "Africa, which is generally friendly toward China, became the top choice for China's 'Going Out' strategy."<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, China also had its eyes on Africa for its market potential. Chinese manufacturing industries enjoy the unique advantage of producing textiles, electronics and other products at a relatively low price, which fits the market demand of the less-developed African countries.<sup>29</sup> Africa's importance as a market for China was significantly enhanced as a result of the 2008 international financial crisis and its dire effect on China's export industries.<sup>30</sup> When the demand for Chinese goods shrank from stagnant Western economies, China's export industries had to resort to alternative markets to fill the void. Some analysts therefore attribute the international financial crisis to the fact that China surpassed the U.S. as Africa's largest trading partner during the same period. Furthermore, as China seeks to upgrade its industrial economy and move up in the global supply chain, Africa, with its vast and untapped labor resources, is identified as the ideal location for China's labor-intensive industries.<sup>31</sup> By relocating low-skilled jobs and labor-intensive industries to Africa, China seeks more capital-intensive, high-tech industries and jobs to improve its own development model and quality.

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<sup>vii</sup> In 1993, the 3rd Plenary Meeting of the 14th Party's Congress defined China's foreign economic agenda as "fully utilize the two markets- international and domestic and the resources of them." Chen Yangyong, "The Forming of Jiang Zemin's 'Going Out' Strategy and Its Importance", [江泽民 "走出去" 战略的形成及其重要意义], Website of People's Daily, November 10, 2008, <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/40557/138172/138202/8311431.html>.

The implementation of the Going Out strategy substantially increased China's economic ties with Africa. This is most clearly reflected in China's trade with Africa. Compared with 1950, when Sino-African trade totaled only \$121 million, by 2000 Sino-African trade passed the threshold of \$10 billion and has been growing 30 percent annually since then.<sup>32</sup> In 2012, China's trade with Africa reached \$198.5 billion, with 42 percent in exports, 58 percent in imports and a trade deficit of \$27.9 billion.<sup>viii</sup> China surpassed the United States as Africa's largest trading partner in 2009.<sup>33</sup> The gap between Sino-African trade and U.S.-African trade has been growing exponentially since then.<sup>ix</sup> In 2012, U.S. total trade with Africa was only \$99.8 billion, approximately 50 percent of Sino-African trade that same year.<sup>34</sup> In terms of composition, China's imports from Africa primarily focus on energy and natural resources. In 2011, more than 80 percent of China's \$93.2 billion in imports from Africa consisted of crude oil, raw materials and resources.<sup>35</sup> Africa has become the second-largest supplier of crude oil for China (the top African suppliers are Sudan and Angola), ranked behind the Middle East. Chinese exports to Africa are primarily finished products such as machineries, textiles and electronics.<sup>36</sup>

The Going Out strategy also promotes the growth of China's investment in Africa. According to statistics from the Ministry of Commerce, China's investment in Africa grew from \$1.57 billion in 2007 to \$5.49 billion in 2008.<sup>37</sup> The growth was disrupted by the international financial crisis in 2009 (down to \$1.44 billion) but climbed back

to \$2.11 billion in 2010 and then \$3.17 billion in 2011.<sup>38</sup> Despite this growth, Africa constitutes only a small fraction of China's total global investment. In 2011, China's investment in Africa was merely 4.3 percent of its global total, significantly less than China's investment in Asia (60.9 percent), Latin America (16 percent) and Europe (11.1 percent).<sup>39</sup>

It is a common speculation among observers that China's official statistics underreport China's investment volume in Africa. According to a report released by the U.S. Government Accountability Office in early 2013, "Chinese foreign direct investments in sub-Saharan Africa are likely underreported. ... Chinese firms set up subsidiaries, in places such as Hong Kong and the British Virgin Islands that can be used to make investments in sub-Saharan Africa. Such investments are not captured by China's data on foreign direct investment and may be a significant source of underreporting. In addition, many small- and medium-sized enterprises may not register their foreign direct investments, which therefore may not be reflected in China's data."<sup>40</sup> The underreporting may not have been an intentional design of the Chinese government, but it does reflect some fundamental deficiencies in its management of Chinese actors' commercial activities in Africa. (This topic is discussed in the last section of this paper.)

The Chinese government actively promotes investment in Africa through concessional loans, commercial loans, and regular and preferential export buyer's credits. From 2009 to 2012, China provided

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<sup>viii</sup> It's worth noting that, country-wise, China's imports and exports to Africa are rather unbalanced. A large percentage of China's imports from Africa comes from resource-rich countries while better developed African countries (such as Kenya and Egypt) import more Chinese products than the less-developed ones. "Ministry of Commerce: Sino-African Trade Reached New High and Gradually Reducing Trade Deficit," [商务部: 中非贸易额创新高 正逐步改变逆差过多], China.com.cn, April 18, 2013, <http://finance.china.com.cn/news/gnjj/20130418/1397454.shtml>.

<sup>ix</sup> In 2010, U.S.-Africa trade was \$113 billion, 88.9 percent of China's 127 billion trade with Africa. In 2011, U.S. trade with Africa was \$125.8 billion, 75 percent of the 166.3 billion Sino-African trade. See: "Trade in Goods with Africa," U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c0013.html>; "Sino-African Trade Increased 83% from 2009 to 2011," [2011年中非贸易额比2009年增长了83%], Chinese Ministry of Commerce, July 17, 2012, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/china/20120717/102712587144.shtml>; and David H. Shinn, "China's Growing Role in Africa: Implications for U.S. Policy," Testimony before Subcommittee on African Affairs, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., November 1, 2011, [www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/David\\_Shinn\\_Testimony.pdf](http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/David_Shinn_Testimony.pdf).

\$10 billion in financing to Africa in the form of “concessional loans.”<sup>41</sup> During Chinese President Xi Jinping’s first overseas trip to Africa in March 2013, this commitment was renewed and increased to \$20 billion during the three years between 2012 and 2015.<sup>42</sup> Sometimes these investments are mingled with foreign aid to maximize feasibility and flexibility.<sup>43</sup> This has created confusion, both inside and outside China, about how to distinguish between foreign aid and investment. The \$20 billion committed by Xi was perceived to be “foreign aid” to Africa by some Chinese scholars and media, while the Chinese authorities consciously chose not to make a clear distinction.<sup>44</sup>

China’s policy actively contributes to the confusion. Beijing encourages government agencies and commercial entities to “closely combine foreign aid, direct investment, service contracts, labor cooperation, foreign trade, and export,”<sup>45</sup> which further blur the distinction between aid and investment. For example, China’s “tied aid” on infrastructure usually favors Chinese builders and laborers, while Chinese loans are in many cases backed by African natural resources, which would count toward trade or export. Whether defined as aid or investments, Chinese loans to Africa aim to be mutually beneficial: natural resources and service contracts for China and financing and infrastructure for Africa.

Much of Chinese financing is associated with securing Africa’s natural resources. Using what is sometimes characterized as the “Angola Model,” China uses resource-backed financing agreements to reach deals with recipient nations that rely on commodities, such as oil or mineral resources, to secure low-interest loans from China.<sup>46</sup> In these cases, the recipient nations usually suffer from low credit ratings and are not regarded as creditworthy. These nations have great difficulty obtaining funding from the international financial market; China makes financing relatively available and acquirable—with certain conditions. Commodity-backed loans were not created by China. Leading Western banks were making such loans to African countries, including

Angola and Ghana before the Export-Import Bank of China (China Eximbank) and Angola completed the first oil-backed loan in March 2004. (China was once on the receiving end of commodity-backed loans historically—Japan used the same model to provide a large line of credit to China several decades ago when China was not credit worthy.)<sup>47</sup> However, the Chinese built it to scale and applied it using a systematic approach. In Angola in 2006, this approach probably helped Chinese oil companies win the exploitation rights to multiple oil blocks through \$4 billion in loans.<sup>48</sup> In 2010, Sinopec’s acquisition of a 50 percent stake in Block 18 coincided with the disbursement of the first tranche of China Eximbank funding, and in 2005, Sinopec’s acquisition of Block 3/80 coincided with the announcement of a new \$2 billion loan from China Eximbank to the Angolan government.<sup>49</sup> In 2008, the China Railway Group used the same model to secure the mining rights to the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s (DRC) copper and cobalt mines under the slogan “[Infrastructure] projects for resources.”<sup>50</sup> According to Debra Brautigam, a top expert on China-Africa relations, between 2004 and 2011, China reached similar unprecedented deals with at least seven resource-rich African countries, with a total transaction volume of nearly \$14 billion.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to securing Africa’s natural resources, China’s capital flows into Africa also create business opportunities for Chinese service contractors, such as construction companies. In the case of Chinese assistance to Africa for infrastructure development, this is essentially “tied aid.” According to Chinese analysts, Africa is China’s second-largest supplier of service contracts, and “when we provide Africa assistance of ¥1 billion, we will get service contracts worth \$1 billion from Africa.”<sup>52</sup> In exchange for most Chinese financial aid to Africa, Beijing requires that infrastructure construction and other contracts favor Chinese service providers: Seventy percent of them go to “approved,” mostly state-owned, Chinese companies, and the rest are open to local firms, many of which are also joint ventures with Chinese groups.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, China’s financing to Africa

creates businesses for Chinese companies and employment opportunities for Chinese laborers, a critical goal of Beijing's Going Out strategy.

## SECURITY INTERESTS

Given the vast geographical distance, Africa poses hardly any direct physical threat to China's immediate national security or the security of its periphery. However, as China's economic activities and personnel presence expand rapidly on the continent, the physical security of Chinese investments and nationals has become the top challenge for Beijing.<sup>54</sup> According to incomplete data, there are at least 1 million Chinese living in Africa as of October 2012.<sup>55</sup> These people are subject to numerous security threats at the local level as well as the state level as a result of the volatile political situations in Africa.

There are several types of security threats for Chinese nationals on the ground. They include:

- Criminal attacks such as robbery and kidnapping. This is the most common and most damaging type of security threat for Chinese in Africa.<sup>56</sup> Some prominent examples include:
  - January 2007, nine Chinese workers were kidnapped in southern Nigeria.<sup>57</sup>
  - June 2007, Shandong Qingrun China Eximbank's branch was robbed in Togo.<sup>58</sup>
  - August 2007, four Chinese were robbed in Nigeria, including one killed.<sup>59</sup>
  - October 2008, nine China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) workers were kidnapped in Sudan, five died.<sup>60</sup>
  - December 2009, a Chinese national was robbed and shot to death in South Africa.<sup>61</sup>
  - October 2012, a Chinese cook with China's Geo-Engineering Construction Company was killed in Nigeria's north-eastern Borno State.<sup>62</sup>
- Politically motivated attacks on the Chinese as a retaliation for China's cooperation with local governments and/or exploitation of local resources:
  - January 2007, two Chinese workers were kidnapped by the anti-government "Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta" in southern Nigeria as a threat against Chinese companies' exploitation of crude oil in the Niger Delta.<sup>63</sup>
  - April 2007, the exploration site of Zhong Yuan Oil Field was attacked by the anti-government Ogaden National Liberation Front in Ethiopia, with nine Chinese workers killed. The attack was against "any investment in Ogaden that benefits the Ethiopian government."<sup>64</sup>
  - July 2007, the representative of China National Nuclear Corporation's uranium project in Niger was kidnapped by Niger Movements for Justice in protest of the "negligence of the region by the Niger government, lack of local control over the mineral resources, and labor disputes."<sup>65</sup>
  - January 2012, SinoHydro's construction site was attacked by anti-government Sudan People's Liberal Movement; 29 workers were kidnapped.<sup>66</sup>
- Attacks on Chinese projects due to labor disputes and illegal activities by Chinese companies:
  - October 2010, unrest at Collum Coal Mine in Zambia led to 11 local mining workers being shot and wounded by Chinese managers and three Chinese being injured.<sup>67</sup>
  - August 2012, a Chinese mine manager was killed following a pay dispute at the Collum Coal Mine in Zambia.<sup>68</sup>
  - October 2012, more than 100 Chinese illegal miners were detained in Ghana

with one Chinese national killed during the government's crackdown on illegal mining.<sup>69</sup>

- June 2013, the Ghanaian government swept local gold mines, detaining 169 illegal Chinese miners.<sup>70</sup>
- Chinese vessels attacked by Somali pirates:
  - November 2008, the Chinese fishing vessel *Tianyu No. 8* was seized by Somali pirates while fishing off the coast of Kenya.<sup>71</sup> The ship was released on February 8, 2009, with 24 crew members safely on board.
  - December 2008, the Chinese fishing boat *Zhenhua 4* was hijacked on the way back to Shanghai. The 30 crew members fought for four hours after nine pirates armed with rocket launchers and heavy machine guns boarded the ship. A Malaysian warship and Malaysian military helicopter arrived and fired on the pirates, who fled the scene. No crew members were injured.<sup>72</sup>
  - October 2009, a Chinese bulk carrier owned by COSCO Qingdao was captured 700 miles east of the Somali coastline in the Indian Ocean.<sup>73</sup>
  - June 2010, the Singapore-flagged Chinese-chartered chemical tanker *MV Golden Blessing* was hijacked in the Gulf of Aden, and 19 Chinese crew members were taken hostage. The ship reportedly was released in November 2010 on payment of \$2.8 million.<sup>74</sup>
  - November 2010, the Chinese vessel *Yuan Xiang* was captured in the Arabian Sea and was released 207 days later.<sup>75</sup>
  - May 2011, the Chinese-owned bulk carrier *MV Full City* was attacked by Somali pirates with 24 crew members on board. The attack was successfully thwarted by Indian naval warships and aircraft.<sup>76</sup>

At the state level, domestic political turmoil and regime changes inside African countries have created the most serious threat to the safety of Chinese investments and nationals. The protection of Chinese nationals in Africa is linked to the Chinese government's legitimacy in that a failure to provide such protection would undercut the Chinese Communist Party's internal and international prestige. The Chinese government and companies learned this lesson the hard way during the military coup of Liberia in 2003, when Chinese embassies had to assist 36 overseas Chinese to evacuate.<sup>77</sup> Although no casualties occurred, Chinese media and analysts emphasized "major financial losses" due to the political turmoil.<sup>78</sup> More recently, during the civil war in Libya in 2011, China was forced, in part by domestic public opinion, to mobilize significant military and diplomatic resources to evacuate more than 30,000 Chinese nationals based in Libya.<sup>79</sup> The Chinese People's Liberation Army dispatched four military aircraft and one navy vessel for the mission.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, the regime change resulted in total losses as high as \$20 billion for Chinese companies on the ground, due to uncompleted contracts originally made with the Gadhafi government.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, China's security interests in Africa are mostly defensive and aimed at protecting its existing economic interests and citizens. The failure to protect the former jeopardizes China's economic benefits from Africa, which China needs to fuel domestic growth. The inability to protect the latter undercuts the government's prestige (even legitimacy) at home. Both entail significant consequences for Beijing. Chinese investments and nationals are particularly vulnerable in less-developed, politically unstable areas. So far, Beijing has primarily relied on its embassies to provide consular protection to Chinese nationals and investments. However, the Chinese consular service is severely understaffed: On average, each Chinese consular officer serves 130,000 overseas Chinese nationals.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, since the consular sections of Chinese embassies in Africa also need to rely on local

governments to provide protection, the inefficiency and incompetence of local African governments usually make consular protection more symbolic than effective or substantial.<sup>83</sup>

Beyond consular protection, the military capacity of Chinese government to provide protection to overseas Chinese is limited for several reasons. China strictly follows the principle of no overseas deployment of Chinese troops<sup>84</sup> and is yet to adopt the practice of hiring private Western security companies to protect local assets.<sup>85</sup> Local private security companies are seen as unreliable. There are major political and legal barriers to hiring Chinese private security companies, such as their employment status in foreign countries and their authority to carry firearms.<sup>86</sup> The hiring of Chinese private security firms also poses a fundamental challenge to China's principle of "non-interference of other countries' internal affairs," since any security activities they might undertake would collide with the law enforcement and sovereignty of the host country.

Since 2005, security threats to Chinese investments and nationals in Libya and other countries have served as a wake-up call to Beijing that internal instability in African nations is also intrinsically China's problem.<sup>87</sup> In the past, China has relied primarily on multilateral institutions, especially the UN, for security and missions inside Africa, including peacekeeping missions.<sup>88</sup> China also began to dispatch PLA naval escort missions to the Gulf of Aden before the end of 2008 under authorization by UN Security Council Resolutions 1816, 1838, 1846, and 1851 (resolutions about effectively rallying international efforts to battle Somali piracy).<sup>89</sup> (Because of the U.N. mandate, this does not conflict with China's "no troop abroad" principle.) Since then, China has dispatched 16 fleets to escort 5,300 Chinese and foreign ships, and the missions remain active.<sup>90</sup>

Since China is unable to provide security protection to Chinese assets and nationals due to military, foreign policy and legal constraints, China

has demonstrated an increasing interest in bilateral solutions, with Beijing taking a series of measures to deepen cooperation with the African Union (AU) and African countries on peace and security issues. During the 5th Ministerial Meeting of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing in July 2012, then-President Hu Jintao launched the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security. Aside from supporting the AU's own peacekeeping operations inside Africa, China made the commitment to provide financial support to the AU standing army and to train security officials and peacekeepers.<sup>91</sup> During Xi Jinping's first overseas trip to Africa, the new Chinese leader also promised to "constructively participate in Africa's peace and security affairs."<sup>92</sup> These moves suggest two main policy conclusions by China: 1) China sees the AU as a promising stabilizing force in Africa to protect Chinese security interests; and 2) China is willing to assist the AU in developing such capacities to defuse and fight security threats in Africa.

## IDEOLOGICAL INTERESTS

Historically, during the Cold War and before China's reform and opening up, ideology had been a main factor determining China's policy towards African countries.<sup>93</sup> During this period, the cornerstone philosophy of China's policy towards Africa was that China should be the front-runner in the developing world against colonialism, imperialism and revisionism.<sup>94</sup> The emphasis on ideology originated from the hostile external environment that forced China to seek friendly diplomatic space to ensure its survival.<sup>95</sup> This ideology-driven policy resulted in massive aid to Africa despite China's own economic difficulties and was gradually abandoned after 1979. Since then, China no longer uses ideology (communism, socialism or capitalism) to determine its relationship to political parties and countries in Africa.<sup>96</sup> Instead, it has developed broad relations with all African countries that embrace the One China policy. As explained in the previous section, the non-discriminative

nature of China's relationship with all African countries is primarily driven by economic interests and practical political considerations, such as garnering international supporters, legitimacy and support for the Chinese government.

However, as the largest and perhaps the most successful authoritarian regime in the world, it is inevitable that Beijing's foreign policy strives to serve domestic political purposes. As many China analysts would argue, given the country's lack of democratic elections, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) most fundamental need is to establish and preserve legitimacy.<sup>97</sup> Domestically, the CCP proves its legitimacy by "making China independent" with the founding of the new China, and by "making Chinese people rich" with reform and opening up.<sup>98</sup> Calls for democracy are muffled by and subject to the higher need for "stability" to foster further economic development.<sup>x</sup> Internationally, foreign governments' recognition of the CCP's successful political and economic policies is seen as a powerful reinforcement of CCP's legitimacy at home.

This is where the China Model, or Beijing Consensus, plays an important role. China uses its own development model, which combines political authoritarianism and economic capitalism, to prove to some African countries that economic development and political stability can triumph over the need for a sound democratic system.<sup>99</sup> In many countries, "China's economic progress is cited by

statists, protectionists, and thugs alike to 'prove' that keeping the state's grip on companies, trade, and political freedoms need not stop a country growing by 8%-plus a year."<sup>100</sup> From Beijing's perspective, the popularity of the China Model is the best way to validate the viability of the Chinese system.<sup>xi</sup> A senior Chinese analyst at the People's University, Tao Wenzhao, wrote publicly that the "China Model has substantial influence in Africa, which is an indispensable soft power for China to become a great power in the world."<sup>101</sup> Incidentally, the same model also continues to support the legitimacy of the CCP at home.

In this sense, China's ideological interest in Africa did not disappear as a result of the nation's shifting its priorities to economic development. Instead, it has taken a different, subtler form, one that supports Beijing's legitimacy through spreading and popularizing China's development model. The more countries identify with and adopt Beijing's approach, the less isolated China feels. Beijing would like to see non-Western, non-democratic governments grow and prosper in Africa, simply because they help validate China's political system and mitigate its international isolation by showing that Western democracy is not a universal value, and that the Western democratic system doesn't have to apply in every country. Therefore, any success of authoritarian governments in Africa, such as Sudan, Zimbabwe and the DRC are in and of themselves seen as constituting support for the legitimacy of the CCP.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>x</sup> As Deng Xiaoping put it, "stability overrules everything." Chen Junhong, "Comrade Deng Xiaoping Raised: The Predominant Issue of China is the Need for Stability", [邓小平同志提出，中国的问题，压倒一切的是需要稳定], Website of People's Daily, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2012/1026/c350767-19398927.html>.

<sup>xi</sup> A senior Chinese analyst at the People's University, Tao Wenzhao, wrote publicly that the "China Model has substantial influence in Africa, which is an indispensable soft power for China to become a great power in the world." See Tao Wenzhao, "The Africa Effect of China Model," [中国模式的非洲效应], Guo Ji Wen Ti Yan Jiu, June 21, 2011, <http://www.cssn.cn/news/374420.htm>.

# AFRICA IN CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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During the Hu Jintao administration (2003–2012), China began to adopt the principle of an “all-round/all-directional” foreign policy that theoretically does not differentiate among geographical regions or countries.<sup>103</sup> According to senior Chinese analysts, “Chinese foreign policy is not about relationship with a particular region/country. China emphasizes balanced diplomacy and seeks to develop ties with all important powers in the world.”<sup>104</sup> Under this principle, China has designed a specific strategic mapping for all regions/countries in the world: “Big powers are the key; China’s periphery is the priority; developing countries are the foundation; multilateral platforms are the stage.” (大国是关键，周边是首要，发展中国家是基础，多边是重要舞台。)<sup>105</sup>

Although the wording seems to suggest that all regions are important, not all countries are created equal. In reality, China does differentiate among them, and China’s neighbors and the big powers are treated as more critical areas for China’s foreign policy.<sup>106</sup> According to Luo Zhaohui, the director of the Department of Asian Affairs at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “for China to have a global aspiration, it needs **to first prioritize** the periphery ... because China has closest relations with its neighbors as well as most concentrated national interests and most direct impact in its periphery [emphasis original].”<sup>107</sup> Meanwhile, big power rela-

tions, such as China’s relationship with the United States, are naturally important because “they have most impact over China’s national interests.”<sup>108</sup> In comparison, the developing country category, to which African nations belong, constitutes the “foundation” of China’s foreign policy, a means rather than an end to China’s relationship with more important parts of the world. As Lu Shaye, the director of the Africa Department at the MFA elaborated before Chinese President Xi Jinping’s trip to Africa, “the strengthening of solidarity and cooperation with broad developing countries including African countries reflects a consistent principle of China’s foreign policy. This is the foundation of China’s foreign policy.”<sup>109</sup> That is to say, since Africa is not in China’s periphery and does not constitute a big power, its key importance lies in forming the basis for Beijing’s relationship with the world. For China’s foreign strategy, Africa is a means rather than an end.

One of the implied assumptions of Africa being part of the foundation is that China already has a relatively stable and positive relationship with the continent; therefore, it requires less attention and effort on China’s part.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, compared to China’s periphery (infested with territorial disputes among China’s neighbors and infused with strategic anxiety), and compared to the great powers (where China sees intrinsic structural conflicts—mostly with the U.S.), Africa is a region with



which China has had much smoother relations and more policy successes.<sup>xii</sup> Africa does not present direct threats or challenges to China's national security. Due to the geographical distance, there is no territorial dispute between China and Africa. African countries (other than the three who retain diplomatic relations with Taiwan) generally do not support the efforts of Taiwan, Tibet or Xinjiang in their pursuit of independence from China. Africa has little, if any, ideological interest in promoting democracy in China. Although there is occasional discord, conflicts are much less contentious or intense than China's encounters with its neighbors and other great powers.<sup>xiii</sup> Even Africa's criticisms of China are often seen as the results of "instigation" by "hostile Western countries," rather than an "indigenous" reflection of how Africa really sees China.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, as Chinese analysts put it, "good relationships demand less attention."<sup>112</sup> Since Africa is a less troubling region for Chinese foreign policy, and Beijing has more key areas to be concerned about, less attention and fewer resources are devoted to Africa. Although Africa's support for China's domestic and international political agendas is important for China, such support is believed to be relatively easy to secure.<sup>113</sup>

Another reason Africa is a low priority in China's foreign policy lies in the reality that China's economic interests in the continent are relatively small despite their impressive growth. China's top trading partners are either big powers or China's neighbors, whereas Africa is a minor partner. As of 2012, China's largest trading partners were the European Union, the United States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Hong Kong and Japan, with African countries far behind.<sup>114</sup>

Although Sino-African trade reached \$198.4 billion in 2012,<sup>115</sup> it constitutes only 5 percent of China's global trade (\$3.867 trillion).<sup>116</sup> In terms of exports and imports, Africa makes up 4.2 percent and 6.2 percent, respectively, of China's global exports and imports.<sup>117</sup> In 2012, trade volume between China and its largest African trading partner, South Africa, was \$20.2 billion,<sup>118</sup> less than 4 percent of trade with the European Union (\$546 billion), and 4.1 percent of trade with the United States (\$484.7 billion).<sup>119</sup> In 2012, China spent \$3 billion in total foreign direct investment (FDI) to Africa,<sup>120</sup> less than 4 percent of China's total FDI (\$77.2 billion) globally.<sup>121</sup>

Hence, although the total volume of Sino-African trade and China's investment in Africa has been growing rapidly, its share in the whole pie remains small. Compared to other regions and nations, the significance of Sino-African economic relations still lags far behind. On this phenomenon one Chinese analyst commented:

In absolute terms, China's investment and trade with Africa has grown significantly compared with the past. However, China's total global investment and trade have also grown exponentially since reform and opening up. The whole pie is bigger, so is the Africa piece. But this does not mean that Africa is occupying a larger share of the pie. In relative terms, compared with China's investment and trade with other areas, Africa still falls far behind.<sup>122</sup>

The two main schools of thought inside the Chinese foreign policy community differ on whether

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<sup>xii</sup> For example, China identifies the U.S. as the largest potential threat to China's national security, sees the big powers' support of Taiwan and Tibetan and Uighur overseas groups as a direct challenge to the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China. China also regards the territorial disputes with its neighbors, such as with Southeast Asian claimants over the South China Sea, with Japan and South Korea in the East China Sea, and with India over the border demarcation, as key challenges in China's foreign policy. The existence and heightened nature of these threats/challenges dictate that China, willingly or not, will have to put its energy into dealing with these problems.

<sup>xiii</sup> China's core national interests categorically include: China's basis system and national security; sovereignty and territorial integrity; and sustainable and stable economic and social development. See "Why Did China Pronounce Its Core Interests?" [中国为什么要宣誓核心利益?], *Global Times*, July 27, 2010, <http://world.people.com.cn/GB/12261419.html>. On how China perceives the U.S. and its neighbors to be challenging China's core national interests, see Ge Xiaoguang, "U.S. Aligns with ASEAN to Stir Up the South China Sea and Challenge China's 'Core Interests'," [美国联手东盟搅乱南海 挑战中国核心利益], *Shi Dai Zhou Bao*, July 29, 2010, <http://finance.qq.com/a/20100729/004597.htm>.

China should prioritize big power relations (the United States) or China's periphery (Asia). But no one feels China needs to prioritize Africa. A prominent Africa scholar based in Beijing summarizes Africa's position in China's foreign policy as the following: "Africa does not rank the lowest in China's foreign policy, but probably is the second-lowest, as it is slightly higher than Latin America."<sup>123</sup> A comparison is also made between Africa's ranking in U.S. foreign policy and in Beijing's playbook. The conclusion is that Africa, without any question, ranks lowest on Washington's agenda and second-lowest for Beijing.

Some Chinese analysts have criticized the low priority of Africa in Beijing's global strategy. They call for a new understanding of the dynamics among the "key" (great powers), the "priority" (the periphery), and the "foundation" (developing countries) in China's foreign policy, and demand that China view Africa from a more strategic perspective and give it more attention.<sup>124</sup> Liu Hongwu, the dean of School of Africa Studies at Zhejiang Normal University, argued that developing countries (Africa) are the strategic support, foundation and prerequisite for China's better relationship with great powers and its neighbors. Thus, Africa is a "long-term and strategic" issue, since China will always rely on Africa for support, while the "key and priority" of China's foreign policy are "temporary" and "ephemeral."<sup>xiv</sup>

Considering the low priority of Africa in China's overall foreign strategic mapping, a disproportionate level of international attention, publicity and scrutiny is paid to China's Africa engagement.

Several factors contribute to this imbalance. First of all, Chinese leaders have deliberately emphasized Africa in their foreign visit agendas as a result of China's "prestige diplomacy."<sup>125</sup> Former President Hu Jintao and former Premier Wen Jiabao made several multi-country trips to Africa during their administration.<sup>126</sup> Africa (South Africa, Tanzania and the Republic of the Congo) was the highlight of President Xi Jinping's first overseas visit since his inauguration in March 2013.<sup>127</sup> Prestige diplomacy in Africa has served to facilitate China's entry into the erstwhile "forgotten continent,"<sup>128</sup> fostering political ties and expanding economic cooperation. For new President Xi Jinping, the consolidation of friendship with Africa also reinforced China's developing-country identity and solidarity with the developing world in China's pursuit of the "democratization of the international relations" and a new international order.<sup>129</sup>

Secondly, although Africa is not China's priority, and economic ties to the continent constitute only a small percentage of China's overall foreign economic activities, China's importance for Africa is quite the opposite. China became Africa's largest trading partner in 2009, and African governments attach high importance to Chinese foreign investment. In addition, Africans find the magnitude of Chinese loans and investment overwhelming and daunting: When China Development Bank (CDB) agreed to provide \$3 billion in loans to Ghana in 2012,<sup>130</sup> local Ghanaian analysts observed that the amount was almost 10 percent of Ghana's annual GDP, saying, "We don't know who CDB is, but just that we owe them a lot of money."<sup>131</sup> In the case of China's \$9 billion (later reduced to \$6 billion)

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<sup>xiv</sup> According to Liu Hongwu, "In the past, China's foreign policy is about four points: great powers are the key, the periphery is the priority, the developing countries are the foundation and the multilateralism is the important platform. However, their connotations are changing. China needs to reconsider the relationship among the key, the priority and the foundation of China's foreign policy and the 'foundation' needs to be conferred new meanings. In face, the key and priority might be important, but they are often time just temporary and require immediate attention, while the foundation is long-term and strategic. Chinese foreign policy needs to deal with current problems, but even more importantly, it needs to plan for the future and have long-term strategic aspirations different from those of the U.S. and the West. Only with strategic support and firm foundations will China's development and foreign policy enjoy the anchor, support and room for maneuver for China to have the capacity to properly handle its relationship with great powers and neighbors. Therefore, the issues of Africa and Sino-African relationship should not be just about the next 2-3 years, but the future 2-3 decades. They need to be considered from the global strategic perspective." See Liu Hongwu, "Re-understanding China's Foreign Policy Mapping," [重新理解中国外交格局], *DongFang Daily*, April 1, 2013, [http://epaper.dfdaily.com/dfzb/html/2013-04/01/content\\_753361.htm](http://epaper.dfdaily.com/dfzb/html/2013-04/01/content_753361.htm).

“deal of the century” with the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2008, the loan itself was almost of the size of the country’s entire GDP that year.<sup>xv</sup> While Chinese officials and bankers may not regard their projects as overbearing, the magnitude of these projects and their opaque nature are prone to attracting attention and raising eyebrows.<sup>132</sup>

That opaque nature is the last, but not least, reason China’s economic activities in Africa invite international curiosity and scrutiny. Chinese investments in less-developed, authoritarian or semi-authoritarian countries have been chastised. Common criticisms include: China’s economic engagements are only about natural resources; they prop up authoritarian regimes; they undermine efforts to strengthen democracy and human rights, and contribute to corruption and environmental and social degradation, etc.<sup>133</sup> Chinese and foreign analysts have

crafted some powerful rebuttals, focusing on two arguments: 1) Despite the downside, China has helped to deliver development through infrastructure projects and revenue creation; and 2) Western countries/companies have demonstrated similar behavior patterns (although it does not necessarily justify the same behaviors by China). Merited or not, these criticisms have created more interest and noise about China’s new economic activities in Africa and their potentially negative impacts. In interviews, most Chinese officials and analysts working on Africa policy expressed dissatisfaction with the international media’s “unfair scrutiny and biased criticisms” of Chinese projects in Africa. However, they do acknowledge that, given China’s un-democratic political system and the reputation of some Chinese companies and projects, it is inevitable that China will be continuously subject to such “unfair” treatment in the foreseeable future.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>xv</sup> The DRC’s 2008 GDP was \$11.2 billion. See “Country Fact Sheet,” Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fs/drc.pdf>.

# THE MAKING OF CHINA'S AFRICA POLICY

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Due to the low priority of Africa in China's overall foreign relations, specific policy-making in regard to Africa is dispersed within the policy apparatus at the working level rather than centralized or coordinated at the top. In the case of Africa, the top decision makers decide on the general strategic guidelines, such as the Going Out strategy, and leave it to the working-level agencies to craft specific policies for implementation.<sup>135</sup> Because economic interests and political interests have been the two primary objectives of China in Africa, MOFCOM and the MFA have been the two key government agencies designing and implementing China's Africa policy. Other agencies are consulted and involved as needed, and each has authority on specific issues in their domain.

## CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICYMAKING

In China, the supreme decision making authority on foreign policy is monopolized by and exercised through the collective leadership of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC).<sup>136</sup> The paramount leader, the Politburo Standing Committee's designated person for foreign policy affairs, exercises

great authority among the group of more or less domestic generalists.<sup>xvi</sup> He is assisted and advised by the director of the Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) of the Central Committee of the CCP, usually a State Councilor and the highest official of the Chinese Foreign Service, who is often regarded as the Chinese version of the U.S. national security advisor.<sup>137</sup> On the working level, the MFA plays the primary role in resolving procedural, daily and routine issues between China and foreign countries. Other government agencies involved in specific fields work in the same fashion.

Within the bureaucratic system, China's foreign policymaking happens at several different levels, depending on the importance of the issue at hand: The more important the issue is, the higher the decision making authority will be.<sup>xvii</sup> According to a senior Chinese official, "most of the procedural issues are handled within the ministries. For those issues that reach State Councilor level, he and the FAO have a large authority to make decisions. Only those issues that the State Councilor could not decide with certainty will be brought to the paramount leader. And only those that the paramount leader could not decide alone will be pushed to

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<sup>xvi</sup> None of the nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee under the Hu Jintao administration and the seven members under the Xi Jinping administration came from a foreign policy background. They all rose to their current status from a domestic political track.

<sup>xvii</sup> When a foreign policy issue arises that requires attention at the highest level, the process begins with the FAO, which summons research reports and analyses from relevant government agencies and key policy think tanks. The FAO will summarize the key findings for the State Councilor to present to the paramount leader. It is also the FAO's responsibility to determine whether to call an NSLSG meeting in order to incorporate input and policy preferences from all agencies involved in national security affairs.

PBSC.<sup>138</sup> Beyond that framework, larger matters, such as the introduction of new key policies, are discussed and decided by the Politburo. Significant issues, such as changes to existing guidelines and principles, will be decided (or at least voted on) at the Central Committee.<sup>xviii</sup>

There are various coordination mechanisms inside the system. On the interagency level, the professional institution set up by the Central Committee to serve the top leadership, the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (FALSG), is comprised of key government and party agency players in the foreign policy process.<sup>xix</sup> When a foreign policy issue arises and the State Councilor decides it is necessary to convene an FALSG meeting, the FAO will invite members relevant to the issue at hand.<sup>139</sup> At these meetings, in accordance with the principles of democratic centralism and consensus building, members of FALSG present information and analyses from their agencies and propose policy recommendations.<sup>140</sup> The diverse voices are integrated and reconciled, or the varying opinions will be presented to the State Councilor or the higher authority for arbitration. On working-level issues where consensus already exists, agencies exchange opinions and coordinate among themselves outside the FALSG.<sup>141</sup> For example, the Division of Economic Diplomacy and Cooperation at the

Department of Policy Planning at MFA coordinates on economic foreign policy issues, usually with the Department of Foreign Aid and the Department of Foreign Economic Cooperation in the Ministry of Commerce.<sup>xx</sup>

Within the foreign policymaking system, line agencies are the primary source of daily information on foreign policy affairs.<sup>142</sup> Each line agency involved, such as the MFA, the Ministry of Commerce and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), provides regular reports that reflect work and concerns specific to the agency's focus. Other line agencies also bear responsibility for information collection and analysis used in the national security decision making process, especially in their respective fields. The Ministry of Commerce focuses primarily on economic and trade issues, while the International Department specializes on domestic partisan politics of foreign countries, including communist countries such as North Korea and Cuba. Externally, the decision making system also relies on governmental and semi-governmental think tanks for information and policy analysis. These think tanks are affiliated with government agencies and act as additional research arms.<sup>xxi</sup> Generally speaking, think tanks produce two types of internal reports. Regular reports represent a "bottom-up" information flow: Think tank researchers regularly follow one

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<sup>xviii</sup> In terms of the decision making authority among the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), the Politburo (PB), and the Central Committee of the CCP, the more significant an issue is, the broader participation and approval must be. Within the CCP, bureaucratic rank and decision making authority increases from the Central Committee to the PB, then to the PBSC. Every five years, a Party Congress elects the Central Committee, supposedly the decision making body within the CCP with the broadest representation. Its 204 members (and 167 alternate members) convene only once a year, at the annual plenary meeting of the Party, making the Central Committee unsuitable for daily management of national security affairs. The PB, made up of 25 representatives elected by the Central Committee, meets routinely only once a month, as four members are not Beijing-based, and other members constantly engage in domestic and international travel. Consequently, due to seniority and operational necessity, the national security decision making authority is ultimately concentrated in the PBSC, which is bureaucratically more senior than the PB, and all of whose nine members are based in Beijing. From author's interviews with Chinese analysts, October and November 2011. Also, see Yun Sun, "China's National Security Decision-Making: Processes and Challenges," Working Paper, Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, The Brookings Institution, May 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/05/chinese-national-security-decision-making-sun>.

<sup>xix</sup> The FALSG includes: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Commerce, Office of Taiwan Affairs, Office of Hong Kong and Macao Affairs, Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs, Information Office, Department of Propaganda, International Department, Ministry of Defense and General Staff Department.

<sup>xx</sup> Some issues coordinated by this division include foreign aid, foreign investment and RMB exchange rate issues, etc. See Zhou Qi, "Organization, Structure and Image in the Making of Chinese Foreign Policy since the early 1990s," PhD Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, March 2008, p. 188.

<sup>xxi</sup> For example, China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) is under the leadership of the MSS, and "prepare[s] short- and longer-term assessment for policymakers." The China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) is a research arm of MOFA; its experts write reports for and provide briefings to MOFA officials. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), directly affiliated with the State Council, conducts extensive international research. The Central Party School has direct ties to the Party apparatus, and its reports are channeled directly to the General Office of the Central Committee.

geographical or functional area and keep decision makers updated on the latest developments. Commissioned reports, on the other hand, represent a “top-down” approach. When the FAO or General Affairs Office decides that a particular issue needs more information and analysis than has been provided by the line agencies, they summon research think tanks to submit studies.

### WHERE AFRICA FITS IN CHINA’S FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONS

The overview of China’s foreign policy decision making system reveals a basic pattern: Issues are decided at different levels depending on their importance. This pattern sheds light on where people should look for Africa in the bureaucratic system. As previously discussed, Africa is a low-priority issue for China’s foreign policy in general and belongs to the category of “developing countries” (the “foundation”). Its importance is mostly as a means to China’s political and economic ends. Africa in general is excluded from the “strategically important” category and does not reach the highest level of decision making. Most Africa policies are procedural decisions made under existing guidelines. The reality is that China’s Africa policy is mostly made, coordinated and managed at the working level (government ministries).

In China’s foreign policy, decisions on “strategically important” issues, such as the relationship with the United States or tension with China’s neighbors, almost without exception reach the level of the FAO, and sometimes require decision making from the paramount leader, the PBSC or even the PB. After the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy

in Belgrade in 1999, the paramount leader organized two expanded Politburo meetings to discuss and decide on China’s proper response. In 2006, when Japanese Prime Minister Abe proposed a visit to China to then-Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo in Tokyo, Dai had to return to Beijing to report to PBSC for a decision. In 2013, a Diaoyu Island Crisis Management Small Group was established in response to the intensified tension between China and Japan after Tokyo’s attempt to “nationalize” the disputed territory. The Small Group is led by the paramount leader and encompasses all working-level agencies such as the PLA, the MFA and the Ministry of State Security.

In comparison, in the past several years, only a few Africa issues have been discussed and decided on the highest level. One example was in 2008, when the crisis in Darfur led to broad international criticism of China’s controversial relationship with Khartoum before the 2008 Beijing Olympics.<sup>143</sup> The FALSG organized targeted special discussions on how China should respond to the image crisis, which eventually led to the creation of the position of Special Representative for African Affairs in May 2007.<sup>144</sup> Later, in 2008, when Chinese ships increasingly came under kidnapping threats by Somali pirates, the decision to dispatch Chinese naval escort missions was made by the PBSC after consultation with all the line agencies, including the MFA, MOFCOM, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of Overseas Chinese Affairs, etc.<sup>xxii</sup>

The other prominent example took place in the spring of 2011, when China had to make a decision on how to protect more than 30,000 Chinese

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<sup>xxii</sup> Author’s interview with Chinese analysts, Beijing, November 2011. According to member of Central Military Commission Li Jinai, the dispatch of the escort mission is “critical strategic decisions made by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Hu based on the country’s development interests and political and diplomatic overall mapping.” See “PLA Navy Escort Taskforce Returned with Success, Chairman Hu’s Instruction Was Conveyed,” [我海军首批护航编队凯旋 传达胡主席批示], *PLA Daily*, April 29, 2009, [http://www.chinamil.com.cn/site1/xwpdxw/2009-04/29/content\\_1744511.htm](http://www.chinamil.com.cn/site1/xwpdxw/2009-04/29/content_1744511.htm). In the case of evacuation of Chinese nationals in Libya, according to Zhang Lili, a professor at China Foreign Affairs University, the final decision was made by the “top Chinese leaders” based on the research and reports by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, especially by the Chinese Embassy in Libya. See Zhang Lili, “Analysis of China’s All-Out Evacuation of Chinese Nationals in Libya,” [中国全力从利比亚撤侨分析], *Chinese Communist Party News*, April 21, 2011, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/68742/187710/191095/14448336.html>.

nationals inside Libya during the civil war. The FALSG organized emergency discussions among the MFA, the Ministry of State Security, the PLA, and the State Council's Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs, among others.<sup>145</sup> The coordinated decision led to the massive mobilization of bureaucratic resources, including diplomatic, military and civil aviation, to ensure the smooth evacuation of more than 30,000 Chinese from Libya, the largest evacuation campaign in the history of the People's Republic of China.<sup>146</sup>

On the working level, two ministries carry primary responsibility for managing daily and routine policymaking and implementation. The MFA is officially responsible for political policy, and it "oversees and coordinates policies on and cooperation and exchange with relevant countries and regions."<sup>147</sup> MOFCOM carries the most weight on decisions related to economic relations, including investment, trade, economic cooperation and the key task of foreign aid. Besides these two agencies, the Ministry of Finance wields power through its authority to approve and supervise the foreign affairs budget. Especially on the foreign aid budget, which is jointly submitted by the MFA and MOFCOM, the Ministry of Finance enjoys a unique position in determining China's aid activities on the ground in Africa.

Within Africa, different countries also carry different weight in China's Africa policy. Generally speaking, two types of African countries are more likely to receive a higher level of attention in policymaking. First, "regional leaders," such as South Africa and Kenya, are given more emphasis because of their regional or international political and economic influence. As a fellow BRICS country, South Africa is seen by China as a strong emerging-power partner with great potential for collaboration bilaterally and against the traditional Western powers. Second, "problematic countries" such as Sudan, Zimbabwe and the DRC require more attention not only because China has large vested economic interests in their natural resources, but

also because their volatile internal politics often raise international concern and spark criticism that China is "propping up" these authoritarian regimes through economic deals and international political support (for example, China's resources-backed financing of the DRC's infrastructure projects, and its veto of the draft U.N. sanction resolution on Zimbabwe in 2008).

## POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH AFRICA

Within the foreign policy apparatus, the MFA is officially in charge of the bilateral political relations with and foreign policy on Africa. Geographically, Africa is divided into two regions, under two departments at the ministry: the Department of West Asia and North Africa and the Department of Africa (Sub-Saharan). Both departments report to the vice foreign minister in charge of the region, currently Zhang Ming.<sup>148</sup> The Department of African Affairs' functions and roles are stipulated as the following:

The Department of African Affairs implements China's foreign policy and principles. It reports and works on China's bilateral relations with countries and regions concerned, manages diplomatic contacts with and makes representations to relevant countries and regions, oversees and coordinates policies on and cooperation and exchanges with relevant countries and regions, and guides the operation of China's overseas diplomatic missions within its regional jurisdiction. It is responsible for translation and interpretation for important diplomatic functions, documents, and instruments in relevant languages.<sup>149</sup>

Within the bureaucratic system of the MFA, its field offices (Chinese embassies) are the primary sources of information on issues of bilateral relations between China and specific African countries. While the political affairs office and the economic affairs office each has its own portfolio, the office of policy studies at each embassy is the

center of strategic analysis on local politics and bilateral relations. The offices of political affairs and policy studies produce diplomatic cables that reflect local situations, analyze issues in bilateral relations and offer policy recommendations to MFA headquarters in Beijing. The reports and cables produced at embassies are usually drafted by staff at the level of third secretary, reviewed and approved by the second secretary and the head of individual office at the embassy, sometimes requiring approval by the counselor in charge, or even the deputy chief of mission or the ambassador in extreme cases. Diplomatic cables send first-hand information from these offices back to Beijing, where it is reviewed and incorporated into the research report, with policy recommendations by their managing divisions (主管处).<sup>xxiii</sup> The Department of African Affairs has seven divisions, six responsible for different sub-regions and one responsible for general affairs.<sup>150</sup> Depending on the significance of the issue at hand, the report and policy recommendations will then be routed through the deputy director of the department, the director of the department, the vice foreign minister in charge of the department, in some cases even the foreign minister himself.<sup>xxiv</sup> Using the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) as an example, Chinese scholars explained that the idea to establish FOCAC was initiated by the Department of African Affairs, which “convened a plenary meeting to discuss the feasibility of the idea” before proposing it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then the State Council.<sup>151</sup>

In this structure, basic assessment and analysis of the issues relating to African countries come from the field offices (embassies), which make policy recommendations from time to time. But individual divisions formulate basic policy, subject to adjustment and approval by the Department of

African Affairs and/or even the leaders of the MFA. Thus, in this process, rudimentary points of policymaking are the research offices at the embassies and their supervising divisions at the Department of African Affairs in Beijing.

## ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH AFRICA

Observers have noted that, in recent years, the Ministry of Commerce has chipped away a significant amount of authority from the MFA in the “interpretation and implementation of China’s policy toward Africa” and, as a result, the MFA’s role has been in decline.<sup>152</sup> Depending on the issue and the perspective, this point of view has certain merits. After all, the Ministry of Commerce is responsible for economic and trade cooperation as well as for managing China’s foreign aid to Africa. Across the board, these activities accompany—and sometimes overshadow—China’s other engagements in Africa, such as political cooperation or security.

Geographically, the Department of West Asian and African Affairs is the managing office for China’s economic relations with Africa. Its responsibilities include the following:

To formulate development strategies, programs, and policies in respect of the trade and economic cooperation with related countries (regions) and organize the implementation thereof; to set up bilateral and regional inter-governmental trade and economic mixed or joint commission meetings; to organize bilateral or regional trade and economic negotiations; to handle major issues in economic and trade relations with relevant countries and regions; to supervise the implementation of multilateral and bilateral economic

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<sup>xxiii</sup> MFA has seven geographical departments and nine functional departments. Under each department, divisions are created to be responsible for one or several country(s) or one or several functional issue(s). For more detail, see the website of Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [www.fmprc.gov.cn](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn).

<sup>xxiv</sup> The names of the officials to whom the reports are presented are listed and attached to the report. Each one has the authority to comment and request revisions to the report. The routing process can be extremely intricate and time-consuming.



and trade agreements signed by foreign governments with China, and conduct negotiations with foreign parties on issues concerned; to assist Chinese companies in their efforts to gain access into foreign market; and to regulate trade and economic activities with countries without diplomatic relationship with China.<sup>153</sup>

At Chinese embassies, the Offices of Economic and Commercial Affairs (经济参赞处) are the field offices of the Ministry of Commerce. Not only does the Ministry of Commerce enjoy the authority to appoint its staff (including the counselor for economic affairs),<sup>154</sup> the bureaucratic framework also dictates that all staff reports directly to the Ministry of Commerce, rather than to the ambassador or the MFA. These staff are an integral component of Chinese embassies, but are usually based at a different location. In a way, this set up illustrates the strained relationship between politics and economics in China's Africa policy (as discussed later). The office of economic and commercial affairs acts as the link between African governments and the Ministry of Commerce. It cultivates relationships with local African government economic agencies and assists Chinese companies in their business endeavors on the ground. Generally speaking, Chinese companies have much closer ties with the office of economic and commercial affairs than with the embassy.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, the office also conveys grievances and dissatisfactions of Chinese companies on the ground back to Beijing to facilitate their resolution.

China's foreign aid plays a key role in China's overall Africa strategy, promoting both China's economic engagement and political agenda. China offers foreign aid in eight forms: complete projects, goods and materials, technical cooperation, human resource development cooperation, medical assistance, emergency humanitarian aid, volunteer programs and debt relief.<sup>156</sup> The administrative office of China's

foreign aid is located at MOFCOM's Department of Aid to Foreign Countries, which many believe reflects the economics-driven nature of China's relationship with Africa. Its responsibilities include the following:

To formulate and implement plans and policies of foreign aid; to boost the reform on China's foreign aid methods; to organize negotiations on foreign aid and sign related agreements; to tackle inter-governmental aid affairs; to formulate and implement foreign aid plans; and to supervise and inspect the implementation of foreign aid projects.<sup>157</sup>

Aid decisions are usually made through consultations among the Department of West Asia and Africa, the Department of Aid to Foreign Countries under MOFCOM, and the Department of African Affairs under MFA, as aid is seen as a direct component of the bilateral relations with an African government. As the primary conduits of communication between China and the African countries, the embassies and the office of economic and commercial affairs both receive requests from local governments about their specific needs for aid.

Government entities other than MOFCOM also play a major role in investment and loan decisions related to Africa. In 2004, the National Development and Reform Council (NDRC) and China Eximbank jointly set up a special loan category for "state-encouraged key overseas investment projects," funded by the Eximbank's FDI budget, with a concessional interest rate.<sup>158</sup> To apply for such loans, a company needs to obtain approval from the national or provincial NDRC and apply for loans directly from the China Eximbank; Eximbank's opinion forms the foundation for the NDRC's decision.<sup>159</sup> For an investment larger than \$100 million, projects also need to be ratified by the Ministry of Commerce.<sup>xxxv</sup>

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<sup>xxxv</sup> Investment between \$10 million and \$100 million needs to be ratified by the provincial bureau of Commerce; see "Measures of Overseas Investment Management" [境外投资管理办法], Chinese Ministry of Commerce, March 16 2009, [http://www.china.com.cn/policy/txt/2009-03/16/content\\_17454125.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/policy/txt/2009-03/16/content_17454125.htm).

In the case of the loans Chinese companies receive from the China Development Bank and commercial banks,<sup>160</sup> the decision is made by the individual banks based on the project's feasibility, merits and a risk assessment. In other words, although the government encourages and facilitates Chinese companies' investing in Africa, specific commercial loan decisions are as market-based as is possible. This is particularly true in the case of loans made by the China Development Bank, essentially a government policy bank but seeking to improve its global competitiveness through market-based decision making.<sup>161</sup>

The China-Africa Development Fund (CAD Fund), invested and owned by the China Development Bank, is a good example.<sup>xxvi</sup> Investment is part of the CAD Fund's mission, but its more important function lies in promoting investment in Africa to Chinese companies, and smoothing obstacles impeding the process. The fund has a policy against becoming the largest stakeholder, generally holding 20 percent of projects.<sup>162</sup> "Cooperation with Chinese companies" is a prerequisite for most of its investment decisions. The \$1.6 billion the CAD Fund had invested in Africa, as of mid-2012, was accompanied by more than \$10 billion invested by Chinese companies.<sup>xxvii</sup> In addition, the CAD Fund also helps Chinese companies identify potential investment opportunities and helps African projects find suitable investment partners.<sup>163</sup> In Ghana, the CAD Fund partnered with China Hainan Airline to invest \$30 million in a local joint venture, Africa World Airline.<sup>164</sup>

The concessional loan portfolio of China Eximbank provides the financing to increase China's

exports and secures access to raw materials pledged as repayment for the loan.<sup>165</sup> Loan decisions are jointly made by MOFCOM and the China Eximbank, subject to approval by the Ministry of Finance. Lucy Corkin describes the decision making process thusly:

Based on the recommendation of the resident Chinese Economic Counselor's office, a given African government applies for a loan. MOFCOM's two departments, the Department of Foreign Aid and the Department of Economic Cooperation, consider the application in consultation with China Exim Bank. MOFCOM then studies the list of priority projects submitted with the application, approves a selection and calculates an approved budget. MOFCOM assigns a specific amount from the foreign aid budget, housed in MOFCOM's Department of Foreign Aid that will be used to subsidize the interest rate of the loan.<sup>166</sup>

## CHINA'S SECURITY POLICY IN AFRICA

China's security activities in Africa are relatively limited, compared to those in China's immediate periphery.<sup>xxviii</sup> As previously discussed, political instability and conflicts at the state level, and local criminal threats to the safety of Chinese personnel and assets in Africa represent the two most direct challenges to China's interests in Africa. China implements a different strategy in each case.

First, concerning instability and conflicts in African countries, China relies overwhelmingly on

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<sup>xxvi</sup> The targeted volume of China-Africa Development Fund is \$5 billion. The first two stages of financing, \$1 billion and \$2 billion each, were invested by China Development Bank by the end of 2012. See "CAD Fund President Chi Jianxin: Africa Welcomes Foreign Investment," [中非发展基金总裁迟建新: 非洲欢迎外国投资], *China Daily*, April 22, 2013, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/zgrbjx/2013-04/22/content\\_16432434.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/zgrbjx/2013-04/22/content_16432434.htm).

<sup>xxvii</sup> For example, when Chinese steel companies were reluctant to invest in an iron ore deposit in central Liberia in 2009 due to capacity constraints and other concerns, the CAD Fund negotiated with the Liberian government to purchase 85 percent of the stake of the project but only to transfer 60 percent to Wuhan Steel, which took charge in the construction and operation of the project. See "The New Career of Chi Jianxin: China-Africa Development Fund," [迟建新的新事业: 中非发展基金], *Global Entrepreneurs*, June 21, 2012, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/20120621/223412377005.shtml>.

<sup>xxviii</sup> China conducts frequent military tests, drills and exercises in its immediate neighborhood, such as the naval exercises in East and South China Seas and joint exercises with Russia and Central Asian countries.

peacekeeping missions by the United Nations and the regional institution, the Africa Union, to stabilize countries and to maintain social order.<sup>167</sup> To China, the only legitimate form of military intervention in a sovereign nation is international intervention based on a U.N. mandate, with local government's consent. Among the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, China also makes the largest personnel contribution to the U.N. peacekeeping missions worldwide. Currently, Chinese peacekeepers are operating in U.N. missions in Sudan, Liberia, the DRC and Mali.<sup>168</sup> China's most recent contribution to the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Mali includes an unprecedented 197 "combat troops" (China rejects the term and uses "security force" instead).<sup>169</sup>

The MFA takes the lead for decisions on U.N. Security Council peacekeeping mission resolutions. Historically, China has vetoed only two U.N. peace-related resolutions: In 1997, China vetoed the draft resolution to dispatch military observers to Guatemala. In 1999, China vetoed the draft resolution to prolong the U.N. preventative force in Macedonia. Both decisions were motivated by the existence of diplomatic relations between Taiwan and the governments of Guatemala and Macedonia. China's permanent mission at the U.N. usually receives requests for China's contribution to a peacekeeping mission from the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, based on a U.N. Security Council resolution.<sup>170</sup> When a request is reported back to the MFA, the State Council and the Central Military Commission decide whether and how China should dispatch peacekeepers.<sup>171</sup> Once a decision is reached, the Office of Peacekeeping at the Ministry of National Defense coordinates the level, type and composition of Chinese peacekeepers to be dispatched, in consultation with the MFA.<sup>172</sup> For decisions on "strategically important" issues, such as whether China should send combat troops upon a request by the United Nations, the

Office of Peacekeeping of the Ministry of National Defense is responsible for making recommendations to top leadership. The decision is ultimately made by the Central Military Commission and PBSC.<sup>173</sup>

China has demonstrated an unprecedented interest in working with the African Union on the peace and stability of Africa. During the 2012 FOCAC meeting in Beijing, Chinese President Hu Jintao announced that China would launch a "China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security" to enhance bilateral cooperation with Africa. Some specific measures include providing financial support to AU peacekeeping missions in Africa and to the AU Standby Force, and training peace and security officers and peacekeepers for the AU.<sup>174</sup> According to Chinese analysts, this decision is primarily pragmatic and political in order to enhance Africa's own capacity to provide security while offering China a meaningful role in the process. U.N. resolutions, mandates and processes to dispatch troops often involve lengthy debates with the West. By comparison, China views its cooperation with the AU and African countries to create peace and stability as less subject to interference by Western countries.<sup>175</sup> Meanwhile, strengthened security capacity in the AU and African countries will also help mitigate political instability and improve law enforcement on the ground, confronting the root cause of security threats.<sup>176</sup> This would constitute an alternative (or at least parallel), but equally legal, approach to U.N. peacekeeping.

In the past few years, China has also engaged in unilateral military actions to protect Chinese nationals and assets in Africa. This is best reflected in the PLA Navy's escort missions in the Gulf of Aden since 2008, and the evacuation of Chinese nationals from Libya in 2011. These actions seemed to be against China's long-term doctrine of "no Chinese troops on foreign soil,"<sup>xxix</sup> but they were driven by

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<sup>xxix</sup> China is highly sensitive and reluctant to dispatch troops to foreign countries for two reasons: 1) China's respect for the sovereignty of other countries; and 2) this would fuel the hostile perception of China's military expansion and threat to the world.

security threats and a popular, public demand for Beijing to take military action.<sup>177</sup> It became an issue of legitimacy and credibility for Beijing to demonstrate it had the ability to protect its own citizens.

Therefore, decisions in both cases were given the utmost importance and were made at the highest level, the Politburo Standing Committee, with coordinated consultation across all participating agencies, including the MFA, MOFCOM, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of Overseas Chinese Affairs, etc. In the case of the Libya evacuation, the top leaders of China established the State Council Libya Evacuation Headquarters, led by Vice Premier Zhang Dejiang and assisted by State Councilor Dai

Bingguo.<sup>178</sup> The interagency coordination meetings were organized by the MFA and attended by the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Commerce, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission, the General Administration of Customs, the Civil Aviation Administration, and the General Staff Department of the PLA, as well as by the representatives of related companies operating in Libya.<sup>179</sup> The results of the evacuation were largely satisfactory, and the operation turned out to be a great test of the government's crisis management and mobilization ability. The biggest lesson drawn from the operation was the need to prepare and preempt such a chaotic operation through multilateral or bilateral cooperation.

# CHALLENGES IN CHINA'S AFRICA POLICY

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## NARROW ECONOMIC PURSUITS AND THE ABSENCE OF A GRAND STRATEGY

One interesting observation that has been made by most Chinese analysts on China's Africa strategy is that China has no such strategy. In their view, China has different goals in Africa but does not have a well-thought-out, long-term strategy to coordinate those goals under a comprehensive national agenda. This is most keenly reflected in China's failure to identify and prioritize between its economic and political interests in its relationship with Africa.

From 1949 to 1979, China's top priority in Africa was clearly political. In the 1950s and early 1960s, China wanted to rally broad international support to penetrate the isolation imposed by the Soviet Union and the United States. The goal became more radical during the Cultural Revolution, when China attempted to promote revolutions in Africa.<sup>180</sup> Under that overarching political priority, economic considerations and cost-benefit analyses were subordinated to political needs. Beijing provided massive unilateral economic aid to Africa to curry political favors rather than for reciprocal economic benefits. This strategy led to temporary political gains and fostered a sense of affinity that endures. However, in economic terms, these policies were less rational.

However, 30 years into reform and opening up, China's Africa policy is believed to have swung to the other end of the spectrum. As Deng Xiaoping

pointed out, the center of China's policies in the era of reform should be focused on economic development, and its foreign policy should "serve the central economic task" of "creating a sound international environment for such development."<sup>181</sup> The doctrine has been loyally carried out by the third, fourth and fifth generations of Chinese leaders, such as the introduction of the Going Out strategy by Jiang Zemin, and its endorsement by Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. For African countries, the key implication is that first and foremost, China's relationship with them must serve China's domestic economic development agenda through the "mutual complementarity of their economies."<sup>182</sup>

The formula would have worked well had China had a grand strategy to resolve the conflicts between the "economy first" philosophy and its other goals in Africa, and between its short-term and long-term economic interests. While China sees Africa primarily through the economic lens, it does have other major political interests, such as Africa's support of China's domestic and foreign agendas. However, as Chinese commercial players (both government corporations) seek to maximize their economic benefits in Africa, their pragmatic, mercantilist approach has undermined the foundation for political relations. Most Chinese analysts point out that the Chinese business community's narrow-minded pursuit of maximum economic gains has left little or no room or regard for social, economic and environmental impact, or for the sustainable development of local

African communities. This is believed to underlie the perception that China is the new “colonial power.” Chinese companies’ behavior has, in many cases, alienated local governments and populations, and seriously undermined the soundness of bilateral political relations. Zambian President Michael Sata, as an opposition leader, criticized China’s presence seeking to harness nationalist unhappiness with Chinese accused of taking jobs from Zambians by engaging in low-pay jobs, such as pushing wheelbarrows at construction sites.<sup>183</sup>

The same conflict exists between China’s short-term and long-term economic strategies in Africa. As a prominent Africa expert from the United States observed, China’s mercantilist approach to Africa today is tantamount to “killing the goose for the golden egg.”<sup>184</sup> As Chinese commercial players focus solely on maximizing natural resource extraction from Africa, they rarely take into account the future of their operations or the future of Africa beyond the existing contracts. In other words, the current model featuring the tunnel vision of Chinese commercial interests without combining them with the political, economic and social interests of the local people is neither sustainable for China nor for Africa. In recent years, Beijing has made more efforts to provide training and human resources development to African countries.<sup>185</sup> However, it has yet to craft a comprehensive strategy that balances its different goals in Africa. The result of such a failure, as Chinese analysts have pointed out, is a “reactive diplomacy” in Africa, where Beijing deals with individual problems only as they erupt. This pattern delays crisis management and damage control, affecting China’s international image, credibility and reputation.

### INTERNAL BUREAUCRATIC CONFLICTS

Without a grand Africa strategy to manage differences, the conflict between China’s economic and political goals directly contributes to the bureaucratic conflicts between the MFA and MOFCOM. Both see themselves as the true representative of

China’s supreme national interests. The MFA believes China’s broader strategic agenda is being inevitably undermined by the prioritization of economic pursuits. As one diplomat bitterly pointed out, “Businesses create messes in Africa and leave us to clean it up for China.”<sup>186</sup>

The conflict is most conspicuous around China’s foreign aid to Africa. To the MFA, foreign aid is essentially a political instrument for China to strengthen bilateral ties and facilitate the development of African countries. In its view, political considerations should be the most important criteria in aid decision making. Economic benefits associated with aid projects, such as profitability, resource extraction, or acquisition service contracts for Chinese vendors, should only be secondary. However, MOFCOM has the opposite perspective. In its view, foreign aid serves China’s overall national priority, which by definition is economic growth. Therefore, all aspects of aid decisions should reflect broad economic considerations. Under this logic, MOFCOM is naturally inclined to allocate the aid budget to countries that offer China the greatest number of commercial opportunities and benefits. Since China’s overall economic interest is Africa’s natural resources, aid decisions are inevitably skewed toward the resource-rich countries (such as Sudan, Angola and the DRC) while others receive less favorable consideration.<sup>187</sup> This practice is problematic in that many of the resource-rich African countries with which China works also suffer from serious political problems, such as authoritarian political systems, poor governance and corruption. When MOFCOM pursues economic gains and associates aid projects with resource extraction, it uses aid packages to promote business relations. This strategy directly contributes to the negative perception that China is pouring aid, funding and infrastructure projects in order to prop up corrupt governments in exchange for natural resources. The MFA argues that China needs to balance aid to other countries to decrease the pressure on its foreign policy and improve its international reputation. However, such a political agenda is not of much concern to MOFCOM.<sup>188</sup>

As many Chinese analysts observe, the MFA in recent years has been fighting fiercely for the authority to manage China's foreign aid projects, which are currently under the purview of MOFCOM. The MFA argues that, given the political nature of aid decisions, it is the more appropriate agency to manage foreign aid in accordance with China's broad strategic interests than MOFCOM, whose sole interests lie in commercial gain. Such a reallocation of authority would require the approval and endorsement of top leaders at the PBSC, which, so far, seems unlikely.<sup>189</sup> Therefore, in the foreseeable future, authority over China's aid to Africa will still be controlled by MOFCOM.

### PROLIFERATION OF BUSINESS ACTORS

The conflict between the economic and political aspects of China's Africa policy is exacerbated by the proliferation of Chinese actors operating in Africa, such as central-level, state-owned enterprises (SOE), provincial governments and private companies. The agenda of these actors is overwhelmingly economic in nature. However, due to these actors' independent operations and the lack of systematic management and supervision for overseas activities, it has been extremely difficult for Beijing to manage the different priorities and the type of actions they have dictated.

Chinese business actors in Africa can be divided into several categories. On the central level, there are large SOEs and state-owned banks, mostly engaged in large-scale investments, infrastructure projects, mining projects, service contracts and loans. One official from the China Development Bank observes that these SOEs enjoy close connections with senior African officials, effectively evading monitoring by, and advice from, the local Chinese embassy.<sup>190</sup> These SOEs are mostly motivated by commercial interests, although they proclaim that their goals are in line with Beijing's broader objectives, such as the Going Out strategy. These large SOEs are made even

more difficult to manage by their high bureaucratic ranking and strong political backing from senior Chinese leaders at home. For example, China's three largest national oil companies enjoy vice-ministerial ranking, while almost all Chinese embassies in Africa are at the director-general level or lower.<sup>xxx</sup>

Governments and SOEs at the provincial levels (or lower) are also increasing their footprint in Africa. As the Chinese provincial governments (especially those in the coastal area) strive for better economic performance in the tide of reform and opening up, they have aimed at overseas investments and markets in order to mitigate the impacts of the international financial crisis and upgrade their labor-intensive development model. Provincial government commerce departments have been enthusiastically organizing and dispatching business promotion tours to Africa to explore commercial opportunities, especially in terms of service contracts. For example, since mid-2012, the commerce departments of Jiangxi Province, Yunnan Province, Tianjin Municipal government and Hunan Province each organized business tours to Africa on service contracts, water system construction contracts and natural resources in Nigeria, respectively.<sup>191</sup> Anhui Province has affirmed that Africa is the primary target of the province's Going Out strategy, and the construction contracts Anhui companies signed in Africa made up 47.6 percent of the province's total 2012 overseas service contracts.<sup>192</sup>

The third category, the most adventurous Chinese players in Africa, is the private companies or individual businessmen. A conservative estimate claims that at least one million Chinese nationals are operating inside Africa.<sup>193</sup> These are independent, entrepreneurial players whose activities take place at the grassroots level in Africa. The recent case of illegal Chinese gold miners in Ghana illustrates how private Chinese individuals have successfully been flying under the radar, evading supervision by local African governments and the Chinese embassy until they run into major political or legal trouble.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>xxx</sup> It is said that only the Chinese ambassador to South Africa enjoys a vice-ministerial ranking.

The proliferation of Chinese commercial actors in Africa broadens the scope of Sino-African interactions beyond the traditional intergovernmental realm. Not all Chinese companies represent—or even respect—China’s policy toward Africa, although they are frequently perceived to do so. Chinese companies tend to follow their traditional operational model in China: the pursuit of low costs, a lack of respect for social and environmental issues, poor labor conditions, a diligent work ethic, etc. Following this model, in many cases, results in direct conflicts with local customs and communities. Among Chinese companies, large companies and SOEs have relatively better track records due to the high profile of their projects and close supervision and management by the Chinese government. Such supervision and management hardly exists for small, independent, private Chinese companies and individuals. For many of these actors, the primary goal is to maximize profits and eventually to return to China; there is no long-term or strategic vision. However, when China’s broad relationship with Africa is examined by Africans or outsiders, these actors are seen as implementing China’s Africa policy, and Beijing gets most of the blame for not properly regulating them.

### GOVERNMENT DEFICIENCIES IN MANAGING ECONOMIC TIES

While China eagerly embraces economic ties with Africa and pushes numerous Chinese companies into the continent to explore commercial opportunities, the bureaucratic system unfortunately lags behind in providing the necessary support system to protect, regulate and manage these new endeavors. A number of capacity deficiencies have created or contribute to the problems China encounters in Africa.

#### **Risk assessment**

On the national level, China has yet to establish a comprehensive mechanism to translate political risk assessment into specific regulatory/advisory advice for business decision making.<sup>195</sup> Chinese companies are at the early stage of understanding the macro-

political and economic environments of a given African country. Given the volatility of domestic politics in many African countries, sound business decision making needs an early warning system that incorporates political risks and economic/social impact studies. Some government entities are beginning to emphasize studies of the overall business investment in Africa, such as the China Development Bank and MOFCOM (through the China Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, a MOFCOM think tank). However, analysts suspect that it will be years before such efforts take effect on the ground.<sup>196</sup>

#### **Industry/country strategies**

Although China regards Africa as the “land of opportunity” and has a general guideline for Chinese companies to “Go Out,” its operation in Africa lacks industry or country strategies. Beijing has failed to produce systematic, long-term strategic planning to coordinate economic cooperation among and within different industries and/or countries.<sup>197</sup> Redundant investments and hostile competition among Chinese companies are rampant. It has been suggested that government agencies, industry associations and research organizations should develop programs to enhance their coordination and information-sharing, and to improve broad government policy and individual company decisions. However, such development is still at a rudimentary stage.

#### **Supervision/management system**

Despite rapidly increasing investment in Africa, China does not have a systematic supervision mechanism to monitor and regulate overseas Chinese actors. Had Beijing a better supervision system, the irregularities of Chinese businesses, such as violations of labor rights, corruption, and environmental damage, could be mitigated. Nevertheless, given the weak position of the MFA in Sino-African economic affairs, and MOFCOM’s priority in trade/investment promotion, there has yet to be a government initiative to create such a mechanism.



## LOOKING AHEAD

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There is no question that Africa has become a more prominent issue for China in the past decade. Yet, overall, Africa's strategic importance for Beijing remains low. While the political utility of the continent to Beijing has remained unchanged, Sino-African economic relations are at a historical high since 1949. Chinese economic activities in Africa are at an unprecedented level. But this trend has also produced new challenges for China's Africa policy. These include rising security threats to Chinese citizens present in Africa, the negative impacts of the mercantilist policy of China over Sino-African relations, and the reputational risks generated by Chinese actors' over-emphasizing economic benefits and neglecting Africa's long-term needs.

China's Africa policy lacks a comprehensive, long-term, strategic vision. This gap complicates the conflicts between Beijing's political agenda and its economic goals in Africa, and between short-term commercial gains and long-term national interests. Bureaucratic competition within the government apparatus and the diversification of Chinese actors

further undermine the overall health of Sino-African relations. In addition, Beijing has yet to improve its bureaucratic mechanisms and procedures to adapt to the new reality China faces in Africa. It is not creating forward-looking political risk assessments nor effectively supervising Chinese entities.

In the years to come, China's engagement with Africa is expected to grow. The system will adapt and adopt easy fixes for some problems, for instance, by increasing spending on training African human resources or by enhancing corporate social responsibility programs for local African communities. However, given China's priority of fueling domestic economic growth with African resources and market potential, a more profound reconsideration of China's overall strategic engagement with Africa will be required to resolve the most fundamental problems in Sino-African relations. The inertia that currently characterizes China's policy approaches to Africa will most likely remain unchanged in the near future. This situation deserves effective responses—from Africa and from the rest of the world.

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In conclusion, China's engagement in Africa is the result of a carefully constructed foreign policy and a comprehensive approach that places China on a par with long-established Western powers. However, with deepening involvement and expanding interactions, issues and conflicts inevitably surface to challenge the contemporary China-Africa relations.Â [i] Chris Alden, "China in Africa", Zed books Ltd, 2007, pp22. [ii] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's Africa Policy", 2006. < <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t230615.htm>>. [iii] Chris Alden, "China in Africa", Zed books Ltd, 2007, pp27. Ahead of next month's China-Africa summit, foreign minister Wang Yi is inviting African leaders to "get on board the fast train of development". The Cityscape: get the best of Guardian Cities delivered to you every week, with just-released data, features and on-the-ground reports from all over the world. It is now nine years since China overtook the US as Africa's largest trading partner. Although Kenya and Ethiopia were the only two African nations among the 30 countries signing economic and trade agreements at the Belt and Road Forum (Barf) in Beijing in May last year, China has been busy on