

➤ The Sino-Africa Relationship: Toward a New Strategic Partnership

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Sino-Africa relations have progressed significantly since the end of the Cold War. In 2006, the Chinese government declared that China will ‘...unswervingly carry forward the tradition of China-Africa friendship, and, proceeding from the fundamental interests of both the Chinese and African peoples, establish and develop a new type of strategic partnership with Africa’.¹ President Hu Jintao confirmed this sentiment at the Beijing Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in November 2006.² Still, this relationship has a long way to go. There is now a more balanced development in the political, economic and societal aspects of this relationship than in previous periods, meaning that the time has come for this relationship to transition to a new trend in terms of Africa’s international engagement.

This paper explores the historical developments of this relationship over the past six decades and its current state, to understand the basic logic of its development and provide a fresh angle of analysis. It then explores the future of this relationship, considering three significant transitions it has taken and the various measures the Chinese government has adopted throughout. It concludes by discussing the need for strategic thinking in promoting the Sino-Africa relationship and moving to new strategic partnership.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Although the economic interactions and cultural exchanges between China and Africa go back many centuries, then contemporary Sino-Africa relationship began with the formal establishment of diplomatic ties with Egypt in 1956. China and Africa have since then become all-weather friends that understand, support and help each other. Fifty-one of the continent’s fifty-four countries have established diplomatic ties with China thus far, the most recent being South Sudan in 2011. China and Africa have shared comprehensive consensus on major international issues, common interests and a willingness to deepen their cooperation. Frequent high-level reciprocal visits (known by some in Africa the ‘frequent flyer’ form of diplomacy) have promoted mutual understanding and trust, and have effectively boosted the development of bilateral ties. Currently, the first foreign visit by the Chinese Foreign Minister is always to Africa.³ China-Africa relations also contribute to both sides’ struggle for a higher international status.

1 Chinese MOFA, *China’s African Policy*, 2006, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t230615.htm>.

2 Hu Jintao (speech, Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Beijing, China, 4 November, 2006), <http://www.focac.org/eng/lttda/dscbzjhy/SP32009/t606840.htm>.

3 While 2011 was an exception because of the Sino-America summit held in mid January. However, if counting the lunar New Year, the first trip of Chinese Foreign Minister in 2011 was still Africa.

Like the political dimension, the economic dimension of this relationship also has developed rapidly. Sino-African trade volume increased from \$12 million in 1950, to \$34.74 million in 1955 and to \$250 million in 1965. China has attached great importance to friendly cooperation with African countries since its Open Up and Reform policy at the end of the 1970s, and Sino-African trade has seen annual growth of 3.6 percent on average. Bilateral total export and import volume kept growing throughout the 1990s, during this time it was as not unusual to see increases of over 40 percent. In 2000, bilateral trade volume for the first time exceeded \$10 billion, and in 2008 it reached a record \$106.84 billion. While it decreased in 2009 due to the global financial crisis, Sino-Africa trade regained momentum in 2010, with \$126.9 billion in 2010 and then \$166.3 billion in 2011. It is estimated that the figure may exceed \$200 billion in 2012. In 2008, the number of African countries with which China had more than \$1 billion in trade reached 20.⁴ This shows that China's engagement with Africa is broad and extensive.

For the last six decades, cultural exchanges have also increased between China and Africa, which has helped to promote cooperation. As of 2005, China entered into 62 inter-governmental agreements on cultural exchanges and cooperation with 45 African countries, under which the two sides have organised over 200 cultural exchange delegations and hosted hundreds of cultural or art exchange events.⁵

To summarise, the Sino-Africa relationship has had three phases of development in the past six decades. The first phase ran from the early 1950s to the adoption of the Open up and Reform policy in the late 1970s. During this period, both China and Africa focused on political development because of their newly gained independence. The aim of this bilateral relationship was political mutual support, with anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism as the core.⁶ In addition to providing political and military support, China built Tazara, the railway linking Zambia to Tanzania, which helped free Zambia from its dependence on trade routes to the sea dominated by white-minority ruled Rhodesia.

The second phase took place in the 1980s. After adopting Open Up and Reform policy at the end of 1970s, China turned to the industrialised developed west for its abundant capital and development experience. China still attached great importance to Africa. For example, the Chinese Premier, Zhao Ziyang embarked on series of diplomatic overtures in December 1982 to eleven African countries, promoting the 'Four Principles' of Chinese cooperation with Africa: equality and mutual benefit, stress on practical results, diversification in form and economic development.⁷

China shifting its eyes back to Africa after the end of Cold War. Along with the new thinking of seeking external support for domestic development, China strengthened the economic dimension of this relationship - or use Ian Taylor's term, China began to re-engage actively with the continent 'now on different terms'.⁸ Sino-Africa trade has grown since this period, as has China's investment in Africa. Investment patterns have had three phases since China began to invest in Africa in the 1980s. Chinese businesses first relied heavily on government-sponsored assistance projects to gain a presence in local markets. Due to the limited strength of Chinese enterprises, most investment projects were small. Between 1979 and 1990, China invested \$51.19 million in 102 projects in Africa, equivalent to \$500,000 per project. In 1990s, China's investment in Africa expanded within the context of improved investment environment in Africa and the emergence of Chinese businesses. Since 2000, China's investment in Africa has entered a fast track facilitated by both governmental policies and market drivers. China has made a sizeable investment in Africa over the past 30 years.

4 'China-Africa Trade Up 45% in 2008 to \$107 Billion,' *Xinhuanet*, 11 February, 2009.

5 'Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation,' 21 September, 2006, http://english.focacsummit.org/2006-09/21/content_899.htm.

6 It is important to note that there were few exceptions with Angola as the example. See Steven F. Jackson, 'China's Third World Foreign Policy: The Case of Angola and Mozambique, 1961-1993,' *The China Quarterly*, 142 (1995), 388-422.

7 Judith van de Looy, 'Africa and China: A Strategic Partnership?' *Working Paper African Studies Centre* 67 (2006), <http://www.ascleiden.nl/pdf/wp67.pdf>.

8 Ian Taylor, 'China's Foreign Policy Toward Africa in the 1990s,' *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36/3 (1998), 443-460.

According to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, China invested \$2.1 billion in Africa in 2010. Africa has become a major investment destination for Chinese enterprises, where over 2,000 Chinese companies have invested in various sectors including electronics, telecommunications and transport. Chinese investment in Africa represents a small (three to four percent in 2011) yet growing piece of total Chinese outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) worldwide. Africa is the third largest recipient of Chinese OFDI after Asia and Europe. By the end of 2011, the cumulative Chinese direct investment net stock in Africa reached \$14.7 billion (a 60 percent jump from 2009) (Figure 2).

Figure 1: African share in Chinese FDI, 2003-2011⁹

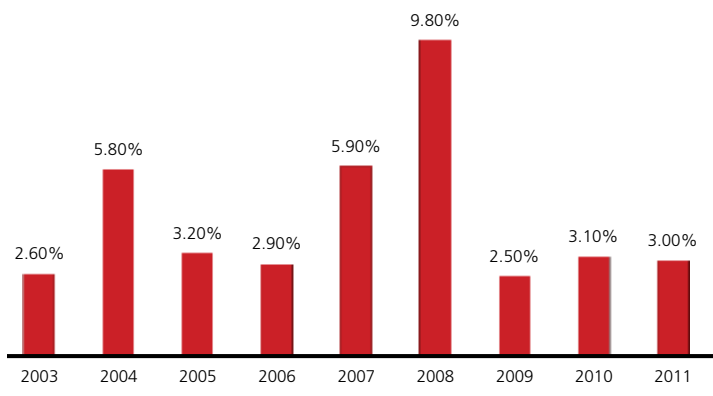
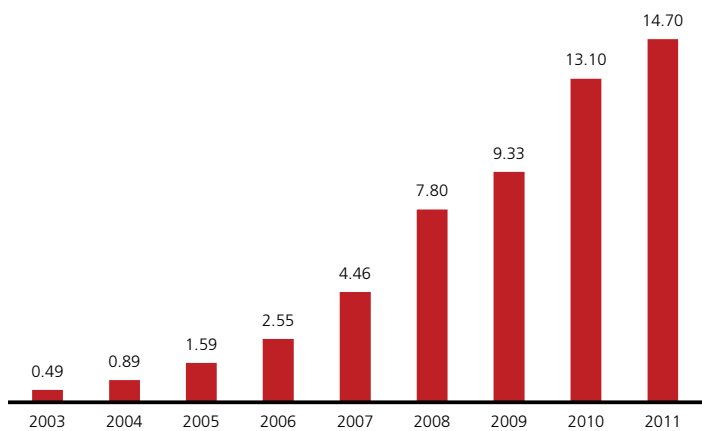


Figure 2: Accumulated net stock of China’s investment in Africa, 2003-2011 (billion USD)¹⁰



In short, the Sino-Africa relationship during the past six decades went from imbalanced to balanced in regard to its political, economic and cultural dimensions. Political relations developed quite well in all three periods, economic relations gained momentum largely in the third period and cultural relations eroded with the development of economic ties.

⁹ Chinese MOFCOM.
¹⁰ Ibid.

CURRENT SINO-AFRICA RELATIONS

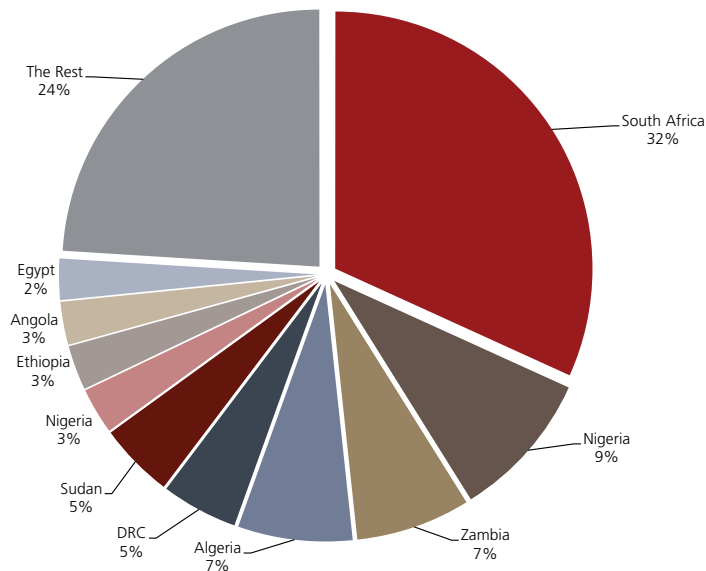
China has gradually upgraded its Africa policy in the 21st Century with the establishment of FOCAC in 2000. Six years later, Sino-Africa relationship reached a level as it defined its Africa policy for the first time with four principal guidelines. These include:

- Sincerity, friendship and equality (the political dimension)
- Mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity (the economic dimension)
- Mutual support and close coordination (the international dimension)
- Mutual learning and seeking common development (the cultural dimension)¹¹

The Sino-Africa relationship gained new momentum under these principles. According to a 2011 report from African Development Bank, 'China is a valuable trading partner, a source of investment financing, and an important complement to traditional development partners. China is investing massively in infrastructure, which helps alleviate supply bottlenecks and improve competitiveness'.¹²

Most western analysts believe that the main driving force behind China's investment in Africa is for natural resources and thus focuses on a few resource rich countries.¹³ Chinese investments actually reach 49 African countries, the fraction of coverage is about 83 percent (second to Asia and much higher than the average rate of 71 percent). These figures also exceed those of other powers in Africa, including the US, EU, India, Brazil, Turkey and South Korea. For example, in 2010, the top 10 African recipients included South Africa (31.8 percent), Nigeria (9.3 percent), Zambia (7.2 percent), Algeria (7.2 percent), The Democratic Republic of Congo (4.8 percent), Sudan (4.7 percent), Niger (2.9 percent), Ethiopia (2.8 percent), Angola (2.7 percent) and Egypt (2.6 percent), comprising 76 percent of all Chinese investment in Africa (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Distribution of Chinese investment in Africa, 2010¹⁴



11 Chinese MOFA, *China's African Policy*, 2006, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t230615.htm>.

12 R. Schiere, 'China and Africa: An Emerging Partnership for Development? – An overview of issues,' *Working Paper*, No. 125, May 2011, African Development Bank Group, p. 17.

13 For a more detailed analysis and discussion of the opposing views regarding China's involvement in Africa, see Sarah Raine, *China's African Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2009).

14 Chinese MOFOCM.

As to diversification, China has invested in African sectors, including agriculture, mining, manufacturing, service, infrastructure, capability building and human resources. According to a report by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, during the period from 1979 to 2000, 46 percent of Chinese investment in Africa went to manufacturing (15 percent to the textile industry), 28 percent to mining, 18 percent to services and seven percent to agriculture. In 2009, only 29 percent of Chinese investment went to mining. In contrast, in 2010, 56.6 percent of US investment in Africa went to the mining sector, more than 30 percent to services and less than 10 percent to manufacturing and agriculture combined.

China has also built platforms to promote its relationship with Africa. The most important one is the FOCAC. Established in 2000, the FOCAC brings together the 51 states that have diplomatic relationships with China.¹⁵ Since its establishment, FOCAC has gradually become an important platform for collective dialogue and an effective mechanism for enhancing practical cooperation between China and African countries. Since its establishment, FOCAC has held five ministerial conferences (the latest in July 2012) and one summit at the level of heads of state and government (in 2006). It has arguably provided the political umbrella for the boom in bilateral relations.¹⁶

Table 1: Five FOCAC Ministerial Conferences

Year	Place	Results
2000	Beijing	Beijing Declaration of FOCAC Program for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development
2003	Addis Ababa	Addis Ababa Action Plan (2004-2006)
2006	Beijing	Beijing Declaration Beijing Action Plan (2006-2008)
2009	Sharm El Sheikh	Declaration of Sharm El Sheikh Sharm El Sheikh Action Plan (2010-2012)
2012	Beijing	Beijing Declaration Beijing Action Plan (2013-2015)

¹⁵ See Li Anshan, 'Why the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation-Analysing China's Strategy in Africa,' *Foreign Affairs Review*, 29/3. FOCAC was initiated by African states. The Chinese emphasise its bilateral character. It is interesting to note that foreign observers - and many Africans – see FOCAC as multilateral as it encompasses more than 50 African states. For an assessment of FOCAC's political role, see S. Grimm, 'The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation - Its Political Role and Functioning,' *CCS Policy Briefing*, Centre for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch, May 2012.

¹⁶ S. Grimm, May 2012.

China also engages with Africa through multilateral organisations, including the UN, the IMF, the World Bank and the G20. Multilateral organisations give great relevance to the South-South cooperation mechanism, G7+China, the Non-Alignment Movement and BRICS. The latter has great potential in terms of its ability to support African development. The invitation of South Africa to the BRICS and recent discussions on the establishment of a BRICS development bank highlight this, as well as the theme of the most recent BRICS summit ('BRICS and Africa') held in March 2013.

The rapid development of Sino-Africa relationship shows a trend of diversification of actors and interests. Aside from state actors like the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Commerce and other central governmental ministries and agencies, many other actors like state-owned companies, provincial agencies, province-owned companies, private companies and even individuals have a role. For example, national companies do not dominate China's investment in Africa. Rather, SMEs account for more than 85 percent of the 2000 Chinese companies that operate in Africa.¹⁷

Table 2: Selected features of support provided by Africa's development partners¹⁸

	AFRICA'S SHARE OF AID BUDGET (%)	FORM OF SUPPORT	CONDITIONS IMPOSED	MODE OF DELIVERY	DEBT RELIEF PROVIDED	MONITORING MECHANISM
China	30–50	Grants and loans	Non-policy conditions	Project	Yes	Forum on China–Africa Cooperation
India	1.5–3.6	Grants and loans	Non-policy conditions	Project	Yes	India–Africa Forum Summit
Brazil	27–30	Co-financing, often through triangular cooperation	Non-policy conditions	Project	Yes	Republic of Korea
Turkey	6*	Grants		Project	No	Turkey–Africa Cooperation Summit
Arab countries	11*	Grants and loans		Project	Yes	
South Africa	95	Co-financing, also through triangular cooperation	Non-policy conditions	Project	n.a.	

¹⁷ Vice Minister Wang Chao Addressed in China-Africa Small and Medium Enterprises Trade & Economic Exchanges and Investment Cooperation Seminar, MOF/COM, September 9, 2010.

¹⁸ UNCTAD, *Economic Development in Africa Report 2010: South-South Cooperation: Africa and the New Forms of Development Partnership* (Geneva: UNCTAD, 2010), 67.

Many scholars have explored the reasons for the transition behind the Sino-Africa relationship. Some point to China's equal treatment of Africa, embodied in a non-interference principle and no-string-attached assistance. While China has received criticism for instrumentalising its traditional emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference to carve out economic deals,¹⁹ most of the other developing countries imitate China in regard to their engagement with Africa (Table 2).

FUTURE TRENDS

The most significant aspect in the progress of the Sino-Africa relationship regards its transition from a linear or single-dimension relationship to a multi-dimension relationship, with the support of institutionalisation efforts (particularly FOCAC). This development facilitates the current transition and also is of great importance to its sustainable development.

The transition includes the following three aspects. First, the Sino-Africa relationship is shifting from one based emotional/ideological intimacy to one based on economic interests. The historical emotional/ideological intimacy is fading due to various developments, including the passing away of the older generation of leaders that share the experiences of national liberation movements with older Chinese leaders, the rising number of new western-educated and the growing number of people-to-people exchanges that have both positive and negative impacts on mutual understanding between two peoples. With considerations of economic interests rising and emotional/ideological intimacy fading, economic indicators have gradually become the main criteria for measuring bilateral relations.

The second transition regards the natural consequence of the growing importance of economic consideration — the change from economic interest promotion to economic interest protection. The Going Global Strategy has had tremendous achievements and needs to plan for sustainable development, which requires attending to a lot of issues. In addition, while wars and conflicts have decreased, instabilities in African continent continue to present hurdles for international investment, trade and even humanitarian aid. The outbreak of the 'Arab Spring' highlighted the importance of protecting China's overseas economic interests and national citizens. Based on the principle of 'People First', protecting overseas Chinese and economic interests remains a top priorities of China's foreign policy in general and China's Africa policy in particular.

While the first two transitions have begun to take place, the third transition in Sino-African relations will take place in the next few years or decade. This transition regards the change from asymmetrical to symmetrical interdependence. The current Sino-African relationship is an asymmetrically interdependent, as China depends more on African natural resources and Africa depends more on opportunities associated with China's rising and Sino-African relation development. Several developments have potential for undermine the current interdependence between China and Africa. The first is the slowing down of China's economic growth - a natural development after three decades (the growth rate for the first quarter 2012 was about 7.5 per cent). While China has slowed down, Africa has accelerated. Six African countries have taken a place on the list of the 10 fastest growing economies in the first decade of 21st Century, and seven African countries have a place on the list of the 10 fastest growing from 2011 to 2015. A third development will likely change the interdependence between China and Africa: Africa has returned to the traditional powers' strategic considerations and has entered that of emerging powers. We have witnessed the recovery of EU-Africa Summit and Japan's TICAD, and the creation of the India-Africa Summit, South Korea-Africa Summit, India-Africa Summit and Turkey-Africa Summit.

19 J. Holslag, 'China's New Mercantilism in Central Africa,' *African and Asian Studies* 5/2 (2006).

Aware of these developments and the challenges that they potentially pose for Sino-Africa relations, the Chinese government has adopted some counter-measures. First, to enhance the Sino-African emotional intimacy, China is shifting its development assistance for Africa from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’ infrastructure assistance. The 3rd and 4th FOCAC Ministerial Conference included eight measures for promoting Sino-Africa relations, many of which provide support for ‘hard’ infrastructure in Africa, like roads, studios and conference centres. However, the 5th FOCAC Ministerial Conference attaches more importance to ‘soft’ ones like education, people to people exchange and joint research. Taking sub-fora building as example (see Table 3), the 5th FOCAC Ministerial Conference Action Plan (2013-2015) mentioned 10 sub-for (including those to create, to strengthen and institutionalise). Of these 10, five (in bold) are ‘soft’ or related to China’s soft power in Africa.

Table 3. Sub-Fora mentioned at 5th FOCAC Meeting

TO CREATE	TO STRENGTHEN	TO INSTITUTIONALIZE
China-Africa forum on cooperation between local governments	FOCAC Legal Forum	FOCAC Think Tanks Forum
China-Africa Radio and Television Cooperation Forum	Forum on China-Africa Financial Cooperation	China-Africa People's Forum
China-Africa Energy Forum	FOCAC Science and Technology Forum	China-Africa Young Leaders Forum
FOCAC Cultural Ministers' Forum		

Second, to protect its overseas rights and interests, China will give more importance to security. The 5th FOCAC Ministerial Conference declared that China will launch the ‘Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security’, deepen cooperation with the African Union and African countries in peace and security in Africa, provide financial support for African Union peace-keeping missions in Africa and the African Standby Force and train more officials in peace and security affairs. For example, China is participating six out of seven UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. It sends more than 1500 peacekeepers to the African continent, the biggest contributor of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Third, China focuses more on supporting sustainable development support than searching for natural resources in promoting symmetrical interdependence. Considering the prospect of symmetrical interdependence, President Hu Jintao declared at the 5th FOCAC Ministerial Conference that, China ‘will expand cooperation in investment and financing to support sustainable development in Africa’ and ‘support the African integration process and help Africa enhance capacity for overall development’. This includes giving support to the Millennium Development Goals, the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP), the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa and the Presidential Infrastructure Championing Initiative, as well as extending aid-for-trade to African countries, increasing the China-Africa Development Fund to \$5 billion and implementing the ‘African Talents Program’.²⁰

20 Hu Jintao, ‘Open Up New Prospects for A New Type of China-Africa Strategic Partnership’ (speech, Opening Ceremony of the 5th Ministerial Conference of The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Beijing, China, 19 July, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The rapid development of the Sino-Africa relationship reveals on-going transitions that facilitate the move towards a new strategic partnership. While the relationship has manoeuvred well through this trend, there is still an urgent need for longer-term strategic planning to steer and sustain the future development of Sino-African relations.

First, China needs to build a stronger social basis for Sino-African relations. Lacking a non-governmental capability, current people-to-people exchanges have more negative than positive contributions. China should strengthen NGOs and civil society groups to nurture these relations, create better platforms for public diplomacy and diversify diplomatic skills and stakeholders.

Second, China should make concrete contributions to African peace and security. On the one hand, China now has a blueprint for peace and security cooperation between the two sides without a detailed strategy or plan. On the other hand, initiating peace and security cooperation poses a risk of violating China's principle of non-interference. Thus, China needs a strategic plan for such an initiative, with multilateral institutions as the main platform.

Finally, China must pave the way for future symmetrical interdependence between China and Africa. China needs to adapt, strengthen and protect its relationship, and learn how to build a real friendship between a would-be 'developed' country (China) and a real 'developing' continent (Africa), how to consolidate the global South and how to be a reliable friend and partner for developing countries. The future is bright, but there is still long way to go. ■