

**SINO-AFRICAN COOPERATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF SELF-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

**A COOPERAÇÃO SINO-AFRICANA E OS DESAFIOS DO DESENVOLVIMENTO ENDÓGENO EM ÁFRICA**


**LA COOPERACIÓN SINOAFRICANA Y LOS RETOS DEL DESARROLLO ENDÓGENO EN ÁFRICA**

**LA COOPERATION SINO-AFRICAINE ET LES DEFIS DU DEVELOPPEMENT ENDOGENE EN AFRIQUE**

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**Abstract**

Sino-African cooperation has been widely debated, with some seeing China's involvement as exploitation and others as a solution to Africa's underdevelopment. This article argues that both perspectives lack a detailed understanding of the historical and geopolitical context of Sino-African cooperation. The skepticism of the global North towards China's presence in Africa does not reflect genuine support for the African continent, but rather a fear of the emergence of a multipolar global order. On the other hand, the representation of China as a "messiah" by some African elites ignores the complexity of the relationship between the two actors. This cooperation is not exclusively benevolent or exploitative; it represents a pragmatic partnership based on economic, political and strategic interests. It has resulted from a change in the global order in

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which new actors, such as China, are seeking to assert their influence and shape the contours of global governance.

**Keywords:** China. Africa. Sino-African Cooperation. Development.

### Resumo

A cooperação sino-africana tem sido amplamente debatida, com alguns vendo o envolvimento da China como exploração e outros como solução para o subdesenvolvimento da África. Este artigo defende que ambas as perspectivas carecem de uma compreensão detalhada do contexto histórico e geopolítico da cooperação sino-africana. O ceticismo do Norte global em relação à presença da China na África não reflete um apoio genuíno ao continente africano, mas sim um receio da emergência de uma ordem global multipolar. Por outro lado, a representação da China como um "messias" por algumas elites africanas ignora a complexidade da relação entre os dois atores. Essa cooperação não é exclusivamente benevolente ou exploratória; ela representa uma parceria pragmática fundamentada em interesses econômicos, políticos e estratégicos. Resultou de uma mudança na ordem global em que novos atores, como a China, buscam afirmar sua influência e moldar os contornos da governança global.

**Palavras-chave:** China. África. Cooperação Sino-Africana. Desenvolvimento.

### Resumen

La cooperación sino-africana ha sido objeto de un intenso debate, con algunos viendo la implicación de China en África como una explotación y otros como una solución al subdesarrollo africano. Sin embargo, este artículo argumenta que ambas perspectivas carecen de una comprensión matizada del contexto histórico y geopolítico de la cooperación sino-africana. El escepticismo del Norte global hacia la presencia de China en África no refleja un apoyo genuino al continente africano, sino más bien el temor a la aparición de un orden mundial multipolar. Por otra parte, la representación de China como "mesías" por parte de algunas élites africanas ignora la complejidad de la relación entre ambos actores. Esta cooperación no es exclusivamente benévola ni explotadora; representa una asociación pragmática basada en intereses económicos, políticos y estratégicos. Es el resultado de un cambio en el orden mundial en el que nuevos actores, como China, tratan de afirmar su influencia y dar forma a los contornos de la gobernanza global.

**Palabras clave:** China. África. Cooperación Sino-Africana. Desarrollo.

### Résumé

La coopération sino-africaine a été largement débattue, certains considérant l'implication de la Chine comme une exploitation et d'autres comme une solution au sous-développement de l'Afrique. Cet article soutient que les deux perspectives manquent d'une compréhension nuancée du contexte historique et géopolitique de la coopération sino-africaine. Le scepticisme du Nord à l'égard de la présence de la Chine en Afrique ne reflète pas un véritable soutien au continent africain, mais plutôt une crainte de l'émergence d'un ordre mondial multipolaire. Cette coopération n'est pas exclusivement bienveillante ou exploitante ; elle représente un partenariat pragmatique fondé sur des intérêts économiques, politiques et stratégiques. Elle résulte d'une

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évolution de l'ordre mondial dans lequel de nouveaux acteurs, comme la Chine, cherchent à affirmer leur influence et à dessiner les contours de la gouvernance mondiale.

**Mots-clés:** Chine. Afrique. Coopération sino-africaine. Développement.

## 1. 1. Introduction

Since the late 20th Century, China has become one of Africa's biggest trading partners, second only to the European Union and surpassing the United States of America, Canada, and Russia. Starting in 2013, China has taken a leading position in terms of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa, promoting interventions that permeate various domains of development: health, infrastructure, construction, trade, technology, mining, agriculture, and other sectors.

Despite the scarcity of debates regarding the relationship between China and Africa in antiquity, historical accounts point out that the Sino-African relationship is not recent; it predates the 20th Century and has had specific dynamics in each context. Abegunrin and Manyeruke (2020) referred to some episodes, including the journey of Ibn Battuta<sup>1</sup> to some parts of China and Said's<sup>2</sup> journey from Mogadishu to China in the 14th century, the voyage of the Ming Dynasty<sup>3</sup> of the Chinese Admiral Zheng He and his fleet, which circled the coast of Somalia, passing through the Sultanate of Ajuran<sup>4</sup>, following the coast to the Mozambique Channel.

Recently, other elements have been identified that corroborate the thesis of the antiquity of the relationship between China and Africa, among them the following stand out: the discovery of Chinese porcelain on the coasts of Egypt in North Africa, of Chinese coins dating from the 9th century in Kenya, Zanzibar and Somalia and the establishment, in the mid-12th century, of relations between the Ming Dynasty and the Ajuran Empire in East Africa (ABEGUNRIN; MANYERUKE, 2020).

In the modern era, the relationship between China and Africa was historicized by Kyle Haddad-Fonda in an article entitled “Zhou Enlai’s African Safari” (1963-1964), published in 2017. Haddad-Fonda stated that, in the mid-twentieth century, the former Prime Minister of China, Zhou Enlai made his first tour of the African continent, visiting ten newly independent African countries, between December 1963 and February 1964, accompanied by a delegation of fifteen people, including the then Minister of Foreign Affairs. They passed through Egypt, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Algeria, Morocco, Ghana, Mali, Guinea Conakry, Sudan and Somalia. Zhou Enlai's visit to the African continent had two main objectives. He intended, on the one hand, to dispute influence with Russia in the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Battuta was a Moroccan traveler and scholar.

<sup>2</sup> Said of Mogadishu was a Somali traveler and scholar.

<sup>3</sup> From 1368 to 1644, China was ruled by the Ming Dynasty.

<sup>4</sup> The Ajuran Empire was an empire located in present-day Somalia.

propagation of communist ideology and reinforce the Chinese presence in Africa, on the other hand.<sup>5</sup>

A skilled and flexible diplomat, Zhou Enlai's led the Chinese delegation to the Bandung Conference, kicking off a serious investment by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the Sino-African relationship. In a meeting with the six African countries at the time independent, namely: Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, Liberia, Ghana and Sudan, Enlai's convinced the participants to incorporate the five principles of Peaceful Coexistence of the PRC in the ten principles of the Bandung Conference<sup>6</sup> (SHINN, 2019).

In chronological terms, the modern Sino-African relationship can be divided into five eras, namely: The era of Mao Zedong (1949-1976); the Deng Xiaoping era (1978-1992); the Jiang Zemin era (1992-2002); the era of Hu Jintao (2002-2012); and the Xi Jinping era (2012-present). In short, the Sino-African relationship has gone through several stages, redefining priorities and cooperative dynamics.

**Table 1: Evolution of the Sino-African relationship**

Period	Context	Dynamics
Pre-19th century to 1949	This period was marked by the arrival of Chinese workers and traders to various regions of Africa. After assuming power in 1912, Sun Yat Sen developed relations with South Africa.	Many Chinese workers migrated to Africa, mainly to South Africa and Madagascar.
Mao Zedong 1949-1976	At the beginning of his term, Mao Zedong – leader of the Communist Party of China – sought to consolidate the government and did not have robust relations with Africa. He became more pragmatic and interested in Africa in the era of independence – in the 60s and 70s, achieving a great success that led to China's admission to the United Nations in October 1971.	With the influence of Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, China was able to incorporate the 5 Principles of Peaceful Coexistence into the 10 Principles of the Bandung Conference – marking the beginning of South-South cooperation.

<sup>5</sup> Held from April 18 to 24, 1955, in Bandung-Indonesia, the Bandung Conference was the first major conference to bring together, exclusively, African and Asian countries to discuss cooperation agreements.

<sup>6</sup> Held from April 18 to 24, 1955, in Bandung-Indonesia, the Bandung Conference was the first major conference to bring together, exclusively, African and Asian countries to discuss cooperation agreements.

<p>Deng Xiaoping 1978-1992</p>	<p>Between 1981 and 1989, 55 African presidents visited China, and there was a considerable increase in recognition of the "One China" policy, which seeks, in other ways, to prevent Taiwan's independence. The number increased from 44 in the 1970s to 48 in the 1980s.</p>	<p>There was a sharp retraction of Chinese investment in Africa due the reduced ability to supply capital to African countries, caused by the Chinese government's investment in economic modernization.</p>
<p>Jiang Zemin 1992-2002</p>	<p>Diplomatic ties were intensified, and significant personalities of the Chinese government visited the African continent. Jiang Zemin even visited Mali, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Kenya and Namibia. This period was also the starting point for Chinese participation in UN peacekeeping operations.</p>	<p>There has been an enormous increase in Chinese investment in the African continent. This investment focused on five areas: 1- loans in the form of infrastructure, 2- trade, 3- arms exports, 4- peacekeeping, and 5- development aid.</p>
<p>Hu Jintao 2002-2012</p>	<p>In 2012, when Hu Jintao resigned from power, only 4 African states (São Tomé and Príncipe, Eswatini, Gambia and Burkina Faso) recognized Taiwan's independence, which demonstrates the tremendous success of the "One China" policy in Africa.</p>	<p>In 2003, a meeting was held in Addis Ababa-Ethiopia, between 13 African leaders, the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao and more than 70 ministers from China and Africa. On the same occasion, a meeting was held between hundreds of Chinese and African business representatives.</p>
	<p>China expanded its political, economic and diplomatic investment in order to promote peace in Africa, expand Sino-</p>	<p>At the sixth China-Africa Forum, China announced a \$60 billion package of loans, trade,</p>

Xi Jinping 2012-up to now	African cultural exchanges, strengthen mutual trust, and economic cooperation.	development aid, and debt relief for African countries. In addition to the nearly 50,000 African students in 2015, China has committed to increasing the number of scholarships for Africa.
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Source: David H. Shinn: China-Africa Ties in Historical Context. 2020.

### 1.2 Chinese investment in Africa: actors, sectors and dynamics

Through whom are Chinese foreign policy and investment implemented in Africa? Chinese investment and action in Africa are represented by various actors, including the Chinese government, Chinese state-owned companies, Chinese private companies, Chinese embassies and the Chinese people. On this subject, Meine Pieter Van Dijk (2009) observed that, in the beginning, Chinese companies made joint ventures with African state-owned companies to guarantee the supply of commodities to China. But, nowadays, Chinese investment opportunities are no longer exclusive to state-owned companies or the government, as there is a strong participation of Chinese private companies and ordinary citizens – it is no longer news for anyone to see Chinese citizens who, on their own, migrate to Africa to open private ventures and do business.

**Table 2: Main Chinese actors in Africa**

Actors	Goals
The Chinese government	Implement China's foreign policy towards Africa, it coordinates and regulates the actions of other Chinese actors.
Chinese state-owned	The state companies are going to Africa to guaranteeing the supply of raw materials (commodities) for China's industrial, technological and economic needs.
Chinese Private Companies	They seek to create markets outside China, increase Chinese private investment abroad, and circumvent the fierce competition in China.

Chinese Embassies	Chinese diplomatic representations participate in the process by providing the necessary information for operations in the countries in question and also coordinating other actors' actions.
Chinese citizens	They have different interests, but they have in common the issue of looking at Africa from an economic point of view. They are searching for employment opportunities and profit generation.

Source : Meine Pieter Van Dijk. Introduction: objectives of and instruments for China's new presence in Africa. 2009.

Since the mid-20th century, Chinese investment in Africa has permeated various development sectors, including economy, agriculture, peace and security, mining, infrastructure development, trade, education, science and technology. Unlike the West-Africa relationship, the Sino-African relationship is less focused on military issues and systems of governance. Data from the “China Research Initiative” (2022) show that, since 2003, there has been a progressive increase in Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows to Africa. They moved from 75 million dollars in 2003 to 5.3 billion in 2020. And to 5.5 in 2018 after the “Industrial and Commercial Bank of China” bought 20% of the shares of the South African bank “Standard Bank”. Since 2013, Chinese FDI to Africa exceeded that to the United States of America (USA). South Africa, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Ethiopia were the top 5 destinations for Chinese FDI in Africa.

To maintain cooperation agreements with Africa, the West requires, among other things, the adoption of democratic governance institutions, market liberalization, privatization, fulfillment of certain conditions for obtaining loans, and local companies participate, in many cases, in the implementation. of cooperation projects. In Sino-African cooperation, the government is considered the leading player – not the market. There are no conditions imposed to obtain “soft loans”, and Chinese companies are usually responsible for implementing cooperation projects. On the political front, China sets two conditions on partner countries – not recognizing Taiwan and supporting China's interests at the United Nations.

**Table 3: West-Africa Cooperation and Sino-African Cooperation**

West-African Cooperation	Sino-African Cooperation
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Economic domain	Economic domain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free market</li> <li>- Valuing the private sector</li> <li>- Provides for the transfer of technology, knowledge and experience (capacity building).</li> <li>- Western and local companies implement cooperation projects to create employment opportunities.</li> <li>- Loans are conditional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The government plays a vital role in the economy.</li> <li>- Provides for transfer of technology, knowledge and experience (capacity building).</li> <li>- Cooperation projects are usually implemented by Chinese companies and with a large part of Chinese labor participation.</li> <li>- Non-conditional subsidized loans</li> </ul>
Political domain	Political domain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We demand democratic systems of governance.</li> <li>- Limits are required for the leaders' office terms (two terms of 5 years each).</li> <li>- Liberalization is required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for China at the UN is required.</li> <li>- Partners must respect the “One China” policy, which means not recognizing Taiwan's independence.</li> <li>- More concerned about stability than governance system.</li> </ul>

Source: Meine Pieter Van Dijk. Introduction: objectives of and instruments for China's new presence in Africa. 2009.

The elements identified in the table above refer to what is presented by the cooperation guidelines of China and the Global North with African countries. Hence, it is necessary to consider the dynamics of their applicability in everyday life and to what extent the questions raised are consistent with the reality on the ground. This subject will be taken up again in the section on the dynamics of Chinese action in Africa.

### 1.3 Research Objectives



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- ✓ Assess the consequences of China's economic projects in Africa, both positive and negative, with a focus on technology transfer, job creation, debt risks, and environmental standards;
  - ✓ Examine the impact of Chinese economic projects on different sectors in Africa, including extractive industries, agriculture, and manufacturing;
  - ✓ Develop an analytical framework that effectively captures the complexities of the evolving relations between Africa and China, considering the political economy and dynamics of global capitalism;
  - ✓ Examine how the geopolitical landscape influences the economic exchange between Africa and China and analyze the implications for both parties;
  - ✓ Extract lessons from specific case studies of Chinese economic projects in Africa and utilize these insights to inform future policies and practices;
  - ✓ Explore ways African countries can leverage their agency and negotiate more equitable terms in their economic engagement with China, focusing on achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

- ✓ What are the positive and negative consequences of China's economic projects in Africa in terms of technology transfer, job creation, debt risks, and environmental standards?
- ✓ How do Chinese economic projects impact African sectors, including extractive industries, agriculture, and manufacturing?
- ✓ What analytical framework best captures the complexities of the evolving relations between Africa and China, considering the political economy and dynamics of global capitalism?
- ✓ What are Africa's constraints and challenges in its engagement with China, and how can these be effectively addressed?
- ✓ How does the geopolitical landscape influence the economic exchange between Africa and China, and what are the implications for both parties?
- ✓ How can African countries leverage their agency and negotiate more equitable terms in their economic engagement with China, ensuring sustainable and inclusive development?

#### **1.5 Methods**

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This study utilized a qualitative analytical technique, leveraging empirical data, case studies, evidence and secondary scholarly sources to construct a more nuanced understanding of Sino-African relations. It goes beyond usual theoretical frameworks that relegate cooperation to simplistic two-way categories, instead advocating for an appropriate political analysis that accepts inherent contradictions and complexities. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities, contradictions, and potential trade-offs within Sino-African relations. It acknowledges that cooperation between China and African countries can have both positive and negative aspects, and that it is essential to critically examine the implications and impacts of this relationship on various levels, including political, economic, social, and environmental.

## **2. China in Africa: some theoretical contributions**

Since its emergence as one of the main, if not the leading partner, of countries on the international stage, China has attracted the attention of academics, journalists and diplomats worldwide. In recent years, there has been an increase in concern about understanding the constraints on the reorientation of cooperation axes in Africa and China's role in the new geopolitical and geostrategic framework. As a result, debates and reflections were developed in different spheres: political, economic, social and academic. In the academic field, this exercise gained varied interpretations that, for a better understanding, can be grouped into the following theoretical constructions: the neorealist perspective, constructivist perspective, liberal perspective and dependency theory. Although all the approaches mentioned above aim to understand and explain the constraints of the Chinese presence and action in Africa, they had different focuses and, therefore, different conclusions.

Defenders of the realist narrative believe that China's presence and actions in Africa are motivated by economic interests, political power and geostrategic disputes with the global North. One of the elements always mentioned by realists is China's involvement in the exploitation of natural resources. For realists, China is taking command of neocolonialism in Africa (DUGGAN, 2020).

In a reflection on China's behavior in the international sphere, especially on the African continent, Priye S. Torulagha (2021) explains that politics concerns the struggle for power to guarantee government control and distribution of material and non-material resources. – Resources are always scarce, while the demand for them is always high. – In this sense, States are like people because they compete in the global arena to maximize self-interest and ensure their existence as States.

Unlike the realists, the constructivists defend that the emergence of China as a great partner of Africa in terms of cooperation has to do with the fact that their identities and interests are, for the time being, correlational in the international system. From the constructivist perspective, it is necessary to analyze China-Africa cooperation beyond the economic dimension and the incidence of prophetic, that is, events happen in the

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international system because they are germinated in certain contexts, but not because they are effects of predetermined conditions (OLORUNFEMI, 2021).

From the liberal perspective, China's robust and active presence in Africa can be better understood if we consider factors such as China's increasing importance in the global economy, its shift from a planned economy to a market economy, and the end of the Cold War that opened space for the emergence of new dynamics and actors in the international system. For liberals, Chinese investment in Africa will expand the internal market by creating a spin-off effect. – Chinese companies will create business for local African companies and improve economic infrastructure. Liberals claim that Chinese investment in Angola, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Zambia and Benin has contributed to increasing the supply capacity of the market in these countries and allowed them to experience international trade.

In the view of apologists for the dependency perspective, investment and the Chinese cooperative model in Africa are part of a framework of relationships that ultimately aim to perpetuate the dependency of African countries. The little value attributed to the transfer of technology, knowledge and experience; the application of Chinese companies and labor in the implementation of cooperation projects; and the asymmetry in profit acquiring between China and partner countries are among the elements presented by the dependency perspective.

For the reflective exercise that is intended to be triggered, it would not be nuanced or consistent to exclusively endorse one of these perspectives, as they all have premises that, depending on the context, may be useful for understanding the presence and action in Africa. Therefore, we will make a context-based analysis considering that China does not always act in the same way in all African countries and that both the different Chinese governments sometimes have different ambitions for Africa.

### **3. Results Discussion and Analysis**

The Chinese presence and actions in Africa have generated diverse opinions among academics, politicians, opinion makers, and ordinary citizens. Supporters of China's engagement in Africa argue that it offers an alternative and unique opportunity for African nations to reshape their cooperation dynamics, stimulate economic growth, and reduce dependence on traditional Western partners. On the other hand, critics of China's involvement in Africa view it as a form of neocolonialism and express concerns about the continent's growing dependency and potential exploitation.

However, there exists a significant possibility that various factors, such as ideological biases, a lack of critical analysis, and amateurish discourse, may oversimplify this debate. China's role in Africa is a serious and complex issue. Hence, it needs to be analyzed with the seriousness and complexity it deserves, to avoid both the thoughtless dissemination of Western jealousy and the messianization of China's image. It must be analyzed from a perspective that considers the implications of political, economic, and

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geostrategic interests in the relations between states in the international system and bears in mind that the actions of its actors are and will always be guided by interests in their multiple dimensions.

On this subject, Kudakwashe Chirambwi (2021) stresses that cooperation between Africa and China is crucial to avoid exploitation and the constraints inherent in North-South cooperation policies. However, it is necessary to stop seeing China as a mere Good Samaritan because if they are not well thought out and managed, Chinese cooperation policies can exacerbate the dependency of African countries.

The environmental effects of Chinese practices in Africa have been widely criticized, especially in mining, energy and fisheries. Far removed from the pillars of South-South cooperation, the actions of Chinese investors do not take the environmental issue and sustainable economic growth seriously (CHIRAMBWI, 2021). Between 2000 and 2022, many illegal Chinese boats and researchers were seized in African waters – Guinea-Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Mauritania, Senegal and Sierra Leone. They had no licenses and operated in prohibited zones, most of them using internationally banned fishing techniques, including in China. According to the non-governmental organization Green Peace, the number of Chinese fishing boats in Africa is increasing disproportionately, from 13 in 1985 to 462 in 2013.

Xiaoyang Tag (2020, p.257) argues that the environmental challenges arising from investments are not solely caused by foreign actors but also stem from outdated or inadequate regulations that are ill-suited for modern industries. The lack of administrative experience in dealing with foreign investors exacerbates these issues. Improving environment-related legislation and administration in African countries is crucial to effectively regulate business activities and safeguard public interests during their process of structural transformation.

In the context of industries, for example, Ayithey (2021) states that Chinese investment is causing the weakening of infant industries in Africa. He showed that in countries like Lesotho, Nigeria, and Zambia, local clothing manufacturers are desperately complaining about cheap Chinese products that destroy their markets and jobs. In Nigeria, there was devastation at the Kano factory. In the 1980s, there were 500 textile production factories in Kano, but as of 2021, less than 1000 are operational. Kano Textile Market, i.e., the largest market in West Africa, today sells more Chinese clothes.

Infrastructure development is one of Africa's sectors with the most significant Chinese influence. Through Chinese cooperation, African countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania and Angola have developed large-scale and high-cost infrastructure projects. China Export-Import Bank, China-Africa Development Fund and China Development Bank are the main sources of Chinese investment. Today, China alone occupies the leading position in terms of cooperation for the development of infrastructures in the African continent, surpassing, by far, Europe, Canada and the

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United States of America. But this was not always the case, according to The Economist (2022) in the 1990s, European and American construction companies had dominated more than 85% of construction contracts in Africa.

Sino-African cooperation programs on infrastructure have contributed to the construction of public buildings, hospitals, technology centers, fiber optic cables, military centers, bridges, roads, airports, universities, buildings of regional organizations, oil refining centers and its derivatives. On this subject, Ayittey (2021) stresses that Africans do not benefit much from agreements based on the “infrastructure for resources” policy with China, as the infrastructure built by China is not very durable. As an example, Ayittey cited the case of Luanda General Hospital, which, in July 2010, had to evacuate 150 patients from the hospital to avoid a possible collapse of parts of the hospital built by China in 2006, which cost 8 million dollars.

The problem of low quality is among the widespread opinions regarding Chinese investment in the infrastructure of the African continent. However, this argument lacks evidence, as Chinese construction companies are very well evaluated, even by non-Chinese infrastructure evaluation centers, that is, Western ones. A study carried out in 2016 by Jame Farrell, a student at Hopkins University in the United States, entitled "How Chinese Contractors Perform in Africa? Evidence From World Bank Projects," warns of the need to heed the rumors surrounding Chinese action in the field of civil construction in Africa. It shows that the opinion of Westerners about China in this context is always loaded with the preconception "Made in China – low quality, cheap and disposable". An article published by The Economist stated that Chinese buildings are always rushed and ordinary; and BBC even published an article with the following title: "China's African Road Gangs".

Worldwide, China is the country that wins the most World Bank construction contracts. Between 2007 and 2015, Chinese companies won more than a third of all World Bank infrastructure projects in Africa. From 2007 to 2015, Chinese companies received a score of 30.3% in the World Bank Infrastructure Projects in Africa assessments. A comparative evaluation of construction projects completed in Africa between 2000 and 2013 showed that Chinese construction companies performed similarly to companies originating in the OECD countries (FARRELL, 2016).

For Hodzi (2019), the discourse on the principle of non-interference by China in the internal affairs of partner countries needs a certain update and adequacy. This is because, currently, China has a flexible interpretation of the principle of non-intervention – when China's geostrategic interests are being threatened, China devises strategies to intervene and protect them. South Sudan, Mali and Libya are some examples of this new dynamic in Chinese action.

In addition to non-military personnel – engineers, doctors and others – China contributed with combat or security troops to MINUSMA in Mali and UNMISS in South

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Sudan. These two Missions are multidimensional and take place in a climate of instability and armed conflict, where their envoys have a mandate to use force. This gradualist approach has worked so far because, unlike the interventions of France, the United States and NATO in African civil wars, China's veiled interventions have attracted little or no objection from African countries (HODZI, 2019).

It has been tough for China to comply with the letter with the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of partner countries as its foreign policy preaches. This is because several African countries in which China has economic, geostrategic and oil interests are experiencing political instabilities that greatly influence resource supply. In addition to Mali and South Sudan, China's role in the conflicts in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo are examples of the exercise of reinterpretation of the principle of non-interference that China is carrying out in Africa - it has provided weapons and other means of assistance to the parties that best guarantee the continuity of their interests in these countries.

For Torulagha (2021), we cannot compare the Chinese presence in Africa with the European one; European nations invaded and colonized Africa to exploit people and resources, while China came to Africa to establish a mutual economic relationship. In the Chinese case, it is the African leaders themselves who voluntarily establish a relationship with China. However, there is a great possibility that Africa will become indebted to China, which could lead to a kind of Chinese colonization. Are allegations about possible Chinese control of Uganda's only international airport due to the country's failure to meet its contractual obligations a prelude to the concerns raised by Torulagha, or is it a mere geopolitical game to outshine China?

There is alarmism about China's position towards African states that fail to fulfil their contractual obligations. Much has already been said about control of the works carried out, with the case of the Uganda airport being the most widespread. However, looking at several cases of non-compliance with contractual clauses already verified in China's cooperation and behavior towards offenders, it is clear that the fuss is alarmist and without foundation why China proceeds otherwise. According to Kevin Acker and Deborah (2021), the majority of countries that negotiated debt relief with China did not receive new loans in previous years, including Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. Kenya, Cameroon, Zambia, and Angola were among those who received relatively small loans.

The constraints accompanying Chinese investments in Africa are not symmetrical with those accompanying West-Africa cooperation. However, we must maintain the limitations of both cooperation models. For example, China does not intervene in its partners' economic and political models but considers UN support for China and the non-recognition of Taiwan as critical conditions for maintaining cooperative relations with African states.

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Egypt, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa have the highest infrastructure development indexes in Africa, and they also have the highest number of Chinese investments. Chinese investment has been critical to African infrastructure development. Between 2007 and 2020, China alone invested US\$23 billion in African infrastructure projects, compared to US\$9 billion invested by all other Development Banks combined.

There is no doubt that Africa needs a considerable number of road, air, port and internet access infrastructures to become a connected continent with the best commercial and mobility conditions. This demands a lot of investment and, apart from jealousy for the space occupied by China, the West is not particularly interested or capable of mobilizing the funds required to carry out large-scale investments in Africa.

Furthermore, China's flexible interpretation of African politics reduced financial bureaucracy, and the adoption of non-traditional methods of receiving compensation for its investments has made China a preferred partner for African leaders for the time being. However, it should be noted that, like the West, China uses development aid packages to request preferential access to the partner countries' natural resources and the participation of Chinese companies in the process of exploiting these resources - Angola, Guinea Conakry, Zambia, and Nigeria are some examples.

Mhandara and Manyeruke (2021) stated in an analysis of the possible contours of China's acceptance in the African political class that there is the possibility of African countries surrendering uncritically to the Chinese will and the win-win discourse, opening precedents for the domination and dependence they try to deny from the West. They also reinforce that the "win-win" rhetoric is widely accepted among African political elites because they gain political protection from international censorship in exchange for cooperation. Chinese loans, like Western development aid policies, are subject to conditions that may include, among other things, UN support for China and preferential access to resources.

The Western discourse on the development of the African continent often appears detached from reality. Ha-Joon Chang's book, "23 Things They Do Not Tell You About Capitalism" (2011), offers an essential perspective. When analyzing Africa's economic and sociopolitical dynamics, Western analysts often start from the assumption that Africa is destined for underdevelopment due to an unfavorable climate, poor geographical location, excessive natural resources, and a negative culture.

While these are real challenges, the obstacles mentioned are surmountable and cannot solely explain the development problems in Africa. The unfavorable climate, lack of access to the sea, abundant natural resources, ethnic divisions, weak institutions, and negative culture hinder development because African countries have not yet adopted the necessary technologies, institutions, and organizational capacities to address their adverse consequences. For example, even without access to the sea, Switzerland and

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Austria have invested in river transportation and are now two of the world's wealthiest economies (CHANG, 2011).

The resource curse is often discussed, but it is forgotten that the United States, Canada, and Australia have more natural resources than all African countries combined, except for South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The tropical climate is not an insurmountable obstacle to development, as currently developed countries like Singapore, Italy, Japan, and South Korea have also been affected by tropical diseases in the past but managed to overcome their adverse effects through the establishment of adequate healthcare systems to combat them (CHANG, 2011).

While advocates of North-South cooperation see development aid as a solution to Africa's problems, Egyptian economist Samir Amin (2009) argues that development aid does not have an altruistic dimension but rather an ideological one. It is a strategy of Western countries to establish geostrategic markets, which can result in the loss of autonomy in defining the governance priorities of recipient countries.

In the same line of reasoning, Moyo (2009) shows us that debt policy has not been sustainable and efficient in Africa. Since the 1940s, approximately \$1 trillion in development aid has been transferred from "developed" countries to Africa. However, this aid has failed to provide sustainable economic growth or reduce poverty. Between 1970 and 1998, when aid flows to Africa were at their peak, poverty in Africa increased from 11% to a staggering 66%.

In some cases, donor countries use aid to exert influence and impose a specific model of governance on recipient nations. They attach conditions to their aid, requiring the adoption of policies aligned with their interests, such as democracy, human rights, or market-oriented reforms. Critics argue that this undermines recipient countries' sovereignty and hampers their pursuit of independent development and governance priorities (MURITHI, 2009). Moreover, certain African countries have become reliant on external development aid, considering it a reliable and limitless source of income. This has led to the unsustainability and inefficiency of aid on the continent. These countries have neglected crucial macroeconomic policies to address vulnerabilities, manage budget deficits, and enhance tax collection practices.

In the past two decades, the relations between China and Africa have primarily been driven by China's interest in Africa's natural resources and its ability to support this interest through a policy of exchange. This has transformed China into a strategic actor for African countries. However, a shift must occur in this dynamic. Both China and Africa depend on each other. African countries can leverage their comparative advantage in natural resources to promote commodity-based industrialization. What Africa hopes to gain from this relationship with China requires a change in mindset, as demonstrated by some reformist governments (LOPES, 2016). Multiple factors influence the cooperation between China and Africa. It encompasses key principles of the



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narrative on South-South cooperation, specifically the integration of material benefits (win-win approach) and humanitarian interests (solidarity) (MTHEMBU, 2018).

## 5. Conclusion

China has assisted many African countries in implementing development programs that necessitate large investments of financial resources and human capital, both of which are limited on the continent, particularly when it comes to oil projects and large-scale construction. From a discursive standpoint, Chinese cooperation with African countries appears to have great potential for a paradigm shift in the world system; however, looking more closely and at the practical dimension of things, it is noted that, despite the dissemination of the flag of South-South cooperation and the adoption of the policy of "non-interference" in the internal affairs of partner countries, China has acted in ways that do not allow industrialization. Therefore, it is necessary to transcend, a little, the discursive field – to go beyond the idea of win-win – that has characterized the discourse about the structuring axes of the relationship between China and African countries. Nevertheless, China's win-win rhetoric, many asymmetries and subjugations verified in the cooperation between Africa and the West, are also being practiced in the relationship between China and Africa. Among them, the following stand out: the centrality of Chinese action in the economic dimension, in comparison with social and environmental projects, the policy of paternalism instead of structurally transforming African economies, maintaining Africa in the position of supplier of commodities and importer of finished goods and services, the exploitation of cheap African labor and the establishment of contracts, in some cases.

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