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# China in Africa: Savior or self-interest?

by David Shinn



Chinese President Hu Jintao (c.), walks past delegates (from left to right, Cape Verde's Prime Minister Neves, Niger's President Issoufou, Equatorial Guinea's President Mbasogo and South African President Zuma) as he prepares to deliver an opening speech for the 5th Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, Thursday, July 19, 2012. (ANDY WONG/API/CORBIS)

VISITORS to Africa in recent years almost certainly have been impressed by China's engagement. Today, China is deeply engaged almost everywhere on the continent, although four countries—Swaziland, Burkina Faso, São Tomé and Príncipe and Gambia—still recognize Taiwan. This is in stark contrast to the situation existing before the mid-1990's, when China was just one of many international actors on the continent. In 2009, China surpassed the U.S. as Africa's largest trading partner. It is important, however, to put this in perspective. Because China is such a major exporter and importer, trade with Africa constitutes only about 4 percent of its global trade. In contrast, China accounts for more than 13 percent of Africa's global trade.

China is also challenging Western countries in all areas of "soft power," such as student scholarships and specialized training in Chinese, technical assistance teams in Africa and

the creation of a Chinese youth volunteer program in a number of African countries. It has expanded its radio, television and print media outreach to Africa and is establishing Confucius Institutes (cultural outposts of the Chinese government with some 350 branches on campuses around the world). China has some kind of military/security relationship with every African country that recognizes Beijing and now has about 1,500 peacekeepers assigned to six of Africa's seven United Nations peacekeeping missions. Since 2008, China has provided two frigates and a supply ship to the Somali an-

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*Symbolizing China's eagerness to win new friends in Africa, Mao Zedong (r.) extends the hand of friendship to Ghana's President Kwame Nkrumah at a meeting in Hangchow, China., July 28, 1962. (BETTMANN/CORBIS)*

tipiracy operation in the Gulf of Aden.

China has become a major force in Africa and has organized itself to remain for the long-term. There are areas where China and the West compete, such as trade, investment and commercial contracts, and there are other areas where interests overlap and China and the West could cooperate, such as UN peacekeeping, antipiracy initiatives, maintaining political stability and promoting economic development.

The future of competition and cooperation hinges on an obvious question: What are China's long-term interests? Does China only desire to extract oil and minerals to feed its industrial development? Or are other elements involved, such as developing another market for Chinese exports and maintaining the political support of African countries?

### The dragon awakens in Africa

When the Communist Party of China (CPC) took control of the mainland in 1949, it was initially consumed with domestic issues and concerns on its immediate periphery. Africa was not important to its foreign policy interests. In any event, only Ethiopia, Liberia and white-ruled South Africa were independent, while Egypt had an element of self-rule.

China did not have good relations or, in the beginning, any relations with Africa's colonial rulers. As African countries began to achieve independence in the 1950s and especially in the 1960s, China realized that it needed their political support in the United Nations to replace Taiwan on the Security Council.

Beginning with the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, China worked hard to cultivate African delegations. China subsequently used conferences organized by the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization to obtain support from the so-called nonaligned states. In 1956, China opened its first embassy in Africa in Cairo. Beijing's efforts paid off in 1971 when the UN General Assembly admitted the People's Republic of China (PRC) into the UN and also replaced Taiwan on the Security Council. The PRC obtained 34 percent of its votes from African countries; 26 African states supported Beijing and 15 backed Taipei, the Taiwanese capital. To this day, China regularly expresses appreciation to African countries for their support in gaining admittance to the UN.

Throughout the 1950's and 1960's, China backed African wars of national liberation, antiimperialism and antico-

lonialism. In the 1960's, China even supported a few left-wing movements that were trying to topple ideologically conservative governments. Increasingly, the Sino-Soviet conflict dictated Beijing's policy in Africa just as the cold war (1945-91) and anticommunism determined U.S. policy. China tended to support those liberation groups in countries still under colonial control that did not have Soviet backing and it made every effort to minimize Moscow's influence. This focus continued until the early 1980's when China and the Soviet Union reconciled. During the first four decades of its engagement with Africa, China had limited financial resources to devote to the continent and could not compete on equal terms with the Soviet Union or the West.

China's policy became increasingly pragmatic in the 1980s, but was also marked by an element of indifference, especially in the last half of the decade. China focused on internal economic modernization while the approaching end of the cold war reduced China's ardor for engaging in Africa. One of China's leading Africanists, He Wenping, said the guiding principle of Chinese diplomacy in the 1980s changed from "ideological idealism to pragmatic idealism and from unconditional internationalism to a priority of national interest." The decade ended with the government crackdown on the pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989, although this event did not adversely impact China's relations with African countries.

At the end of the cold war, decreased interest in Africa by the Soviet Union (now Russia) and the West coincided with the rapid growth of China's economy and its increasing need for raw materials. In 1993, China became a net importer of oil; Africa has about 10 percent of the world's known petroleum reserves. China's rapidly growing industrial sector also consumed increasing quantities of copper, bauxite, iron ore, cobalt, manganese, uranium, titanium and timber, all of which are found in abundance in Africa. By the mid-1990s, almost without notice, China had quietly begun to increase its engagement in Africa. ■

# China's interests in Africa

CHINA'S ENGAGEMENT in Africa, well-advanced by the beginning of the 21st century, had become so frenetic that in 2000 China created the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which meets every three years at the ministerial or summit level in an effort to coordinate China's relations with the 50 countries in Africa that recognize Beijing. In advance of the third FOCAC summit in 2006, China issued a major white paper on its African policy, which continues to guide the development of China's policy toward Africa. The fifth FOCAC ministerial meeting took place in Beijing in July 2012.

Although China is more economically advanced than every country in Africa, it continues to emphasize that it remains a developing country and, consequently, claims a special attachment to countries at a similar stage in Africa. While parts of China's interior still qualify as underdeveloped areas, the coastal region and even some interior centers such as Chongqing have clearly emerged from the developing category. It is doubtful that China will be able to claim for much longer that it is a developing country.

President Hu Jintao, speaking at the opening of the 2012 FOCAC ministerial meeting, emphasized his country's status as a "still-developing" country and said that China and Africa, as developing states, should align themselves more closely in global forums such as the United Nations. He then took a swipe at the West by adding: "We should oppose the practices of the big bullying the small, the strong domineering over the weak and rich oppressing the poor."

South African President Jacob Zuma, speaking after Hu, commented that "we certainly are convinced that China's intention is different to that of Europe, which to date continues to tend to influence African countries for their sole benefit." Zuma added, however, that Africa must be cautious and avoid allowing that sort of pattern to govern its relationship with China.

China currently has four hard inter-

ests in Africa. First, Africa is a source of raw materials. China obtains about one third of its oil imports from African countries and significant mineral resources: for example, about 90 percent of its cobalt, 35 percent of its manganese and 30 percent of its tantalum. It would be difficult for China to meet all of its mineral needs from non-African sources.

Second, China wants to expand its exports to Africa, which now has more than one billion people and a growing middle class, making the continent a more attractive export market. Between 2000 and 2010, China increased its exports to Africa thirteenfold.

Third, China seeks political support. African states now constitute more than one quarter of the membership of the United Nations General Assembly. China and many African countries that are criticized for their human rights practices tend to support each other in the United Nations Human Rights Council. China also welcomes African support in forums such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and it, in turn, often supports African positions in the UN Security Council.

Fourth, one of Beijing's priorities

is to end the diplomatic recognition of Taiwan by any country in Africa. Although only four African countries still recognize Taiwan, Beijing has never relented in its pursuit of the "one-China" policy. The 2008 election of Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou, who quickly developed a more cordial relationship with China, has resulted in an informal, but likely temporary, diplomatic truce between Beijing and Taipei. At some point, Beijing will almost certainly step up pressure on these four African governments to recognize China. At the same time, Beijing has no objection to Taiwan's commercial presence in Africa.

## U.S. interests in Africa

The U.S. has five hard interests in Africa. The first three are almost identical to China's. First, the U.S. seeks raw materials, especially oil. Although the U.S. buys more oil from Africa than does China, it imports fewer minerals and other raw materials.

Second, the U.S. wants to increase its exports to Africa, although they remain a tiny percentage of global American exports. Third, Washington tries to obtain support for U.S. positions in international forums from as many Afri-



Gold miners form a human chain while digging an open pit at the Chudja mine in the Kilomoto concession in north-eastern Congo, February 23, 2009. (FINBARR O'REILLY/REUTERS/CORBIS)

can countries as possible. The only Chinese interest in Africa not shared by the U.S., for obvious reasons, is China's aim of ending diplomatic recognition of Taiwan.

The U.S. has two additional interests in Africa. First, the U.S. desires to minimize the impact in Africa of terrorism, narcotics trafficking, international crime, piracy and money laundering so they do not harm U.S. interests in Africa or at home. These concerns are not as significant to China as they are to the U.S.

Second, the U.S. military continues to rely on access to African ports for visits by naval vessels, on the ability to overfly African countries, and on the ability to land military aircraft at African airports. The U.S. has a military base in Djibouti and small drone intelligence-collection capabilities in Ethiopia and the Seychelles. It also operates small counterterrorism operations in Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Burkina Faso.

So far, China has expressly denied it has any interest in establishing military bases or operations in Africa. However, as China expands its naval capacity, this could change.

### State-to-state and party relations

The strength of China's relations with African countries lies in the state-to-state and party-to-party ties. China's official governmental relationships with each of the 50 countries in Africa that recognize Beijing is either excellent or, at least, satisfactory, and it works hard to maintain these cordial ties. The most telling fact is that every year since 1991 China's foreign minister has made his first overseas visit to a country in Africa. African leaders notice this consistency of attention.

High-level exchange visits with African counterparts permeate all layers of the Chinese government. President Hu has been to Africa six times, two as vice president and four as president. Between 1956 and 2006, some 160 Chinese leaders and foreign ministers visited Africa, while 524 Africans with the rank of minister or higher made 676 visits to China. These exchange visits have proved to be an effective and low-cost way to build a strong state-to-state relationship.

An especially important aspect of the official connection is the contact between the CPC leadership and African

ruling party counterparts in each country. Except for South Africa, where the Communist Party is a junior partner in the ruling coalition, none of the African ruling parties operates under the name of a communist party. Some of the ruling African political parties are ideologically close to the CPC but others have little in common with it. For example, Sudan's ruling party, the National Congress Party (NCP), professes to be an Islamic party. Yet the NCP and most ruling parties in Africa have established a close relationship with the CPC.

Between 1997 and 2006, the CPC hosted over 60 African party leaders. These visits permitted an exchange of views, coordination of policies, provision of modest financial assistance and even the voicing of grievances. The CPC has provided material support, for example, to the ruling political party in Zimbabwe. The CPC partners with like-minded ruling parties and offers cadre training and party management courses in countries such as South Africa, Tanzania and Namibia.

It is difficult to understate the importance of the CPC relationship with ruling parties in Africa, especially when comparing the situation to high-level U.S. contact with African leaders. Senior U.S. officials make fewer state visits to Africa and, excluding African attendance at the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York, African leaders receive fewer invitations to come to the U.S. More importantly, the U.S. has nothing comparable to the CPC. The Democratic and Republican parties do not function as major decisionmaking bodies even when their leader occupies the White House. The only foreign engagement provided by the two major American political parties consists of low-level technical assistance and election monitoring by the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute.

### Military and security ties

Africa is of military and security interest to China only to the extent that there might be interruptions in access to and movement of oil and minerals that support Chinese industrial output.



Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara (r.) speaks with the Chinese ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire, (2nd l.), and the Ivorian Minister for Economic Infrastructure after the official launch of the jointly funded construction project of a 30 km highway linking Abidjan to Grand Bassam, on August 3, 2012. The infrastructure project is expected to cost \$116.7 million. (SIA KAMBOU/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

China prefers political stability in Africa and wants to minimize any threat to its personnel and interests there. China estimates that one million Chinese nationals now work and live in Africa, a number that is well above the figure for U.S. nationals. The death in 2007 of nine Chinese workers in Ethiopia's Ogaden region and the evacuation of 35,000 Chinese from Libya during the 2011 revolution were unpleasant surprises. China has not signed a formal military alliance with any African country. On the other hand, China has been a strong supporter of UN peacekeeping missions in Africa and the international effort to combat Somali piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

China's current policy emphasizes military operations other than war as a solution to international disputes. As in the case of its state-to-state contacts, China's military links with Africa rely heavily on a constant parade of Chinese military personnel visiting African counterparts and African military personnel hosted in China. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) coordinates its activities in Africa with the CPC and the state bureaucracy. PLA activities are political undertakings using military means for strategic reasons and not independent initiatives conducted explicitly for military purposes. At the end of 2007, China had 16 defense attaché offices in Africa, some accredited to multiple countries, while 28 African countries had comparable offices in Beijing as of 2010. The fact that China has relatively few defense attaché offices in Africa may reflect China's effort to downplay its military involvement.

### Arms

China is a significant supplier of arms to Africa. From 2002 through 2009, China transferred (in most cases sold) \$1.1 billion in conventional weapons to sub-Saharan Africa and another \$1.4 billion to North Africa. The conventional weapons transferred to sub-Saharan Africa constituted about 20 percent of arms transferred by all suppliers. China helped Sudan to build its industry for assembling and producing small arms, artillery and armored vehicles. Nev-



Sailors from China's People's Liberation Army stand on the deck of a Chinese Task Force 525 flagship missile frigate that saw action in Somalia against pirates, as the ship anchored in Manila on April 13, 2010. (TED ALJIBE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

ertheless, China was a less important supplier by dollar value of conventional weapons to Africa than Russia or Germany. On the other hand, China is a more significant supplier of small arms, ammunition and light weapons, but there are no reliable statistics to document China's global percentage of these transfers.

Some of these weapons, especially small arms and light weapons, end up

in African conflict zones. Together with arms from numerous other countries, they have been found in recent years in Sudan's war-ravaged Darfur region, the brutal war in eastern Congo and anarchic Somalia. These weapons probably reached conflict areas after having been purchased on the international arms market or were transferred to groups involved in the conflict by compliant African governments that



Members of a special squad of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy Seventh Escort Task Force participate in a joint drill with Tanzanian Marine Corps at a Navy base March 29, 2011, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. (XINHUA/GAMMA-RAPHO/GETTY IMAGES)

received them legally from China. The situation underscores, however, China's inability or unwillingness to monitor more effectively the movement of these weapons into conflict zones.

Military training is a growing component of China's cooperation with Africa. The PLA sends military experts to help with education, equipment maintenance and health care. China trains Zimbabwe's air defense personnel and pilots in connection with its equipment sales to the country and trained Equatorial Guinea's military in the use of heavy weapons. It has sent instructors to maintain military equipment in Sudan, Zimbabwe, Cameroon and Gabon. The PLA Navy held a joint training exercise with South Africa and conducted a military medical exercise in Gabon.

The most intriguing aspect of China's military connection with Africa is its current effort to expand the capability of the PLA Navy. While the western Indian Ocean is not an immediate priority for China, it is certainly part of the PLA Navy's long-term planning.



**“China is interested in Africa’s resources because they are interested in controlling their own economic destiny. And for China to control its own economic destiny, it must have a range of economic relationships and diplomatic partnerships that will allow them to procure sufficient raw material to keep the mother ship going.”**

**— John Huntsman,  
Former U.S.  
Ambassador to China**

[www.GreatDecisions.org/DVD](http://www.GreatDecisions.org/DVD)

Modern China made its first African port calls in 2000 with visits to Tanzania and South Africa. Following a hiatus, there has been an upsurge in port calls since China began sending ships to the antipiracy effort in the Gulf of Aden. This engagement has highlighted the difficulty of maintaining and supplying three navy vessels over an extended period of time without any permanent base rights in the region. As a result, China has been in discussions with Kenya and the Seychelles concerning the resupply of its ships. More importantly, China is well-advanced in building a nuclear submarine capacity and has begun to create an aircraft carrier task force. China currently must rely on the U.S. or Indian navies to protect the sea lanes that carry so much of its imported oil and minerals coming from Africa and the Persian Gulf. As PLA Navy vessels expand into the western Indian Ocean, they will bump up against both Indian and American naval ships and give rise to growing concerns about their objectives.

### Trade, investment and aid

China's total trade with Africa grew from \$6.3 billion in 1999 to \$166 billion in 2011, a twenty-sixfold increase. When all 54 African countries are taken into account, trade over the years has generally been in balance, but there are huge disparities in bilateral trade. Some 15 African oil/mineral exporting countries tend to have large trade surpluses with China, while more than 30 others, generally the poorer ones, usually run large deficits. Trade for the remaining African countries is about in balance. Roughly three quarters of Africa's exports to China come from five oil/mineral exporting countries: Angola, South Africa, Sudan, Libya and the Republic of the Congo. In 2009, 80 percent of Africa's exports to China consisted of metals and petroleum products; other raw materials accounted for another 10 percent. To its credit, China is trying to increase imports from poorer African countries by allowing 4,700 items to enter duty free from Africa's least-developed countries. So far, this has not had

a major impact on imports from those countries.

Most Chinese exports to Africa are high-value manufactured goods. Transportation equipment, machinery and electronic products account for half of its exports. China's exports are highly diversified, however, and include large quantities of textiles, footwear and plastic products. More than half of China's exports go to five countries: South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Liberia and Algeria. Increasingly, Chinese goods, especially low-end consumer products, are being sold by Chinese traders who have taken up residence in Africa and have an integrated supply system with friends and relatives in China. "Chinatowns" have appeared in cities such as Dakar (Senegal), Lagos (Nigeria) and Cape Town (South Africa). Some critics refer to China's trade and economic engagement in Africa as an example of neo-colonialism. While there are certainly elements of mercantilism, the charge of neocolonialism misses the mark. China's trading practices are not significantly different than those of other major trading partners. Nor is there any effort by China to establish control over African governments.

Chinese investment in Africa only began in earnest in about 2000, long after companies from Europe and North America had entered the market. In recent years, Western investment in Africa has slowed considerably while Chinese investment has grown rapidly. Even using China's conservative figures, investment increased by more than 60 percent between 2009 and 2011. China has established a number of institutions to encourage overseas investment such as the China-Africa Development Fund and the China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation. Initial Chinese investment in Africa was concentrated in mining, energy, construction and manufacturing. Increasingly, China is moving into finance, aviation, agriculture and tourism. More than 2,000 Chinese companies, many of them small and private, have invested so far in Africa. South Africa, Nigeria, Zambia, Algeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan account for about 65

percent of China's investment in Africa. It is important to note, however, that this constitutes only about 4 percent of China's global investment.

Information on China's direct investment in Africa lacks transparency and is sometimes conflicting. As of the end of 2011, China stated its total direct investment in Africa had reached a cumulative \$14.7 billion. The real figure is believed to be closer to \$40 billion because of investments that go through locations such as Hong Kong and the Cayman Islands and are not included in the official total. It is probable that in the last several years China has been the largest bilateral investor in Africa, outpacing investment from the U.S. or any single country in Europe. Because companies in the U.S. and those in several major European countries started investing in Africa much earlier than China, their cumulative investments exceed China's.

China's minister of commerce, Chen Deming, asserted at the 2012 FO-CAC meeting that China will urge its companies and banks to participate in cross-border and regional infrastructure projects, encourage regional trade facilitation and eventually establish a comprehensive and diversified China-Africa trade and economic cooperation system. He said it is China's goal to migrate more production to Africa to create more jobs on the continent. Seven special economic zones now under construction in Zambia (two), Nigeria (two), Mauritius, Egypt and Ethiopia are intended to help achieve this goal. Chen added that China will request more investment protection and double taxation agreements. It will promote more experience and knowledge sharing with African counterparts in development concepts, policies, laws, regulations and industrial park development. Finally, Chen promised to encourage Chinese companies to fulfill their social responsibilities and pay greater attention to environmental concerns.

China is even less transparent about the level of its assistance to Africa and there is considerable confusion as to what constitutes aid as defined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). China



*A Zambian worker digs a ditch in the Zambia-China Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone in Chambishi in the Copperbelt, the first zone of its kind in Africa. A Chinese worker is seen at the right, January 28, 2011. (THOMAS LEKFELDT/MOMENT/REDUX)*

does not provide annual aid figures for individual countries. Specialists who have looked at this issue carefully suggest that in the past several years, China has provided about \$2.5 billion annually in OECD-equivalent aid to Africa. This compares with about \$8 billion from the U.S. The European Union (EU) provides even larger amounts. Although China is not yet in the top ranks of aid donors to Africa, it now provides enough assistance to qualify as a significant donor.

The component of Chinese assistance that is receiving the most publicity is the growing number of multibillion dollar soft loans for large infrastructure projects such as dams, railroads, roads, bridges, pipelines and buildings. The terms of these loans are usually better than similar commercial bank loans, but they usually do not qualify as OECD-equivalent loans. Except for China's insistence on recognizing Beijing rather than Taipei, there are no political strings attached to the loans, making them especially attractive to African governments that are wary of Western conditionality. On the other hand, these multibillion dollar loans are almost always tied to construction of the project by a Chinese company, often a large state-owned company, and sometimes include a significant percentage of Chinese labor. Nevertheless, China filled a void left by Western companies and is

now reaping an enormous amount of praise from African governments for meeting one of their priority needs.

While one can only guess at the value of China's development assistance, China's State Council reported in 2009 that almost 46 percent of its aid went to Africa, the largest regional recipient. Between 2000 and 2009, China also canceled \$2.8 billion of debt owed by 35 African countries. There is no clear evidence that China is adding significantly to the debt of Africa's poorest countries. China is also increasingly engaged in multilateral aid organizations that tend to play an oversized role in Africa. It makes modest contributions to the United Nations Development Programme. Its voting share in the 188-member International Monetary Fund (IMF) has reached 6.1 percent compared to 16.5 percent for the U.S. and in the 187-member World Bank, whose mission is to help poor nations develop their economies, it is now at 4.42 percent compared to 15.85 percent for the U.S. China is also an active member of the African Development Bank and African Development Fund. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are exploring the possibility of establishing a BRICS development bank to compete with the World Bank and other multilateral development banks. To the extent that China is willing to cooperate with



## Is China an economic model for Africa?

There has been considerable discussion on the question of China as a development model for Africa. Often called the “Beijing Consensus” (as opposed to the “Washington Consensus”) the argument is made, usually by African leaders, that their countries need to follow the economic success of China. Interestingly, China’s officials have been careful to avoid pushing this idea. In fact, some have publicly warned that it would be inappropriate to emulate completely China’s experience.

These cautions are grounded in several good reasons. First, there are just over one billion people in Africa’s 54 countries compared to more than 1.3 billion in China. Nigeria, Africa’s most populous nation, has about 160 million people. A number of African countries have populations of less than one million. The huge population difference calls into question the wisdom of trying to replicate China’s development policy in any one country.

Moreover, China’s success has been based on a high national savings rate, a large pool of cheap and compliant labor, state-targeted capital investments, a coherent continent-wide market with a single currency, internal market integration, a relatively well-educated and highly motivated workforce with a common language, invest-

ment from the Chinese diaspora, developed state institutions and political unity within a single ruling party. No country in Africa has even half of these attributes.

There is also a negative side to China’s development: increasing income inequality between urban and rural areas, among regions and between the richest and poorest Chinese; growing pollution problems; and a willingness to sacrifice human rights and freedom of expression for the sake of national development. For that matter, there are different development models in effect across China itself. The rich coastal region operates on an industrial, export-dominated model, which is different from the economic model found in most of the interior. There are elements of Chinese development policy that might transfer successfully to some countries in Africa. One of them, the special economic zones, is already being established, as discussed earlier.

China’s success at poverty reduction is another program that may have positive lessons for Africa. There may also be some useful borrowing from China’s educational and agricultural policies. But the idea of transplanting China’s development model to any particular country in Africa is just fantasy. ■

other donors, it prefers to do so within the context of the UN system, where it has growing influence, rather than the Western-dominated OECD’s Development Assistance Committee.

China constantly reminds other donors that it does not attach political strings to its assistance, and this is generally true. On the other hand, should any African leader publicly criticize China’s internal policies on issues such as Tibet or the treatment of Uighur Muslims in western China, the impact on China’s aid to that country should be observed. There is no criticism either because African leaders agree with Chinese policies or because they do not want to risk a rebuke. In any event, African leaders prefer not to deal with political conditionality that is often imposed by Western countries. As one Chinese official told the author several years ago, “No African leader has ever asked us to attach conditions to our aid.” While China may not attach political strings, World Bank economist Ali Zafar concluded that China uses aid “principally to facilitate trade and

improve access to natural resources.”

President Hu announced at the 2012 FOCAC ministerial meeting that China will provide \$20 billion in credits to Africa over the next three years. This is double the pledge made at the 2009 FOCAC. He said the loans would support infrastructure, agriculture and the development of small businesses. Although he did not offer details of the loan terms, they probably are similar to previous loans based on attractive commercial terms with repayment in most cases made by the shipment of raw materials. In the case of infrastructure projects, Chinese companies will certainly obtain the contracts and there will likely be a percentage of Chinese labor. China also announced at the 2012 FOCAC that it will promote its currency, the renminbi, for settling trade and investment deals in Africa and encourage more countries to use it as a reserve currency. The Bank of Ghana has already taken this step.

### Other soft power

Although the official numbers tend to go up and down depending on who makes

the announcement, Hu Jintao commented at the 2012 FOCAC that China has trained about 40,000 African personnel in a variety of sectors and provided more than 20,000 government scholarships to students from African countries. The scholarship figure actually seems low inasmuch as China announced more than a year ago it is offering 5,000 scholarships annually. In any event, China is making a major government effort to attract African students. The U.S. no longer offers a comparable program except for the small Fulbright Program, started in 1946 to increase “mutual understanding,” although many African students come to the U.S. at their own expense or are sponsored by universities. China and countries in Africa have paired 20 universities as part of a project to link institutions of higher learning. China has also established 29 Confucius Institutes in 22 African countries. Most of them are at African universities where the institutes offer Chinese language, culture and history.

Since 1963, 18,000 Chinese medical personnel have served in 46 African countries. China claims these teams have

since the beginning of the program treated 200 million patients. In 2005, China began sending small numbers of young volunteers organized by the CPC Youth League. Between 2009 and 2012, more than 350 volunteers worked in African countries, most of them in health, medicine, education and technical fields. Although the program is tiny compared to the U.S. Peace Corps program in Africa, it is one more example of China's desire to engage at all levels of soft power.

Xinhua, China's official news organization has more than 20 bureaus

in Africa and regional centers in Cairo and Nairobi. It competes with Reuters, Agence France Presse and Bloomberg, and in some countries in Africa it is the only international news service. Xinhua produces both public news and "internal reference" reports for the Chinese government. Xinhua reporters work closely with counterparts in African governments' official news agencies. As a result, they are often among the best-connected and informed reporters. China Radio International (CRI) launched its first overseas-based

FM radio station in Kenya in 2006 and now has offices in Cairo (Egypt), Lagos (Nigeria), Nairobi (Kenya) and Harare (Zimbabwe). It broadcasts and hosts Web sites in Arabic, Hausa, Swahili, English and Chinese. China Central Television established a station in Nairobi at the beginning of 2012. China also announced in 2012 its intention to create a China-Africa Press Exchange Center in China to increase interaction between the correspondents of media organizations from both sides. ■

## Challenges for China in Africa

CHINA HAS MUCH working in its favor, but it faces some serious challenges. While China has developed especially good relations with African governments, it has done rather poorly with African civil society, opposition political parties and independent labor unions. This comes as no surprise. Civil society is weak in China. Because there are no opposition political parties and no independent labor unions, China does not understand how to deal with these components of society. On the other hand, China has generally been successful in interacting with the African commercial sector, including private companies.

### Democracy and human rights

The approach to African countries by the U.S. and China about democratization and human rights practices constitutes the most important difference in their respective African policies. It is China's policy to eschew political conditionality such as putting pressure on countries to improve human rights practices and to democratize. Most African governments welcome China's policy.

The U.S., on the other hand, sees this as a major part of its interaction with Africa. Autocratic African governments disdain this approach while democratic countries such as Botswana and Mauritius are more receptive. Even the democratic states, however, are sensitive to political conditionality. So long as the U.S. makes

this an important policy consideration, China will have an advantage in working with most African governments.

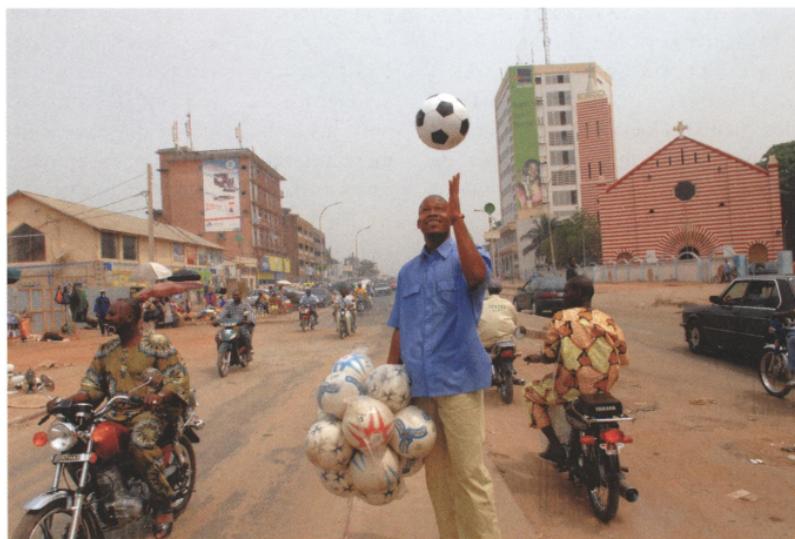
Where there is a strong civil society, these groups often deplore China's willingness to ignore human rights abuses and even prop up undemocratic regimes. African opposition political parties also feel ignored by China, although on those rare occasions when they overturn ruling parties they are usually quick to improve relations with Beijing because they welcome China's investment capital.

Strong labor unions in the few Af-

rican countries where they exist, such as South Africa and Nigeria, have been especially critical of China's impact on Africa. Textile imports from Asia, including China, decimated about one third of Africa's production several years ago. Labor unions, not always accurately, put the blame on Asian imports.

### Chinese imports

Africa is being flooded with inexpensive Chinese products and increasingly Chinese traders are displacing African merchants in the marketplace. Most



A Nigerian salesman of soccer balls made in China tosses one up into the air in an outdoor market in Cotonou, Benin. Chinese exports to Africa enter markets here and then go on to west Africa. February 13, 2008. (JEAN CLAUDE MOSCHETTI/REA/REDUX)



Chinese employees work at the Nile Textile Group factory in the free zone of Port Said, Egypt, on November 8, 2009. With cheap labor, investment incentives and unrestricted exports, one Chinese textile group has turned to Egypt as an ideal location to produce its ready-made garments, beating stiff competition at home. (KHALED DESOUKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

African consumers welcome the availability of Chinese products, although there are complaints about low quality, because they are usually cheaper than comparable products made in Africa.

Cheap Chinese imports make it difficult, however, for African manufacturers to turn a profit or, in some cases,

even remain in business. In addition, private Chinese traders with their integrated supply chains and willingness to work longer hours are displacing African counterparts, especially in west and southern Africa. This has resulted in growing public criticism of Chinese traders and created, in some cases, a public relations nightmare for China.

### The media

The collaboration between government-controlled media organizations in Africa and counterpart organizations in China has been noted. The downside of this arrangement is China's tendency to isolate the growing number of private sector media organizations in Africa. Some Africans are beginning to express concern about the motives of China's engagement in this sector. Private Kenyan media companies were displeased, for example, when a Chinese company received the contract to distribute media content digitally. They perceived the deal as giving China an opportunity to interfere in Kenya's press freedom, as this does not exist in China.

### Arms transfers

China is a major supplier of small arms and light weapons to Africa. Some of

these weapons end up in conflict zones. It is China's policy to keep them out, but their widespread availability guarantees that some get in. China has not shown much interest in monitoring these transfers and has not taken steps proactively to prevent their movement into African conflicts.

Western critics have expressed concern that China's multibillion-dollar loans to African countries may add excessively to African debt and undercut efforts by the West, the World Bank and the IMF to encourage good governance. While they do serve as a disincentive to improving governance, there is no solid evidence they are leading to excessive debt. Most of the loans go to resource rich countries that can afford to pay down the loans by shipping raw materials to China. They may be a problem, however, for countries without natural resources.

### Labor

Some Chinese companies have a poor record on worker safety and following local labor laws. A case in point was Chinese involvement in Zambian copper mines, where an explosion killed a number of workers and labor conflict has plagued the operation. In 2011, the opposition party even won the election in part by running on an anti-China platform. Once in power, however, the new government, after realizing the magnitude of China's investment in Zambia, quickly restored good relations.

Other issues that have confronted China in Africa are the selling of counterfeit and adulterated products. In the case of textiles based on African designs, manufactured in China and then resold in Africa with Made-in-Africa labels, the situation is only embarrassing. In the case of medicines that may not have the indicated amount of active ingredient, the product is dangerous. China is trying to stop these practices, but it is difficult to monitor the private sector and African countries are ill-equipped to identify the fake and adulterated products. China has also been criticized for some of its environmental practices in Africa. Again, it recognizes the problem and is trying to do better.



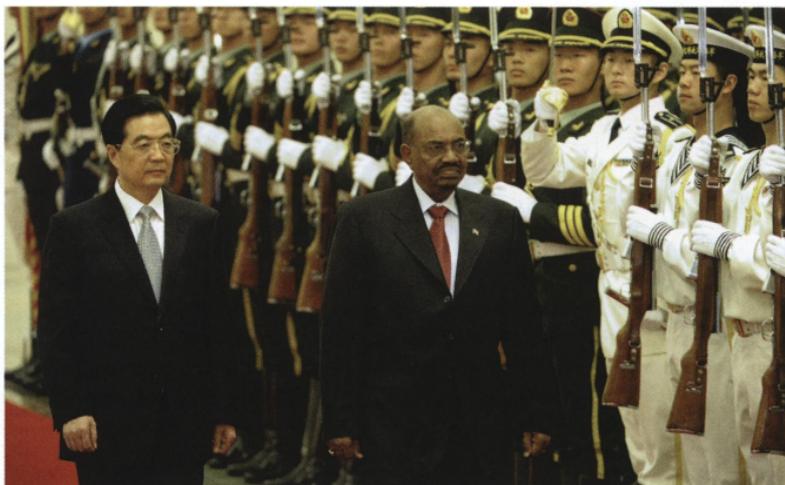
Members and supporters of the Kwazulu-Natal Christian Council and Diakonia Council of Churches held a morning prayer, "Arm-in arm against arms" on Durban's beachfront on April 19, 2008 to protest against the offloading of arms from China destined for poverty stricken Zimbabwe. International sanctions imposed by Western countries against Zimbabwe include a ban on weapon sales to the country. (RAJESH JANTILAL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

### U.S. policy options

Africa is essentially neutral territory for both the U.S. and China. While the U.S. has traditionally been more engaged in Africa in the post-World War II era than China, Beijing has come on strong in the 21st century and has surpassed the role of the U.S. in some countries and in some areas, such as trade. Both countries intend to remain engaged in Africa for the long-term. It was only about six years ago that the U.S. began to take seriously China's growing role in Africa. The options for U.S. policy in dealing with China are limited by global economic concerns and increasing restrictions on the international affairs budget. In addition, the issue is much more complicated than just China in Africa. A number of emerging nations such as India, Brazil, Turkey and Indonesia—and returning ones such as Russia—are joining the rush to Africa. It is hard to deal with competition from China in isolation.

The U.S. does not have the financial resources or the political will to counter China at every level of its engagement in Africa. In fact, such a policy would result in an unnecessary waste of scarce U.S. resources and probably achieve limited success. Nor does abdication of influence to China make much sense. Even with its diminished budgets, the U.S. still brings considerable resources to the table. Its aid to Africa is much higher than China's; its cumulative private investment is greater than China's, although the PRC's private and state-owned industry investment is growing faster. America's military reach is much longer than China's. Those African countries truly interested in establishing democratic governance will continue to look to the West and the U.S., not China, for moral and political support.

The preferred option for the U.S. is to compete in some areas and seek cooperation in others. Obvious areas for competition are in the export and contract sectors where companies from both countries routinely vie for business. China has been winning this competition easily over the past decade. It has some advantages in that many of its deals are packages involving government financing and political back-



Sudan's leader Omar al-Bashir (r.) and Chinese President Hu Jintao (l.) review a Chinese military honor guard during a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on June 29, 2011. (LIU JIN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

ing combined with the sale of Chinese products or bidding on large contracts by Chinese private and state-owned companies. Private American companies generally operate independently and are especially handicapped because there is much less U.S. Export-Import Bank financing (which helps sell American goods overseas) available, American companies must find ways to become more competitive and convince Congress to provide more government financing.

There will also be a continuing competition for serving as the example of the best way to govern a country. African governments see the advantages and disadvantages of the systems in the U.S. and China and rarely want to emulate one or the other in its entirety. But those governments that lean toward Western style liberal democracy, free and fair elections, a free press, an independent judiciary and the ability to express views openly find themselves in tune with the U.S. Others tend to follow the Chinese system.

The policy opportunity that has received the least attention in the U.S., China and Africa is the chance for China and the U.S. (and perhaps others) to cooperate to the mutual advantage of African states. The obvious areas where there already has been some cooperation include providing funding and personnel for UN and the 54-member

African Union (AU) peacekeeping operations in Africa, the antipiracy effort in the Gulf of Aden, policy coordination in response to African conflicts in areas such as Sudan/South Sudan and Somalia and the search for political stability generally in Africa. This cooperation should continue.

There could be much more collaboration in the area of development assistance. Both countries have major programs for combating malaria that would benefit from greater cooperation. China and the U.S. could pool their respective strengths in efforts to improve pandemic preparedness and to reduce neglected tropical diseases such as hookworm and schistosomiasis. Both countries also have significant experience in aiding African agriculture, which consumes the labor of 60 percent of the African labor force but is still not able to grow enough food to feed its people.

Some African governments seem to be preoccupied with the idea that it is in their interest for China and the U.S. to compete in Africa. This is valid in the case of trade, investment and bidding on commercial contracts. It does not apply, however, to efforts to further develop Africa and prevent disease. ■



Opinion Ballots  
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## discussion questions

1. Why does China have a long-term interest in Africa? Is it only a desire to extract oil and minerals to keep its industry producing at a high level? Will Africa ever become a major market for Chinese exports? Now that China is a global power, does it really need to pay so much attention to the political support of African countries? What are the potential implications of natural resource extraction on the environment?
2. Some writers and even U.S. policy officials have described China's engagement in Africa as an example of neo-colonialism. Is this a valid criticism? Why or why not?
3. Mercantilism is also a frequent charge leveled against China's policy in Africa. What is it? Is it appropriate to describe China's policy as one of mercantilism? Why or why not?
4. So far, China has not been a positive influence on improving human rights practices and encouraging democracy in Africa. Do you think this will continue to be the situation in the coming decades? Are there ways to encourage China to play a more positive role in this area? Are there ways that the U.S., working with African leaders, can move China more positively in this direction?
5. Should the U.S. be concerned about China's military buildup, especially its plans to expand the navy? If the PLA Navy becomes a frequent visitor to the western Indian Ocean, will this pose a threat to American security interests in the region? What should the U.S. do about it? Are there potential areas for U.S.-China naval collaboration in the western Indian Ocean?
6. What are the prospects of U.S.-China cooperation in Africa? There continues to be considerable criticism of China in the American press, among the public and on Capitol Hill. Will this skepticism prevent the U.S. from collaborating with China in Africa assuming the Chinese and Africans are even interested in such collaboration?
7. Do you agree with the author's assessment that, taken in its totality China does not serve as an appropriate economic model for Africa? If you disagree, what are the arguments put forth by some African leaders that China is the best model? In the final analysis, is the Beijing Consensus about as meaningless as the Washington Consensus?

## suggested readings

- Brautigam, Deborah, **The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa**. New York, Oxford University Press, 2009. 397 pp. \$21.95 (paper). Drawing on three decades of experience, Brautigam emphasizes the role of China's aid, trade and investment in Africa.
- Shinn, David H. and Eisenman, Joshua, **China and Africa: A Century of Engagement**. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. 524 pp. \$69.95 (hardcover). This is a baseline study of China and Africa that looks at all aspects of the relationship over the past century. It includes four regional chapters that cover China's bilateral relations with each country in Africa from the date of diplomatic recognition to the present.
- Taylor, Ian, **China's New Role in Africa**. Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009. 226 pp. \$24.00 (paper). Taylor argues that Beijing is using Africa not only as a source of raw materials and potential new markets but also to bolster its own position on the international stage. He traces the history of Sino-African relations and looks at key issues such as oil diplomacy, trade, human rights, arms trade and peacekeeping.
- For more news and analysis, we recommend the following Internet resources:*
- African Economic Research Consortium, <[www.aercafrica.org/publications/all.asp](http://www.aercafrica.org/publications/all.asp)>. This website contains a 54 page list of monographs dealing with economic issues in Africa, all free of charge. There are numerous academic papers on China-Africa topics included among them.
- Forum on China Africa Cooperation, <[www.focac.org/eng](http://www.focac.org/eng)>. This is China's official website for the Forum on China Africa Cooperation. It contains the key documents and speeches for the five ministerial and summit conferences that have been held so far. It also provides from China's perspective additional background information on its relations with Africa.
- South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), <[www.saiia.org.za/occasional-papers/blog.html](http://www.saiia.org.za/occasional-papers/blog.html)>. This website contains a long list of occasional papers of 20 to 30 pages each on a variety of topics dealing with China in Africa. It also has shorter policy briefings on China-Africa issues.
- Stellenbosch University, Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS), <[www.ccs.org.za](http://www.ccs.org.za)>. This website contains monographs on China-Africa relations, a monthly newsletter called China Monitor and a weekly briefing on China-Africa issues.

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