

Original Paper

China-Africa Relations from the Perspective of the Belt and Road Initiative: Motivations, Characteristics and Prospects

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Abstract

The Belt and Road Initiative is a major diplomatic strategy implemented by the Chinese government and a public good of worldwide significance. Africa has unique advantages such as abundant strategic resources and considerable market potential, and has become the focus of major countries. Strengthening China-Africa cooperation is of great significance to building a new type of international relations and building a community with a shared future for mankind. In recent years, China has become a major force in promoting Africa's development. With its huge size and increasing strategic influence, China is playing an increasingly important role in global development with global development initiatives and the Belt and Road Initiative as its starting point. This is especially true in Africa: activities such as Chinese investment in Africa, as well as cooperation with other countries such as the United States, will enhance the capacity of low-income African countries to achieve sustainable development.

Keywords

The Belt and Road Initiative, China-Africa relations, prospects

1. Introduction

Over the past 50 years, China-Africa economic and trade relations have made great progress. China has been Africa's largest trading partner for 13 consecutive years, with bilateral trade volume increasing 20-fold in 20 years, reaching more than US\$254 billion in 2021. China is Africa's fourth-largest source of investment, with direct investment in Africa totalling US\$3.74 billion in 2021. Between 2000 and 2019, Chinese financial institutions reached 1,141 loans worth US\$153 billion with African governments and state-owned enterprises. In 2020, the total value of non-contracted projects by Chinese enterprises reached US\$38.3 billion. China has established 25 economic and trade cooperation zones in 16 African countries and continued to invest heavily in Africa during the pandemic. By the end

of 2020, 623 enterprises had settled in these economic and trade cooperation zones, with a total investment of more than US\$7.35 billion. Since its establishment in 2000, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation has gradually formed a mechanism-based comprehensive strategic partnership platform led by the Summit and operated on multiple tracks.

2. Background

The Belt and Road (B&R), short for Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, was proposed by the Chinese President in September and October 2013 to build the New Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Relying on the existing bilateral and multilateral mechanisms between China and relevant countries, and with the help of existing and effective regional cooperation platforms, the Belt and Road Initiative aims to borrow the historical symbols of the ancient Silk Road, hold high the banner of peaceful development, actively develop economic cooperative partnerships with countries along the route, and jointly build a community of interests, destiny and responsibility with political mutual trust, economic integration and cultural tolerance.

This year marks the 68th anniversary of the opening of diplomatic relations between China and Africa. In 2006, China and Africa established a new type of strategic partnership, in 2015 China and Africa established a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, and in 2018 China and Africa decided to build a closer China-Africa community with a shared future. China is the largest developing country, Africa is the continent with the largest concentration of developing countries, and China-Africa cooperation has a profound foundation and broad prospects. At present, the world is facing major changes unprecedented in a century, the reform of the global governance system and international order is accelerating, and the destinies of the people of the world have never been so closely linked as they are today. At the same time, hegemonism and power politics still exist, and wars, terrorist attacks, famine and epidemics are emerging one after another. Under such a new situation, the common interests of China and Africa are expanding, mutual needs are increasing, and the development of China-Africa relations is of great significance.

3. Motivations

China is the largest developing country in the world, and Africa is the continent with the largest concentration of developing countries. Similar historical encounters and common historical missions have closely linked China and Africa, which have always been a community of common destiny. China-Africa cooperation is carried out on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, is a special opportunity for both sides, and is an external stage and strategic fulcrum for each other's development. Growth has slowed relatively slowly in recent years, and it can be said that Africa's economy is on the rise. Politically, the 54 African countries have played an important role in the competition between great powers and are a strategic maneuvering ground for China to compete with other major powers.

After World War II, Africa also became an important part of the Third World, and the rise of the Third World became the third power under the competition between the two superpowers during the Cold War. Professor Zhang said that among the four levels of international power today, most African countries are in the fourth level, and their international strength is weak. Low international standing. In the changes and enhancement of Africa's international status in the global rectification, the Chinese factor is crucial. China's aid to Africa has shaken the political influence of the West in Africa, made African countries see their own hopes, and stimulated the increase of international cooperation platforms with Africa.

The great significance of developing China-Africa relations to China's development. Africa has unique advantages such as abundant strategic resources and considerable market potential, and has become the focus of major countries. In the 21st century, China, the United States, Britain, France, Japan and other countries have launched dialogues and cooperation with African countries. The 2006 Beijing Summit identified eight measures for China's cooperation with Africa, and the 2015 Johannesburg Summit established China's Policy Document on Africa, upgrading China-Africa relations to a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership", promoting the leapfrog development and qualitative improvement of China-Africa relations.

At the 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the Chinese government stressed that China and Africa should join hands to build a China-Africa community with a shared future that shares responsibility, win-win cooperation, shared happiness, common prosperity, security and harmonious coexistence. By the end of 2020, China's direct investment in Africa was about US\$47.35 billion, and China-Africa trade reached US\$254.3 billion in 2021, which shows China's determination to build a China-Africa community with a shared future.

4. Characteristics

Mutually beneficial cooperation, pragmatism and high efficiency can be said to be a very distinctive feature of China-Africa relations. The remarkable feature of China-Africa cooperation is that we will do what we say we will do, we will not write "empty promises", and as long as we make the promises that China has said and made, we must earnestly implement them. At the time of the Dakar meeting, the two sides also took stock of the implementation of the "eight major actions" proposed by the Beijing Summit. I am really happy and very pleased to see that the results of the summit have basically been implemented, and a large number of projects have taken root. Due to the impact of the epidemic, the implementation has also been slightly affected, but the entire China-Africa economic and trade cooperation has maintained a very strong momentum of development, and all indicators have shown an all-round upward trend. This achievement is very difficult to obtain.

China-Africa pragmatic cooperation has always adhered to win-win cooperation and mutual benefit, which benefits both China and Africa, and this cooperation fully reflects and practices President Xi's policy concept of "true and sincere" policy towards Africa and the correct concept of righteousness and

benefit. There are 3,700 Chinese-funded enterprises in Africa, and the investment of Chinese enterprises alone has created 4.5 million jobs in Africa. Then, Africa is one of the most important sources of import of strategic resources needed for our economic development, and the sale of African characteristic products to China also provides us Chinese consumers with more choices. Now, consumers of African high-quality agricultural products in the Chinese market are also particularly welcome.

China is sincere in its treatment of its African friends. China is sincerely committed to helping Africa achieve peace, security and development. In order to accelerate the implementation of the outcomes of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and promote the in-depth development of China-Africa cooperation in jointly building the “Belt and Road”, China put forward four proposals on developing China-Africa relations, accelerating China-Africa substantive exchanges and common ideas, continuously deepening China’s good relations with African allies, vigorously promoting the upgrading of China-Africa cooperation, and firmly safeguarding the unity and cooperation of developing countries.

In carrying out cooperation with Africa, China is efficient and pragmatic. The completion ceremony of the China-assisted Africa CDC headquarters project was held. As a flagship project of China’s cooperation with Africa, the headquarters building of the Africa CDC was handed over to African friends in a timely manner, reflecting the high standards and high level of China-Africa cooperation, and interpreting the Chinese style of keeping promises, being efficient and pragmatic. Recently, good news about China-Africa cooperation has been coming continuously. African aviation giant Ethiopian Airlines has announced that the airline is expected to quickly return to pre-pandemic levels in the coming months. In Angola, China and Angola signed a framework agreement on preferential loans from the Chinese government, which will support Angola’s construction of national broadband projects.

China has always been consistent in strengthening China-Africa friendship. Benin and China celebrate the 50th anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic relations; Angola and China also celebrated the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. At these important historical junctures, Chinese leaders exchanged congratulatory messages with leaders of relevant African countries, expressing their common expectations for close and mutually beneficial cooperation, building a win-win future, and benefiting the Chinese and African people. This year marks the 60th anniversary of China’s medical aid to Africa. With their superb medical skills, hard work and the spirit of saving lives and helping the wounded, groups of Chinese medical team staff have continuously narrowed the distance with the African people, winning their good reputation and trust.

To help Africa’s development, China is frank and selfless. China has always respected the will of the African people and based itself on the needs of African countries in its cooperation with Africa, never seeking political selfish interests or attaching any political conditions to it. China believes that what Africa needs is unity and cooperation, not confrontation, and no country or anyone has the right to

force African countries to choose sides. No matter which country, as long as they sincerely help Africa achieve peace and development, China is happy to see its cooperation bear fruit. If African friends are willing, China is also willing to carry out tripartite or multi-party cooperation with any country in Africa to jointly make greater contributions to Africa's development and revitalization. Benin President Talon said that we cherish China's long-term support and help, and although Benin is small, it stands on the side of truth, equality and justice, and will continue to be a firm and reliable friend of China. Gabonese President Bongo said that the friendship between China and Africa has been sublimated in promoting common development and safeguarding common interests.

5. Prospects

At present, the reform of the global governance system and international order is accelerating, and the balance of international power is deeply adjusted. The coronavirus pandemic has further highlighted the intimate destinies of countries around the world. Standing at another crossroads in history, China and Africa need to consolidate their partnership and build a China-Africa community with a shared future in the new era. The two sides will unswervingly deepen the traditional friendship, unswervingly promote mutually beneficial cooperation, unswervingly safeguard common interests, continue to play the leading role of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, promote the construction of the "Belt and Road" in a down-to-earth manner, continuously promote the development of China-Africa comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership to a higher level and in a wider field, and jointly create a better future for China-Africa cooperation.

Both China and Africa have entered a new stage of development. China's promotion of a new development pattern with domestic circulation as the main body and domestic and international dual circulation promoting each other will bring more "Chinese opportunities" to Africa's development. The African Free Trade Area has been officially implemented, and African economic integration and regional economic integration have been accelerated, giving China-Africa cooperation more room for development. China and Africa will take the high-quality joint construction of the "Belt and Road" as the starting point, further promote the in-depth alignment of the "Belt and Road" cooperation initiative with the African Union's Agenda 2063, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the development strategies of African countries, deepen practical cooperation between China and Africa in various fields, and build the "Belt and Road" into a road of peace, prosperity, openness, green, innovation and civilization between China and Africa, and jointly build a "China-Africa community with a shared future in the new era".

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