



China's Interests in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the dramatic growth in the relationship between Africa and China, that is one of the major part of the profound transformations taking place in the international relations. The Chinese quest for resources and markets was reciprocated by the African quest for cheap products and investments. African countries were keen to substitute Western and European investment. This paper used qualitative research methods to analyze the Chinese interests in the African region, the challenges for China in attaining desirable outcomes of the Sino-African partnership, and the opportunities China gets in the African region. The study also explores how China's non-interference policy appeals to African leaders seeking investment without political conditions. Furthermore, it evaluates the long-term sustainability of Chinese involvement in critical sectors like infrastructure and energy. The paper concludes by reflecting on the implications of the Sino-African alliance for global power dynamics. It also highlights the growing cultural and educational exchanges between China and African nations as a soft power strategy. Additionally, the paper assesses how this evolving partnership influences Africa's bargaining power in the global arena.

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1.0 Introduction

China and Africa's interaction share numerous political, strategic, and diplomatic interests but economic interests are at the top of the list. Both China and Africa reciprocate each other as China is attracted to the natural resources that are possessed by Africa and Africa is in dire need of capital to support its fragile economy. Most of the African states have vast reservoirs of natural resources, which are source of the economic output for the states. Africa is also a big market opportunity for China to sell the inexpensive goods and services created by the Chinese companies in the struggling less-developed countries. On the other side, Africa is purchasing inexpensive Chinese goods and working in collaboration with Chinese workers and companies to help their struggling economy hold a better position in the region. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Sino-African relations were political and ideological. But in the twenty-first century, the partnership is economic as the world is being economically developed through cooperation and the interdependence of financial giants and underdeveloped regions.

China's interests in Africa are always misquoted by international community. The international media interpreted these investments as China's debt trap policy or a new colonial agenda. Critics believe that China is only focusing on extracting natural resources from Africa, affecting African strategic culture and importance but still giving nothing to Africa. The investments and loans are merely the diplomatic stunt for the portrayal of the soft power of China.

Besides other research gaps and weaknesses in the information already present in the research, the application of the theory of "new liberalism" to the Sino-African case in this research will help to understand the theoretical insight of the study. Since long, work has been done on the drivers of the Chinese agenda in the African region. However, this research focuses on the internal and external challenges that China has faced in pursuing its agenda in Africa and the opportunities offered by Africa to the Chinese government in return for their investment.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- It intends to analyze Sino-African relations in the contemporary era.
- The study aims to examine the political, economic, and military interests of China in the African Region
- To identify the great power competition in the African Region

1.3 Research Questions

- Why China has increased its influence in the African region?
- What are the main political, economic, and military interests of China in the African region?
- What are the main challenges and opportunities for China in the African region?

1.4 Significance of the Study

As far as the significance of the study of this research is concerned, regions are shaping the world order as the entire world order is being regionalized. Global powers are constructing the regions. Africa is involved in this politics of regionalism as they consider it one of the major solutions to their economic, social, and political problems. China is enhancing its role in the African states for its own national interests and foreign policy agendas. This research will emphasize all the

opportunities that are offered to China to uplift its burgeoning economy by utilizing its investments in Africa and gaining natural resources. It also explains all the challenges that China can face in the African region by the international fora. This study will analyze the fact that global powers are shaping regional politics and how much their aid is beneficial for the less developed and developing states of the world.

2.0 Literature Review

(Mensah, 2013) states in the research paper “China's Foray into Africa: Ideational Underpinnings and Geo-economics Interests” in the “African Journal of Political Science and International Affairs” that China's foreign policy agenda in Africa is its transformation from its principle of supporting the third world countries to immense focus on the geo-economics, geopolitical and geostrategic interests in the region. China's participation in the economic matters of African states will help Africa in its quest for sustainable development and overcoming its over-dependence on Western exports. This will result in the end of marginalized status of Africa in the international economy and politics.

(Jakobson, 2009) states in his article “China's Diplomacy towards Africa: drivers and constraints” that China's diplomacy is always changing as diplomats have to adjust their initiatives according to the state's needs and changing international conditions. Chinese diplomats are always concerned about the fair image of the state in the international arena whereas Chinese companies are always looking for export markets for their commodities and resources.

(Maidan, 2006) states in his article “China's Africa policy: business now, politics later” that in recent times, Chinese businessmen and politicians have shown greater focus in Africa just to enhance capital flow in their state. Beijing is also focused on the principle of south-south cooperation and new world order in her relationship with Africa. China-Africa relationships are not only an economic foreign policy shift but also a diplomatic shift. China is trying to maintain its focus on the economic domains as political interference in the internal issues of Africa is not on the Chinese foreign policy radar right now.

(Haroz, 2011) stated in one of his articles named “China in Africa: Symbiosis or Exploitation” that China's major role in Africa is based on three major factors including the Chinese model, superpowers, and China's third world policy. The first part of the Chinese model relates to efforts for power capturing and the second part deals with its experience of development as China was able to make record-breaking economic and social progress in a short period. One of the main reasons behind Africans trusting China's agendas blindly was that they were not satisfied with the initiatives imposed by Western nations or by their government to modernize or prosper them. The second component of China's model is superpowers as China was struggling hard to degrade the efforts made by the United States and the Soviet Union in the African region. Through its policy of third-world countries, China was trying to challenge Western domination in the third world and make its international organization workforce.

(Morris, 2014) stated in his book “The Chinese Engagement in Africa” that China's white paper further cleared the strategic vision of China towards the African region, which is based on principles of friendship, common prosperity, mutual support, and common development. This

shows that China-Africa ties are a win-win approach in which China is trying to gain economic benefit and provide economic opportunities to African states without interfering in their domestic affairs. China is also expecting African states to accept and respect China's One China Policy, which means that Taiwan is an exception to China's noninterference policy

(Kushambe, 2016) states in the article "China Africa Relations: What Lies Beneath?" that it is believed by Western media that China is trying to flourish its economy at the expense of African natural resources with zero gains for the African region itself. Some of the critics believe that China is responsible for underdevelopment, and poor industrialization of Africa as China has destroyed Africa's manufacturing capacity by selling them cheap and mal-functioning products.

3.0 Methodology

In this study, qualitative data analysis is used by incorporating the techniques of exploratory, descriptive, and analytical research. The exploratory type of research helped in studying the topic mainly focused on the dimensions in which the in-depth knowledge has not been explored yet. The descriptive research sheds light on the whole context of the Sino-African ties. The analytical research is used to give the critical insight of topic of research. The document analysis is done to gain understanding and knowledge to the topic by reviewing and evaluating the already existing documents and information. In this research, secondary sources of data like books, journals, articles, research papers, reports and other electronic sources related to the topic are used to extract required information to answer the research questions.

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 China-Africa Ties Through the Lens of Neo-Liberalism

The Sino-Africa relation through the spectrum of neoliberalism theory of international relations involves the work of neoliberal trade and investment policies of China in Africa, and the strategies shaped by them to get their interests.

According to neoliberals, freedom ensured in the market by the government would enhance the economic productivity of the state. China has always ensured zero trade barriers regarding the presence of African products in their markets and always gained incentives to the local products in the foreign markets. The free flow of goods and services between China and the African region results in better results of investments and businesses (Mohan G. , 2013).

Neoliberalists believe that the enterprises owned by the state should be privatized and should be deregulated by ending government control over the industry. This will enhance the economic efficiency and competition between industries within and outside the state. Following this principle, the phenomenon of privatization was initiated in the late 1980s in South Africa to create capitalist economic regimes in the region and to drive the governments on a profit basis (Zajontz, 2023).

Neoliberals believed that the market mechanism should be decided by the supply-demand factor. The Chinese firms enjoy great freedom in the African region in terms of investments, market strategies, and in shaping supply-demand factors in economic relations. The supply-demand factor enhances the economic productivity and efficiency of the state (Yunsheng, 2023).

According to neoliberalism, the institutionalization of international affairs can increase

peace and cooperation in the world. China has also applied this neoliberal principle in its partnership with the African region. The establishment of institutions such as the Forum for China and Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), African Union (AU), and BRICS has increased opportunities for peace and cooperation between China and Africa. (Stein, 2009).

China has followed the principle of neoliberal globalization through its “Going-Out Strategy”. BRI is one of the prime examples of the practical application of this strategy. Neoliberalists believe that economic interdependence makes cooperation more valuable as the cost of war rises due to common economic interests. For instance, China and Africa reciprocate each other needs and interests. Both China and Africa have to avoid any sort of conflict to secure their economic interests. In this way, economic interdependence mitigates the chances of conflict (Turner, 2007).

4.2 China's interests in the African Region

China's interests in the African region are multi-dimensional as they involve the economic, security, political, and strategic factors of the relationship between states. Safeguarding the financial interests of the Chinese government is the main aspect of the security and political agendas in the African region. China's interests in the African region are not static as they always mold following the opportunities they are seeking in the region and the extent of goals they can achieve through the partnership. China's constant stalking of natural resources and markets for their local products and enterprises results in more enhanced involvement in the African region and the African region with its struggling economy had no other option but to welcome Chinese assistance and investment in its countries. China-Africa relationship has evolved greatly with time. During Mao's era, the relationship was based on geopolitical and strategic agendas. But now the partnership includes security, political, and economic interests.

4.2.1 Access to Natural Resource

The economic interests of China are shaping the state's foreign policy in the 21st century. China's economic and population boom in the last few decades has forced Chinese governments to look for opportunities across the globe for investment and natural resources to meet the energy needs. Africa's geographical location, environment, and natural resources make it the most important region in the world. It is stated by Former Senegalese president, Abdoulaye Wade, that “China has a much greater sense of personnel urgency of development in Africa than many Western nations”. (Nantulya, 2020)

4.2.2 Opportunities for Strategic Partnerships and Alliances

Africa provides opportunities for the Chinese government to sustain its image and status as a global power by being with partners who will never be a hurdle in Chinese progress and support China in its competition with its opponents. China has signed numerous strategic deals with Africa to gain control or influence over the natural resources of the African region to meet its growing economic and public needs. China's involvement in the African region extends from natural resources to human resources, commercial diplomacy to health diplomacy, infrastructure sector to the agriculture sector, keeping in consideration its mission of creating long-term strategic partnerships based on mutual understanding and trust

4.2.3 Market Expansion and Infrastructure Development

Africa offers opportunities for the Chinese government to expand its market and enterprises across the region. The Chinese goods and services are widely used in the African region. China provides the products at cheaper rates to the African region. The Chinese private sector and State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) are dominating most of the economic activities such as trade and investment in the African region. Africa increased the consumer base for Chinese products and diversified the supply chains of Chinese goods and services. The greater the consumer base, the greater the expansion of the market. The Chinese government has signed Infrastructure projects with almost 38 African states, which shows the Chinese footprints in the infrastructure sector of the region.

4.2.4 Taiwan's Isolation in African Region:

China has always tried to isolate Taiwan internationally and regionally since its independence. China is trying to utilize its economic aid and investment in the African region as a diplomatic tool to eradicate even a little support for Taiwan's presence in Africa. Currently, six African states are having ties with Taiwan including Eswatini and Somaliland. In competition with Chinese economic aid and investment, Taiwan is providing technological assistance and specialized knowledge. Most of the African states switched their ties from Taiwan to China because of the Chinese economic assistance and growing global influence. The Cold War between China and Taiwan to get diplomatic support forced them to make relations all across the globe (Abidde, 2022).

4.2.5 Influence over United Nations decision-making

The importance of Africa was witnessed in the struggle between China and Japan for their permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. China needs the help of the African states in its struggle to reform the structure of the international institutions and make the international environment favorable for Chinese policies. With the help of African states, China tries to propagate its agendas on international or multilateral forums. Africa with 28 percent of the vote in the United Nations, is the largest bloc in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as compared to Asia, America, and Western Europe with 27%, 17%, and 15% of the votes respectively. Due to this reason, Africa is very important for China in its efforts to reshape global institutions and creation of China-dominated global institution.

4.2.6 Multilateralism

The Sino-Africa partnership and its strategy of multilateralism depict the continuously changing dynamics of international affairs and cooperation, the importance of dialogue and negotiation in crisis, and combined efforts in solving global issues (Nantulya P. , 2023). Global South coalition, dominated by China, is challenging the United States-led coalition and Africa are major aspect of the Global South coalition. China is a key representative and spoke person of the developing countries on many international forums. The alliance with China will not only benefit Africa with Chinese favor, but they will also gain the support of the states that have bilateral relations with China. China will try to make a stronger ideological affiliation with Africa as this will help China to penetrate deeper into the African region.

4.2.7 The Strategy of Multiple Track Diplomacy

The strategy of using multiple-track diplomacy by China in the African region will help China get the support of African non-state actors and civil society so that they will pressure the government to conduct cooperation of mutual benefits and sustainable development with China. Using multiple-track diplomacy will enhance the influence and presence of China on the African territory. China is using commercial diplomacy, health diplomacy, infrastructure diplomacy, resource diplomacy, and any other possible sort of diplomacy in Africa to get their desirable outcomes in the African partnership.

4.2.8 China's Military and Security Interests:

The international power dynamics have been changed with the increased Chinese military footprints on the African land and water. The Chinese desire for global dominance has fueled the need to create military influence in the region. There are many reasons for the military presence of China in Africa. One of the major reasons is the security of Chinese economic investments, assets, and personnel present on African soil. In other words, the military presence is ensuring the sustainability of the financial interests of China. China's military is also helping the African military to enhance its defense capabilities through joint military exercises, exchange of military equipment, military training, and arms sales. China has participated in the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Africa for regional and global security efforts. The first overseas military base of China was built in Djibouti in 2017 in the Horn of Africa with US\$590 million, showing the intentions of China of shifting its focus towards military development

4.2.9 China's Economic, Trade and Investment Interests

The Chinese economic interests are not only confined to the oil industry but all the natural resources present on African soil. China has its eyes on Zambia's copper, Zimbabwe's platinum, Gabon and Namibia's fishing sector. China is a savior for the resource-rich countries no matter how politically and economically unstable they are. China has invested in every sector of Africa including infrastructure, technology, agriculture, fisheries, and extraction and this shows that Africa has welcomed Chinese investments with open arms. Africa was in dire need of capital and investments in their country because of their struggling economy without keeping in consideration the possible economic and political repercussions. The search for a market for Chinese local products, strategic and geopolitical interests, securing diplomatic support, and maintaining the status of emerging global power in the changing global order causes the Chinese government to increase its presence and influence, not only in Africa but all across the globe (Lahtinen, 2018) China has become the largest trading partner of Africa and the largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the region because of China's multilateral projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The trade of Africa is dominated by the private enterprises of China. The African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), launched in 2021, results in the expansion of the regional growth chain, and access of China to the African markets. It is expected that the African market will expand to \$6.7 trillion with the help of ACFTA. The trade agreements will increase international as well as trade among the African states and create new opportunities for local, regional, and international investors to invest in the new market in the region.

4.3 Challenges for China in its partnership with African region

The challenges China is facing in Africa are coming from different directions as from the Western world, international media, African region, and also from within China. China has a long way to go for its African policy. The Western states and media are always trying to portray the negative narrative of the Chinese policies and using a brain drain strategy among the African public. China has to overcome these challenges to protect the large sum of capital they have invested in the African region otherwise its economic, political, and diplomatic interests would be at stake and this would give a huge blow to the Chinese as well as the African economy. The major source of competition between both the major powers is the similarities in their interests and demands from the African region. (Schoeman, 2008)

4.3.1 U.S influence in the African Region:

The African region has become a zone of competition after Chinese involvement in the region. The major powers such as China and the United States have been competing in the region and trying to get more control in the region over the resources and economic capabilities. Some of the African states align with one major power but some align with both major powers to avoid being part of the major powers rift as the African region has been a battleground for the proxy wars between the United States and Russia during the time of the Cold War and suffered a lot. In 2021, Chinese trade with Africa reached \$250 billion, surpassing the United States. China is investing in every sector of the region whereas the U.S investment has limited scope. The infrastructure projects led by China increased from 13% to 31% from the period of 2013 to 2020 in the African region. Whereas, Western firm's involvement declines from 37% to 12% from 2013 to 2020 (J Jacobs, 2019)

4.3.2 Taiwan as a Challenge

The Taiwan versus China rivalry is expanded all across the globe and the African region is no exception in this regard. All the 53 African states accept the Chinese government except Eswatini. Taiwan's economic influence has been diminishing in the African region for the last two decades. Taiwan has nothing to offer to Africa other than a few development projects, scholarships, some Taiwanese industries manufactured products, and technological assistance. On the other hand, multi-billion economic assistance and investments by the Chinese government have reduced the marginal economic involvement of Taiwan in the geo-economic domain of the African region. China is also using “coercive diplomacy” tactics such as investment restrictions, trade barriers, and tourism restrictions for the states not standing with its “One China Policy”. China always tries to threaten the states recognizing. For example, China offered \$40 billion to Nigeria to remove the Taiwanese trade office from the Nigerian capital. China has been taking the “carrot and stick policy” under consideration while dealing with the Taiwan issue (Hsieh, 2022).

4.3.3 Debt Trap Diplomacy Allegations

The Western media and states impose the allegations of “debt trap diplomacy” on the Chinese government regarding their African policy. The debt trap is an international financial propaganda of pouring large sums of capital into the struggling states, which is hard for them to repay, and in return for capital, the lending state will get access to strategic resources, markets,

and political and diplomatic influence on the borrowing state. The debt trap diplomacy is used in the case of underdeveloped and struggling states as the economic assistance will help them to get rid of economic backwardness, and diplomatic and political marginalization, and the military presence will ensure the security and survival of the states. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is considered the beginning of the propaganda of the debt trap by China

4.3.4 Environmental Sustainability Challenges

Resource depletion has the potential to generate harm in every sector of the African states. China's policy towards Africa includes environmental protection initiatives but are not implemented fully and bear minimum fruit. China prioritizes its domestic economic growth over environmental sustainability in major cities. Western critics claim that China has always utilized low environmental standards while operating in Africa (Adekunle, 2021). The unchecked mineral extraction would lead the African states to the harms of deforestation and desertification. The illegal wildlife trade and smuggling cause the loss of biodiversity as the rare species of animals and plants are being harmed. It is stated by the wildlife trade monitoring group that 20000 African elephants have been killed in 2014. China has also worked on some environmental policies and action plans in the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). The pollution-intensive industrial work should be mitigated and low carbon emissions should be ensured.

4.3.5 Security Challenges

The Chinese commitment to the UN peacekeeping mission results in an increased security presence in the African region. The long-lasting regional peace results in long term economic activities in the region. The rising status of China as a world hegemon raises the expectation of the international and regional community for its increased role in the peace and security of the world. China played a crucial role in the UN peacekeeping missions in some African states such as Chad, Congo, South Sudan, South Africa, Liberia, and Namibia. The security threats affect the geostrategic and geopolitical relations between the states. The security presence in Africa during Cold War times was just limited to arms supply to African states and non-state actors. However, due to economic expansion in the African region, China has no other option than to make strong military footprints in the region to secure its interests, assets, and citizens. China's security and military presence in Africa has undergone a vast transformation, from being part of peacekeeping missions to building the first overseas military base in the region and fighting the security threats such as piracy, terrorism, and human trafficking (anthony, 2015)

4.3.6 Terrorism and Piracy Efforts

The rise in terrorism has also raised security concerns for 2000 Chinese enterprises, a million Chinese citizens residing there, and billions of dollars of investment. China has to hire private security companies to protect manufacturing sites, extraction sites, shipments and vessels, and investments. There are numerous cases of kidnapping for ransom of Chinese citizens. The global expansion strategies of China like the "Going Out strategy" and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) get minimum security from the threats posed by the local terrorist groups.

The Gulf of Aden/Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea are considered hubs of maritime crimes and piracy activities in the world. China is playing a constructive role in countering piracy attempts

in Africa by cooperating with multinational task forces and ensuring the maritime security of its interests and investments.

4.4 Opportunities for China in Africa:

China has left no corner of this world to explore the opportunities that are beneficial for its economic growth and political status. China is helping the African region in industrialization to mitigate its dependence on the Western powers. African region got the **opportunities** for employment, trade and investment, resource extraction, and industrialization. After all this, china also got so many opportunities to enhance its sphere of influence in the world. (Barry Sautman, 2007).

4.4.1 Opportunities for China in the Western Indian Ocean

China has invested in the countries that are neglected on the international level in the Western Indian Ocean region such as the Island of Seychelles. The Western Indian Ocean region, includes major sea lanes of communication and choke points such as Bab al Mandeb and Strait of Hormuz, connecting the Indian Ocean with the Red Sea and Gulf. The western Indian Ocean region is considered the center of the Maritime Silk Road. China has been constructing ports all across the region to increase its cooperation in the region (Zou, 2021).

4.4.2 Opportunity for Economic Diversification

China has expanded its economic activities in the African region which has diversified Chinese businesses. Economic diversification has been the foreign policy goal of a great number of trading partners in the African region. Africa has also diversified its economic potential by expanding its sectors and their advantages. The trade-enabling infrastructure has enhanced China's economic advantage over the other economic major powers. Economic diversification has increased the economic interests of the African region and the other major powers in other crucial sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, mining, and wildlife.

4.4.3 Trade and Investment Opportunities

China is investing in infrastructure development such as the construction of roads, and railways. The investment opportunities are not only beneficial for state-owned enterprises but also for the private sector. Today, over 10,000 Chinese-owned businesses are operational in the African region. China has invested in every sector including infrastructure, extraction, mining, agriculture, industrial sector, telecommunication, and real estate (Anton Eberhard, 2013). Several private Chinese companies have also invested heavily in Africa. For example, Huawei, a Chinese leading global telecom services provider, has invested a total of USD1.5 billion and employs 4000 workers in Africa. China's trade with Africa has also grown steadily during the past decade reaching USD160 billion in 2011 from just USD9 billion in 2000. China's share in Africa's total trade has been phenomenal, rising to 13% from 3% a decade ago.

4.4.4 Opportunities for Cultural Expansion

China is utilizing soft power tactics to portray its image as a fair superpower. China is also using "cultural diplomacy" in the African region. The Chinese government currently allots 5 billion Chinese yuan, every year as the official for cultural diplomacy with African countries. This sum is normally divided into two parts: the first is for people-to-people exchange (including

cultural officials, performing troupes, academic exchanges, artists and performers sent to each other) and the second is for regular cultural donations (including books, booklets, DVD players, stage stereo systems, light apparatus). Regular Chinese scholarships for African students are announced so that the young generation learns about the modernized world of the 21st century. The Chinese language learning courses are initiated in the African region to mitigate the communication barriers between the public of China and African states.

4.4.5 Opportunities to Expand Geopolitical Influence

China has increased its geopolitical influence in the African region after the successful implementation of its international economic policies. The geopolitical influence of China in the African region helps China in expanding its sphere of influence across the globe because China will get the political and diplomatic support of 54 African states in the internationalization of its ideologies and policies. This will also help China in availing the opportunities of strategic partnerships in the region and international domain. The geopolitical agendas of China in the African region are basically to ensure the continuity of its economic initiatives. In short, the geopolitical influence of China will create opportunities for economic, military, and political cooperation (Mohan M. P., 2010)

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The similarities in the interests bring the states closer; the same is the scenario with China and Africa. The scope and intentions of Chinese investments in the African region cannot be fully emphasized due to the continuously changing demands and desires of the Chinese government to fit itself in the transforming global order. But China is keeping strong goals of portraying the Sino-African ties as a “win-win partnership” in front of international and regional powers as well as to their homeland. African states consider China as a catalyst for economic recovery, freedom from Western colonial strategies, and the global importance of Africa.

Asim Rasheed: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

Amad Rashid: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Fahmeed Idrees: Methodology and Revision

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