

INTRODUCTION

China-Africa ties have expanded beyond trade and investment in extractive industries to engagement in telecommunications, infrastructure, manufacturing, finance, media, agriculture and peace and security issues.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While not as well documented as Africa's links with Europe, China-Africa relations date back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) when a series of expeditions reached East Africa under the command of Admiral Zheng He, at roughly the same time as the [Portuguese were exploring Africa's Atlantic coast](#).

However, formal political relations were only forged during the early years of the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949), which intersected with the first wave of African independence. The [Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence](#) were originally established in 1954 by India's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai. [These principles rose to popularity during the 1955 Bandung Conference](#) – which paved the way for the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement – and have become an important basis for China's foreign policy and its relations with Africa and Asia. China's support for Africa's liberation [also played an influential role in shaping the outcomes of newly independent states](#).

2015 is also 60 years since the 1955 Bandung Asian-African conference, a turning point of world history when for the first time representatives of the former colonised nations united and proposed alternatives to a world order dominated by superpowers.

- [Remarks by African Union Commission Chairperson, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma](#), 30 January 2015.

...The relationship between ourselves and China is founded, as the Prime Minister reminded us recently, on four basic principles: treating each other sincerely and equally; consolidating solidarity and mutual trust; jointly pursuing inclusive development; and promoting inventive practical cooperation between our countries. The Standard Gauge Railway is an especially clear application of these principles...

- [Remarks made by Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta](#) during the signing of the Standard Gauge Railway Agreements, 11 May 2014

Historical Highlights

1956: Egypt was the first African country to establish official diplomatic relations with China. China currently maintains diplomatic relations with 54 African states, with [Sao Tome e Principe \(2016\)](#) and South Sudan (2011) being the most recent.

1971: China secured a permanent seat on the UN Security Council with support of 26 African states (34% of the General Assembly votes).

1970-75: The most celebrated Chinese development assistance project in Africa was the Tazara railway, requested by the previous Zambian president Kenneth Kuanda and his Tanzanian counterpart, Julius Nyerere.

[China's 'Opening Up and Reforms Policy'](#) under Deng Xiaoping was launched in late 1978, beginning a period of incremental change towards its domestic economy and producing massive development gains over the next three decades. This was followed by an African tour under Premier Zhao Ziyang during December 1982-January 1983, where the '[Four Principles on Sino-African Economic and Technical Co-operation](#)' was announced, reformulating solidarity aid to 'mutual interest' as the basis for economic co-operation. China's economic involvement in Africa remained miniscule up to the mid-1990s, but this began to change with [CNPC's investment in Sudan's oil sector in 1995](#).

For more on historical relations see SAIIA's 2009 China-Africa Toolkit: http://www.saiia.org.za/images/stories/research/chap/chap_toolkit_200909.pdf.

CONTEMPORARY RELATIONS

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (2000-present)

The Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was launched in October 2000 in Beijing as a tri-annual collective dialogue platform for co-operation between China and Africa. In many ways it is an exemplary form of South-South co-operation, demonstrating the strengths of utilising an incremental and practical approach to tackling development issues of mutual concern. FOCAC has been hosted in:

- 2000 – FOCAC I, Beijing, China
- 2003 – FOCAC II, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- 2006 – FOCAC III, Beijing, China ([China's first Africa Policy](#) published)
- 2009 – FOCAC IV, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt
- 2012 – FOCAC V, Beijing, China
- 2015 – FOCAC VI, South Africa ([China's second Africa Policy](#) published)
- 2018 -- FOCAC VII, Beijing, China (forthcoming)

The 2012 FOCAC, convening against the backdrop of the ‘Arab Spring’ and regime change in Libya, brought home the risks to growing Chinese economic interests operating in Africa. The ministerial meeting was most notable for its promotion of a [China Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security](#), which sought to provide financial assistance, capacity building and other forms of institutionalised support for Africa’s efforts at fostering peace and security on the continent. It reflects new thinking within Beijing, despite its official ‘non-interference’ policy, about the necessity of engaging more deeply in stability and peace building in Africa in light of difficulties experienced in a [range of countries](#). Significantly, the African Union (AU) was made an observer of the FOCAC process during the ministerial meeting, paving the way for closer forms of collaboration across all sectors.

It is Africa’s challenge to take advantage of China’s willingness to engage the continent on a range of political and economic issues. Creative interventions and creating appropriate regulatory frameworks on Africa’s part can expand and consolidate the...partnership...

- China, Africa and South Africa by Garth le Pere and Garth Shelton (2007), p. 159.

The most recent iteration, the sixth FOCAC, took place in Johannesburg on 4-5 December 2015, as the first *summit* of its kind to be hosted on African soil. It convened against the backdrop of China’s slowing economic growth and the concurrent fall in commodity prices, which have impacted negatively on bilateral trade and investment. These new realities, termed ‘the New Normal’ by President Xi Jinping, also put the spotlight on other areas and opportunities for collaboration as opposed to the commodity fuelled growth of the past two decades. The current [action plan](#) covers a range of areas (including retained focus on energy, transport infrastructure development and trade). Interestingly, social concerns have also featured more prominently such as industrialisation, health, agriculture, people-to-people links and [habitat protection and issues surrounding wildlife](#) (see more on SAIIA’s work on the [ivory trade in 2016](#)). Still it remains to be seen the extent this recognition will translate into action.

Another important landmark in South Africa-China relations was the assumption by South Africa of the Co-Chair position of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) at its 5th Ministerial Conference in Beijing in July 2012. South Africa sees China as a key partner in the implementation of some of the grandiose infrastructure and other development plans on the continent.

- [Media briefing remarks](#) by Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, South Africa’s Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, 27 November 2014.

The most reported outcome has been the \$60 billion (R861 billion) development package pledged by President Xi to the continent. Importantly, this pledge needs to be further unpacked as it includes various *kinds* of support (for more on the breakdown see: [Brautigam and Xue](#)). Much of this is likely to be implemented at a bilateral level – with the particular details announced during high-level visits (like the traditional [annual visit](#) to the continent by the Chinese Foreign Minister at the beginning of each year). At the same time, China is strengthening its parallel engagement with the [African Union](#) and sub-regional organisations like the East African Community.

It is likely that FOCAC VI will give reference to new issues and circumstances, such as China's economy's "new normal," the recent Ebola outbreak in parts of Africa, the changing peace and security environment, and the seriousness of the global illegal wildlife trade. Of particular interest are the actual details about how these issues will be approached and what specific links are made between them and China's broader global initiatives.

- Yu-Shan Wu, excerpt from commentary on FOCAC VI, '[The China Africa Relationship: Crossroads or Cliff?](#)', China File, 24 November 2015.

Read more on FOCAC: Background and 2015 Focus Priorities; [China-Africa: a maturing relationship? Growth, change and resilience.](#)

China's Evolving Engagement: the global financial crisis and beyond

For Africa, an important marker of the transformation from a 'Northern' dominated world to the rise of emerging powers was the global financial crisis which began in late 2008. The ability of the Chinese economy to weather the crisis, in contrast with the negative impact on the European and US economies, marked a fundamental shift in favour of leading developing countries like China. African countries have sought to emulate China's 'development lessons' and integrate these ideas into [their own national planning programmes](#).

China is increasingly replacing the West as the new face of globalisation in Africa.

- [China in Africa](#) (2007), Chris Alden p. 129.

With the onset of a new generation of Chinese leadership in 2012, Xi Jinping sought to articulate foreign and economic policies commensurate with China's global status. This focused initially on the promotion of a '[China dream](#)' that would resonate with other, particularly developing-world societies, and was coupled in 2013 to the launching of the '[One Belt, One Road](#)' initiative. This is an ambitious economic project aimed at building a network of overland trading routes linking China to Europe ('the Silk Road Economic Belt') and a rising Asia to developing Africa ('21st Century Maritime Silk Road'), which emphasises regional connectivity through ports and infrastructure projects. As the initiative is still in the making, there remains concern over the (uneven) [impact on Africa](#).

More concretely, the tumbling demand for commodities and the fall in oil prices has since 2015 had a profound impact on [African economies](#). With Chinese demand gradually tapering off and the expected rise in domestic consumption still unrealised, the belief that China could serve as an alternative source of capital, markets and innovation is under review. While optimists still believe that the Chinese will in the long term want to shift some manufacturing to the continent, the requisite conditions of low factor costs, suitable infrastructure and proximity to key markets remains an unmet and therefore a serious obstacle. Under these circumstances, the onset of China's 'new normal' is bringing about a recalibration in Africa back to the strategy of diversification of its trading and investment partners as the continent searches for an economic paradigm suited to its development

needs. The question is whether African states and societies will be able to respond adequately to such new changes, as well as new trends in their relations with China.

Nevertheless, both sides appear committed to weathering the negative impacts of the current global economy, as evidenced by the high-level meetings held to discuss the implementation of FOCAC projects. For instance in July 2016, a coordinators' meeting on the Implementation of the follow-up actions of the Johannesburg Summit, was held. (It is acknowledged that between FOCAC in December 2015 and the July 2016 follow-up event, 243 cooperation agreements – to the value of \$50.7 billion – was signed). Also, advancing from a memorandum of understanding signed in January 2015 to connect African capitals through railway, air and highways; a Five-Year Action Plan to implement the MOU was signed in October 2016. Notably, a \$3.4 billion Chinese-financed railway between Djibouti and Ethiopia opened the same month.

The Chinese dream is about prosperity of the country, rejuvenation of the nation, and happiness of the people. It reflects both the ideal of the Chinese people today and our time-honoured tradition to seek constant progress.

- Extract of a speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping at UNESCO, 28 March 2014.

THEMATIC AREAS

Public diplomacy / Media

The roll-out of China's global public diplomacy campaign emerged against the backdrop of the consequences of its expanding outward trade and diplomatic relations, such as growing [Chinese migration to Africa and the controversial activities of some Chinese firms operating on the continent](#). Since the late 2000s, a range of instruments has been used to communicate with African audiences, such as university exchanges, [think tank collaborations](#), establishing a [Chinese media presence in Africa](#) and Confucius Institutes. These initiatives communicate China's culture and global outlook, yet their impact remains largely undetermined.

2015 provided an additional layer for China's outward communication with the continent. While South Africa hosted FOCAC VI for the first time, it was also '[China's Year in South Africa](#)', where China was promoted through a range of cultural activities (South Africa hosted its own country year in China in 2014). The public diplomacy component of China's engagement is a complex mixture of commerce and official objectives that are increasingly difficult to differentiate – and has become an important aspect of its global engagements to garner support for initiatives like the 'One Belt, One Road' and to temper concerns over its rapid rise. The more China continues down the path of interacting with publics abroad, the more it will likely need to respond to a multifaceted African public.

China-Africa: bilateral relations

As noted in the original [Toolkit](#), the bulk of China's diplomatic and economic interactions with Africa are conducted through bilateral arrangements. Within that context, however, a veritable kaleidoscope of Chinese actors exist, including government ministries, state-owned enterprises, provincial agencies and firms, multinational and small/medium private companies and even individuals. In this context, greater attention is being given to African actors as key determinants of the relationship. While the first wave of China-Africa scholarship focused mainly on the general shape of relations between China and the continent more recent work has emphasised deeper analysis of the varieties of Chinese engagement at country and sectoral levels – for example '[Zambia, Mining and Neoliberalism](#)' by Alastair Fraser and Miles Larmer (eds.), Notable amongst these are studies examining China's bilateral ties with [Angola](#), [Chad](#), [Mozambique](#), [Namibia](#), [South Africa](#), [Sudan](#), [Zimbabwe](#) and comprehensive regional studies of Eastern and Southern Africa.

We will take the responsible attitude and kick off pioneering work in some countries, listing Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Republic of Congo as the demonstration and pioneering countries for such cooperation. We will help South Africa in its efforts to become the locomotive in Africa's industrialization. We will take Egypt, Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Uganda, Rwanda, Togo, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Senegal as our priority partners for production capacity cooperation.

- Ambassador Lin Songtian, Director-General of African Department of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [2016 speech](#) at the African Session of the Forum on Global Production Capacity and Business Cooperation

China's policies will naturally lag behind the rapidly evolving economic, social and security environment in Africa and China will need to adjust accordingly. Though committed to meeting these fluid challenges, China will never waiver in its principles of treating Africa with equality, respect and mutual development.

- Li Anshan, China Security, 3:3, 2007, p. 87.

China-Zimbabwe relations are neither a microcosm of China-Africa relations nor support for a rogue state or pariah regime.

- [Zhang Chun](#), SAIIA Occasional Paper 205, 2014, p. 20.

Of all the China–Africa relationships, the one that merits the most attention is Beijing's ties with Zimbabwe. This is largely due to the controversies associated with the contents and multi-dimensional extent of this relationship. These controversies, emanating largely from Zimbabwe's domestic politics and the international reaction to them, have placed China in situations where its diplomacy in Africa has had to be explained and sometimes readjusted to ensure that it does not lose the friendship of other African countries that view events in Zimbabwe differently.

- [Abiodun Alao](#), SAIIA Occasional Paper 202, 2014, p. 5.

Overview of trade and investment statistics

China's surging trade and investment into Africa over the last two decades, though slowing recently, underpins much of the contemporary interest in its engagement with the continent. While trade is still dominated by Chinese exports of finished products and its imports of African resources, the investment picture in some countries is beginning to reflect Chinese foreign direction investment (FDI) into transport infrastructure, manufacturing, media, property and services. At the same time, it should be noted that there are data discrepancies in China-Africa trade and investment figures (as noted for example by [Gelb, Brautigam](#) and the [Centre for Chinese Studies](#)). See below figures and information:

Trade

- China's [Ministry of Commerce](#) reported that due to the phased declining price of global commodities, the trade volume between China and Africa was at US\$147.6 billion in January-October 2015. This was a decrease of 18% year-on-year. However exports from China to Africa increased by 5%, reaching US\$89.9 billion.
- Another [report](#) found that China's 2015 imports from Africa decreased by 38% amidst the economic slowdown, while its exports to Africa rose 4%.
- China-Africa Trade data between [1992-2015](#) can be found on the China Africa Research Initiative's website
- China-Africa Trade data between [2006-2015](#) can be found on Tralac's website

Investment

- China's [Ministry of Commerce reported](#) that between January-October 2015, the direct non-financial investment flow into African countries was US\$1.9 billion, which was down 40% compared with the same period in 2014. Although the investment growth was slow to some extent, many major projects invested in Africa also obtained positive progress (for more information visit this [link](#)).
- View the following articles that disaggregate China's investments: '[China's direct investment in Africa: Reality versus myth](#)'; '[China's Aid and Investment in Africa: A Viable Solution to International Development?](#)'; '[5 Myths About Chinese Investment in Africa](#)'; '[Chinese investment into Africa soars in 2016](#)'.

Will the [South Africa-China] partnership continue to be one based on a complementarity of interests; a shared understanding of the developmental challenges faced not only by South Africa and China but also by the African continent as a whole? Or will commercial competition and even geo-strategic concerns eventually impose limitations on collaborative action abroad? Can South Africa and China reconcile the disjuncture between an official policy based on common interests with public perceptions that emphasise differences and distance? These questions, among others, are part and parcel of the challenges facing South Africans and Chinese...

- [Chris Alden and Yu-Shan Wu](#), SAIIA Occasional Paper 199, 2014, p. 28.

*How can the enthusiasm of the Mozambican elite towards the Chinese presence in **Mozambique** be harnessed to bring benefits to the country, and not just for a handful of individuals?*

- Sergio Chichava, in C Alden & S Chichava (eds.), *China and Mozambique: from comrades to capitalists* (Jacana 2014), p. 207.

China and Africa's Peace and Security

China's expanding role in African peace and security is the outgrowth of its increased economic exposure to changing conditions on the continent. While Beijing's non-interference principle effectively constrained action in the past, from 2004 onwards there is a gradual transformation in key areas of security co-operation. This includes a willingness to participate directly in UN peace support operations, to contribute to the UN's Peacebuilding Fund and the AU peace missions and engage in sensitive conflict mediation in the [Sudans](#). At the same time, the expansion of [Chinese arms sales to Africa](#) is complicating its role in the region.

Security cooperation came on the agenda at FOCAC III in 2006 with the launch of China's first [Africa Policy White Paper](#), which highlighted, amongst other things, the need for an expansion of peace and security cooperation. Subsequently in 2012, peace and security was made the highlight of FOCAC V. As noted, the event convened against the backdrop of the 'Arab Spring' and regime change in Libya (bringing home the risks to growing Chinese economic interests operating in Africa). This led to the establishment of the [China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security](#). Modest steps towards expanding Chinese involvement in African security and peace keeping were to follow, such as Beijing's role in fostering mediation between the government and warring factions in South Sudan in 2013. Significantly, the African Union's observer status has paved the way for closer forms of collaboration in areas including security.

Again peace and security was placed high on the agenda at FOCAC VI. This is illustrated by President Xi's pledge of a further \$60 million to be made available for the African Standby Force and African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC). Xi has also vowed to continue to participate in UN peacekeeping missions in Africa (more notably contributing 8000 troops to the UN in September 2015) and support African countries' capacity building (such as the areas of defence, counter-terrorism, riot prevention, customs and immigration

control). Taken together, this marks a significant departure from the hallowed principle of 'non-intervention', which had once characterised Chinese approaches to African security questions.

Read more: [On Becoming A Responsible Great Power: Contextualising China's Foray into Human Rights and Peace & Security in Africa](#) (2016)

Compiled by: Chris Alden & Yu-Shan Wu
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