LIBERAL STUDIES

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Evolution of China's Foreign Policy Towards Africa

History plays a major role in understanding and appreciating both, the domestic politics as well as the foreign policy of a country. This is especially true in case of China. From a once, backward and agrarian society, China has traversed a long path in terms of its global interests and responsibilities. Africa is a key area of interest to China today. However, the literature available in the public domain mostly deals with the strategic, economic or soft-power aspects of the Sino-African bilateral relationship. Through this paper an attempt has been made to focus on the historical transformations in this relationship. A good understanding of the shifts and the continuities in the Sino-African ties enables one to reflect better on China's objectives in the African subcontinent in the present day as well as its plans there in the near future.

History reveals that for long, China had maintained an attitude of indifference towards the remote areas of the world, till its national interest was directly affected. As a result of such a stand, in the 1970s and the 1980s China had on several occasions abstained from voting on certain issues in the UN Security Council. However, the gradual expansion of China's military and economic strength and consequently the broadening of its diplomatic stance, led to a continuous and sustained evolution of its definition of national interest. Simultaneously, there has been a growth in expectation of the international community towards China's expanded role in the global arena. In this context of its progressive expansion of national interest and simultaneous rising expectations of the international community from China, its interaction with Africa has gained much prominence in recent times.[1]

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Mutual Dependence of China and Africa

Quite clearly in many ways Africa is politically useful to China. Above all, it is a source of large number of votes in the UN General Assembly and is representative of the concerns of the poor nations of the world, on issues like climate change at global summits. China has steadily promoted the strength of her ties with the African continent, by repeatedly citing the event of China's restoration of seat in the United Nations (UN) in 1971 when 26 African nations had voted in its favor, out of the total 76 votes that it had received. Another objective for seeking alliance with Africa is to obtain its support in various multilateral forums, to block the entry of Taiwan as a full member in the respective organisations. Together with this, an attempt has been made to procure the support of African nations on platforms like the UN Human Rights Council where the West has openly voiced its condemnation against the Chinese track record on the issue of human rights violation.[2]

Africa on its part, seeks active engagement with China mainly on economic grounds. Robust trade ties and the export of raw materials from the continent to China would enable the African economy to flourish. Further, the surge in the Chinese demand for natural resources from the continent has revived a renewed interest of several other powers towards Africa. This has encouraged a new range of investment and investors to the region. Consequently, Africa has been compelled to introspect on its economic future and has identified China as a model of economic development.

The Evolution of China's Africa Policy

China's Africa policy has since the beginning undergone several shared continuities as well as shifts.[3] Further, it is interesting to note that the rationale behind the Chinese interest to engage in Africa has changed over time. The relation between the two nations can be divided briefly and broadly into three major periods: 1949–78, 1978–99 and 2000- till date.

First Phase

During the 1950s, the foreign policy of People's Republic of China was directed towards seeking recognition and legitimacy, safeguarding itself against the potential American threat and developing friendly relations with the Asian countries to its south. By the middle of the decade, China sought to move beyond the Communist bloc and Asia, into Africa. Such a move was a major shift in its foreign policy strategy.

These being the larger Chinese foreign policy objectives in the 1950s, a brief overview may now be provided on the manner in which Africa fit into the larger picture of China's foreign policy agenda and the reason behind China being interested in developing ties with the countries of this continent.

During the first phase, China's interest in forging alliance with the African countries was based on four fundamental goals: (1) the desire of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to attain international acknowledgement as the only legitimate authority of China. The recognition by 40 liberated African states to the status of Communist China was the foremost prize; (2) Africa was viewed as the arena in which the Chinese could fight the United States and more importantly, combat the anti-China coalition; (3) the Chinese leadership realised the necessity to break away from its isolation and consequently develop new allies. This was closely linked to the aspect of Sino-Soviet conflict; (4) the self-styled Chinese leadership against imperialism, neo-colonialism and colonialism in the Asian-African-Latin American sphere was at stake. Had the developmental and revolutionary model of Communist China gained acceptance from the Africans, its international status would be immensely boosted. Anti-revisionism, anti-colonialism and anti- imperialism were the basic tenets of China's Africa policy, in the initial years. In their drive to persuade the Africans, the Chinese leadership had emphasised on three fundamental themes: self-reliance, self-determination and Afro-Asian unity.[4]

The dawn of African independence movement coincided with the birth of People's Republic of China. This provided the Chinese leadership with a unique opportunity to forge a thriving relationship with the continent. However in the early days, China's vision received a setback as some of the newly independent states like Ethiopia, Egypt, Liberia, South Africa, showcased a pro-western stance. Further, the states of South Africa and Ethiopia participated in a military operation carried out by the United Nations in Korea, to combat the forces supported by China in 1950–54. Devoid of both, a United Nations membership as well as recognition by the United States, Beijing soon realised that the newly independent African states which had so far been under colonial domination were both a solution to Beijing's legitimacy problems as well as their natural allies.[5]

The 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' launched in 1949 acted as a cornerstone to fulfill these objectives. The new states found the principles of 'mutual non-interference' in internal affairs, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, equality, mutual no-aggression and mutual benefits, appealing in the post-colonial scenario. Consequently after the Korean War,

Beijing embarked on a strategy of instituting official contacts with the African countries. Thus, the first diplomatic offensive took shape in 1955 at the Bandung Conference.[6] Zhou Enlai, the then Foreign Minister of China, met a number of African leaders during the Bandung Conference, which included the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser. As early as 1956, the first African state to institute diplomatic ties with Beijing was Egypt. Hereafter, for several years Cairo continued to serve as a base for Chinese business in the continent.[7]

By the mid-1960s, China put in place a well-designed policy towards Africa. Through a number of indicators, Beijing demonstrated the high priority that it assigned to the African theatre. Of great significance, in this regard were Zhou Enlai's much celebrated three visits to Africa during 1963–65, to the countries of Ethiopia, Guinea, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Mali, Tunisia, Somalia and United Arab Republic. During his visit, Zhou had emphasized on certain themes of Chinese foreign policy which eventually became the founding principles governing China's African Policy. To state a few: complete allegiance to the goal of revolutionary struggle, mutual political support, and third world unity. In terms of the principle of mutual political support, China manifested its support towards the African people through recognition of new states and offering assistance to their national liberation movements. In return China sought the acknowledgement of PRC as the sole legitimate government of China, assistance to China for its effort to liberate Taiwan, resistance to the idea of creation of "Two Chinas", and finally reinstatement of China's rights in the UN. The third principle of unity of the Third World was significant as solidarity was essential in order to maintain freedom in the face of imperialism and colonialism.

Zhou had launched a foreign aid campaign, China's "Eight Principles of Economic and Technical Aid" in Ghana on 15 January 1964. It stressed on China's contributive role in African development. Estimated figures suggest that China's aid commitments to Africa, in 1966 totaled $428 million.[8] Thus, seventeen of thirty eight African states as compared with fourteen African states which maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan, recognised China. The formal instruments thus emphasized on giving greater importance to development of relationship with each African state. This in turn resulted in the amplification of China's influence in the region. 14 additional states recognised China from 1960 to 1965. Diplomatic relations with China could be classified into four main groups: trade agreements aiming to endorse commercial relations; friendship treaties to promote solidarity and develop cultural and economic relations; cultural programs encouraging student exchange programs; and lastly technical assistance accords through which China provided assistance in financial and other fields.

Thus, during the first phase, the importance of Africa to communist People's Republic of China was at a dramatic increase. The growing importance of the former was based primarily on two grounds: one was of seeking greater international recognition and the other was the quest to pilot the socialist revolution of the world. During this period, more specifically during the 1960s, China had regarded Soviet Union as its primary enemy with China using the subcontinent to discredit the latter "as a revolutionary force" and classifying the Soviet Union as at par with "United States imperialism."[9]

A controversial facet of the Sino-African engagement in this phase is the installation of clandestine instruments, in its association with the liberation movements of Africa, viz. – the connection of China with the FLNA and MPLA in Angola, Frelimo of Mozambique, insurgents in Congo, and FLA in the state of Algeria in the 1960s. The motive behind Beijing's unrelenting assistance to these groups was to amplify its reputation in the AAPSO and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) as well as to contend with the two superpowers, particularly with the Soviet Bloc to maintain long term influence over the peripheral regions of Africa. At this point of time, China failed to comprehend the logic of giving primacy to its global socialist struggle.[10]

By the end of the decade two factors contributed to the decline of China's radical line of action: domestic and international factors. In terms of the domestic factor, the Cultural Revolution made China more introspective; on the other hand, increasing apprehension of a 'Soviet menace' gave way to development of positive relations with the US. This in turn, culminated in China winning a seat in the UN Security Council (1971) and achieving diplomatic recognition from several states across the world.[11] In the early 1970s, China's African Policy was guided by two key factors: seeking support from the developing Third World countries and formulation of the "theory of the three worlds." Deng Xiaoping had presented the theory of three worlds in April 1974 in the United Nations.[12] The theory was divided into three basic parts. The first part divided the world into three components: the First World referred to the superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States; the Second World consisted of Europe, Canada, Oceania and Japan; the Third World consisted of developing continents like Asia (besides Japan), Africa and Latin America. In the second part, China placed itself in the group of the developing Third World countries and opposed hegemonies. (supremacy/dominion) The third and final part consisted of an international struggle of the Third and the Second world against the First, primarily the Soviet Union.

It is clearly discernible from the theory of three worlds that China was seeking to formulate an international united front strategy against the superpowers, primarily the Soviet Union. In order to pursue this objective China developed relations with the members of the Third World, especially the African states. This led to increased Chinese activism in the African arena. Three key activities undertaken by China to project the high priority that it allotted to the African states were as follows: firstly, between 1970 and 1977, China committed to financial aids to 29 African states totaling almost $1.9 billion; secondly, Beijing embarked upon a campaign to secure diplomatic recognition; and thirdly, a program was initiated to invite African leaders to China.

Thus, China could be acclaimed with two major successes in the mid-1970s. First, with the support of 26 African countries, PRC was able to secure a permanent seat in the UN in 1971. Second, China won the struggle against Taiwan in Africa. Whereas only eight African states remained in favor of Taiwan, by 1976, almost thirty nine African states sought to maintain relations with China. However, though China's ambition to make inroads into the subcontinent during the 1950s–1970s seemed to be an expedient move, it proved to be unsustainable and financially costly. Although narrowly focused and politically motivated, the existence of Maoism in the region at this point of time, left behind its concrete evidence. A case in point was the construction of the Tanzania-Zambia Railroad that was built in order to assist the people in South Africa in their struggle for national liberation, against the forces of colonialism and imperialism as well as to avert their dependence on the sea route in the south that was largely controlled by the white racist regimes of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa.[13] Eventually, with China's shift in policy from bringing about a world revolution to developing commercial relations with the Western nations, its activities in the subcontinent gradually but considerably reduced.

Second Phase

The second phase corresponded to the reform period. Certain important developments such as the reconciliation of relations between the United States and China, abandonment of the united front policy, reopening links and reduction of tensions with the Soviet Union, as well as reaffirmation of China's third world membership, took place at this point of time. These developments were soon followed by Premier Zhao Ziyang's visit to the African countries of Algeria, Egypt, Guinea, Tanzania, Zambia, Congo, Gabon, Kenya, Zaire, Morocco and Zimbabwe between December 1982 and January 1983. Such visits indicated the sustained importance that Africa still enjoyed from China. Premier Zhao

reiterated the general message of upholding of national independence, South-South cooperation, preservation of national independence and Third World unity. However a marked shift in Premier Zhao's policy from that of his predecessor Zhou Enlai, was in terms of the Chinese technical and economic assistance policy to the subcontinent. Zhao had announced "Four Principles on Sino-African Economic and Technical Cooperation" in Tanzania on 13 January 1983.

The difference in the scope of the "Four Principles" of 1983 from that of the previous "Eight Principles" of 1964 was clearly discernible. Whereas the 1964 principles emphasized on China's contributive role and reverence for the "sovereignty of recipient countries", there was no demand for special privileges for the Chinese aid officials. On the other hand, "Four Principles" of 1983 laid emphasis on practical results, mutual benefits, and common development. Further, Beijing indicated the termination of its financial aid commitments to Africa. Therefore, the key tenet governing Beijing's new aid policy was now more in line of mutual economic benefit.[14]

Despite the announcement of the "Four Principles" of aid policy in 1983, the prime focus of China's foreign policy during this phase, lay on developing closer relations with the West. The main motive behind this tactic was to earn greater FDI from the West in order to promote the development of its domestic economy. There was also a tendency to side track Africa and reduce the amount of aid offered to the subcontinent.

In the 1990s post the Tiananmen Square incident, when China had earned fierce criticism from the Western quarters, it thereafter adopted an active foreign policy approach. Consequently, in an attempt to protect itself, China sought to build alliances with several non-western nations. It eyed the support of African states. Owing to their numerical strength, the support of African nations would be beneficial to China in international organisations and multilateral forums. Therefore, Beijing now began to follow the policy of 'multipolarity' in the 1990s. In the last years of the twentieth century structural changes in the international and the domestic environment had brought Africa back in the fold of Beijing's foreign policy. As a consequence to the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 and the diplomatic isolation of China, the latter's honeymoon phase with developed countries had come to an all-time low. The isolation was further reinforced with the breakdown of Soviet Union. This left China as the only surviving communist power.

During the Cold War era, confronted with the unwanted prospect of China becoming a "pariah in the ashes" the country embarked on a diplomatic mission

to forge relations of goodwill with the developing countries, particularly Africa.[15] This strategy was undertaken to outwit the isolation created by the developed world as well as to realign its external relations. As a part of this strategy Chinese officials were dispatched on goodwill tours throughout the world. Subsequently, there was an upward trend in the visit of foreign leaders into China – thereby stabilizing relations with several countries irrespective of their ideological commitments.

The then Foreign Minister of China, Qian Qichen visited as many as fourteen African states from June 1989 to 1992. Several African heads of states were invited to visit Beijing. Aid packages to African states which stood in support of China post the Tiananmen crisis were amplified. In 1990, the Sino-African aid to 43 recipients summed up to US$ 3746 million. This figure is significant in comparison to the aid package of 1988 which was distributed to 13 African states.[16]

The Chinese endeavor to develop close ties with the African states was widely appreciated and hailed by the leadership in Africa. There were twofold reasons behind this warm welcome: Firstly, the Chinese interest in the continent came at a time when the American interest had diminished, and secondly, support for the preservation of their solidarity and self interest in terms of human rights and democracy. The second demand echoed widely amongst several African regimes as they were compelled by the Western patrons to amend their policies.

The Taiwan issue acted as a significant factor leading to the revival of China's African Policy, during this time. Having officially abandoned the assertion to represent entire China, as early as 1991 the authorities of Taiwan now sought to notch out a unique status for itself in the global community. This seemed to many observers as a prologue to the assertion of independence. Holding a stake of one-third votes in the UN, Africa held a position of pre-eminence for Taiwan, as a combat zone nation struggling to seek international recognition. This situation was further amplified in 1997 with the return of Hong Kong under Chinese sovereignty.[17]

The game was gradually won by China, owing to its image of a rising global power. This was particularly the case after the recognition of Beijing by South Africa in 1998. In 1996, the Taiwan missile catastrophe became the cause of further strain in the relations between the West and China. Africa once again offered a stage of support to Beijing. Thus, in the years 1996–1997 the official Afro-Asian tours of Premier Li Peng and President Jiang Zemin were cited by

observers as the introductory stage for the resurgence of Africa in Beijing's foreign policy.

Furthermore, during this tour Jiang had revealed the proposal of launching a Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). The Forum was instituted in China after four years. In this context, the year 2000 was significant as it marked the launch of this highly significant body in Sino-African relations.[18]

The rising importance of Africa in Beijing's foreign policy was further demonstrated by the consecutive high level tours in 2006, first by President Hu Jintao (April) and the second by the then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.[19] To add to it, a White Paper on China's Africa policy was published in 2006. This clearly spelt out the principles of – equality, sincerity, common prosperity, mutual benefit, close coordination and common development – as the guiding values of Sino-African relationship in the forthcoming years.[20]

African States Recognizing Communist China

Country	Year of Recognition	Country	Year of Recognition
United Arab Republic	1956	Uganda	1962
Morocco	1958	Kenya	1963
Sudan	1958	Tunisia	1964
Guinea	1959	Congo (Brazzaville)	1964
Ghana	1960	Central African	
Mali	1960	Republic	1964
Somalia	1960	Senegal	1964
Tanzania	1961	Zambia	1964
Algeria	1962	Dahomey	1964

Source: George T Yu, "Sino-African Relations: A Survey", *Asian Survey,* Vol. 5, No. 7, July 1965.

The International Situation: In the post 2000 phase some significant changes took place in the international environment, which altered China's foreign policy strategy further. As a result of the shocking 9/11 attack there had been significant changes in USA's geo-strategic position in world affairs.[21] Under the garb of neo-conservative policy, the US attempted to expand its sphere of influence, with a particular focus on the Middle East. On the flip side, diplomatic relations of the US with its close allies remained greatly strained. War in Iraq had led to the US suffering alienation from world opinion and brutally weakened the US

'soft power' strategy in the international fora. With the US influence being bogged down due to the situation in Afghanistan, Iraq and a changing geopolitical and strategic landscape after the 9/11 incident, Beijing intended to use this unanticipated opportunity to add to its "strategic space."[22] In this context, the Chinese policy makers judged that alliance with the peripheral regions like Africa would further strengthen China's tactic against the West.

In 2002 when the fourth generation of leadership took over the CCP, there seemed to be a further commitment to the inclusion of the third world dynamics in the foreign policy of China. In this context, the Sino-African bonhomie was further emphasized with the initiation of the White Paper in 2006, on China's African Policy. This was the same year when the third FOCAC summit took place and China celebrated the golden jubilee of its diplomatic ties with the subcontinent.[23] The Chinese have claimed that the success of the 'new frontier' policy with peripheral areas like Africa, which have dominant powers like the United States at the core and would hence help in reducing the risk and strategic dependence of China on the west and especially on the United States of America. When one sees the Sino-African engagement from this perspective, then the 'new frontier diplomacy' is perceived as a wise strategic move instead of an opportunistic tactic.[24]

Third Phase

The most significant milestone that marked the commencement of the Sino-African relationship in the twenty first century was the establishment of the FOCAC. China has always shown an immense fascination of the African subcontinent and more so during this phase under the model of South-South Cooperation. In order to reinforce Sino-African collaboration, formalize bilateral relations and curtail debates relating to China's role in Africa, the African and Chinese leaders had established the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC/中非合作论坛, in 2000.[25] The Forum has helped in reinforcing the strategic partnership between People's Republic of China and the African subcontinent, at the turn of the century. Trade and economic cooperation have been the underpinning objectives of this body. To add to it, China's 'Go Global' (走出去) policy, in the late 1990s and the early 2000 have acted as a driver of China's investments abroad in search of unexplored new markets.[26]

Further, the promotion of the idea of China-Africa New Strategic Partnership showcases the growing bonhomie between these two nations. Quite clearly, the Sino-African relations now came to be guided by the values of mutual trust, political equality, promotion of cultural exchange and the idea of a win-win

strategy in economic terms. Such developments demonstrated continuity in China's agenda towards the subcontinent to coagulate political, diplomatic and economic ties. Success has been achieved on this end as Sino-African trade has witnessed an unprecedented growth, from as little as US$ 2 billion in 1999 to $160 billion in 2011. Such an agenda has been framed through the assistance of ministries (Ministry of Commerce, MOFCOM and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MFA) and financial establishments like the China Development Bank, China Exim Bank and the ChinaAfrica Development Bank.

This phase witnessed a shift in China's objective of forging ties with the subcontinent from initially seeking legitimacy as the sole legal government of China to now its economic motives, of seeking oil, raw materials and natural resources in order to sustain the domestic economic boom as well as to fulfill its energy requirements. This was also the phase which had on one hand witnessed a massive trade boom and increased import of goods from the sub-continent to Beijing and simultaneously on the other hand, viewed a disjuncture from the previously held principles of ''interference'' and ''conditionality.'' As an evidence of this, one can cite the shift in Beijing's demand to the African capitals in the early years, that they should break away their ties with Taiwan in order to acquire Chinese investment. However, this demand no longer stood true in the first decade of the twenty first century. China's proactive diplomacy towards Africa in this last decade can be termed as 'energy diplomacy' or 'economic diplomacy'.[27] At present China ranks as the second major economy of the world. As a developing country it has shown the fastest economic growth with an annual average 9.8 per cent growth rate from 1979 to 2012.[28]

However, despite this economic growth China continuously faces shortage of raw materials, natural resources and oil. Quite evidently it requires a massive and steady supply of resources in order to sustain its domestic economy. China's requirement for oil has risen with such rapid speed that instead of being a net exporter, it has today become an energy importer.[29] It depends on foreign oil as much as 55 per cent.[30] China imports one-third of oil from the African subcontinent.[31]

Apart from natural gas and oil, Beijing requires raw materials such as nickel, copper, bauxite and natural resources like timber and so on, which are available in abundance in Africa. Thus, China's need and demand for growth and development has necessitated her to invest heavily in various parts of the continent. Examples of Chinese investments include her investment in the copper and cobalt mines in Democratic Republic of Congo, investment of US$ 170 million in Zambian copper mines and in the titanium mines of Kenya.[32] To add

to it, the country's increasing population and their rising consumption together with China's loss of agricultural land to industries has increased the country's quest for a stable source of basic foodstuffs. It is beyond doubt that the economic impetus behind China's Africa policy is for the time being limited to raw materials and energy. Africa also presents to China a large unexplored market for the latter's surplus goods.

Shifts in China's African Policy

Over the years, the trajectory of Beijing's diplomatic tactics towards the subcontinent of Africa has undergone gradual shifts. During the Cold War era, China's Africa Policy was dominated by the 'ideology in command' policy.[33] The relationship, at this point of time, was founded on the ideology of endorsing national liberation movements as well as promoting the idea of a world revolution. In other words, China's policy towards Africa during the Cold War era was dominated by sheer ideological considerations rather than economic rationales. The quest for economic benefits was by no means their main consideration. It was with the adoption of the strategy of openness since the late 1970s that 'politics takes command' was substituted by 'economics takes command'. Revolutionary ideas had lost significance in the Sino-African relations. Since, boosting the domestic economy now became a vital issue, the concept of 'economic diplomacy' started gaining more currency. An insight into this importance given to the term 'economic diplomacy' can be gained from the conference held by the State Council in 2004 on Beijing's economic diplomacy in the developing countries. Such a conference took place for the first time in the history of PRC.

However, of late, the Chinese leadership has become conscious about the fact that the idea of economic diplomacy is not sufficient by itself to preserve its interest in the African continent. The narrative of military conflicts and political instability in Africa poses an unceasing threat to Beijing's economic interest in the region. Therefore, China has realised the need to amend its one-dimensional tactic and in turn encourage a comprehensive relationship between the two. The Beijing Action Plan of FOCAC's fifth ministerial summit manifests such an idea.

This document highlights the areas of cooperation in political affairs and for regional peace such as cooperation in external affairs and development, economic cooperation and promotion of cultural exchanges. Although economic diplomacy continues to be the cornerstone of China's Africa policy yet it cannot be the lone basis for constructing a stable relationship. Favorable economic

relations must necessarily be cushioned on a network of mutually dependent relations. Thus, an essential aspect of this arrangement is the exchange of human resources. In the last decade, China has considerably invested its resources on promoting its 'soft power' strategies through influencing and training elites in the various states in Africa. China has also offered resources into training diplomats from Africa.[34]

In the sphere of politics, China has shown respect and supported African countries in their preference for political systems. In the post-Cold War period the Western nations forcefully pursued Africa to opt for "political democracy."[35] This was mainly done to woo the subcontinent into the Western sphere of influence. Such a policy had greatly diminished the national pride of the African populace and had caused a social turbulence there.

From the Chinese viewpoint, preference for one's political system and the route to development strictly belonged to the domain of internal affairs of a country. In line with this argument Africa had the complete right to choose their desired model of development and it was preferred that other countries would not interfere in such matters. Thus, the policy of "non-interference" in China's Africa Policy is quite clear.

Further, China believed that the imposition of any kind of a foreign model on Africa would end up only in failure. Rather China preferred to foster an economic cooperation based on goodwill and the 'principles of peaceful coexistence'.[36] The African people, in turn, appreciated China's stand on this issue and have over time supported Beijing's struggle against the West on the issue of human rights violation in the United Nations Human Rights Committee.[37]

Not necessarily did China seek to construct a class of 'pro-China' elites in Africa. However, it desires the leadership in Africa to understand Beijing's policy, minimize fallacies and build a positive outlook towards China. As part of its strategy to enhance mutual goodwill, on several occasions China has arranged workshops to guide African officials on issues of poverty alleviation by providing a case-study of China's own experiences.[38]

Relations have thrived in the cultural sphere as well. China inked agreements of cultural cooperation and signed annual government execution plans with the African states with which it shared diplomatic relations. From 2007 to 2010, five conferences on 'China-Africa Cultural Focus', three workshops on the 'African Cultural Visitors Program' and two meetings on 'Exchange Program of Chinese and African Cultural Visitors', were organised by the two nations.[39]

Security and military ties have stood out as dynamic features of the Sino-African relations in the recent years. Military exchanges and cooperation between the African states and China involve joint military assignments, financial aid, high level visits and training programs. During the last decade, several visits have been made by the Chinese military leadership to the African countries of Nigeria, Algeria, South Africa and Egypt. Simultaneously, a couple of military delegations from Africa have visited Beijing.[40]

A recent milestone in the Sino-African relationship has been the Ebola outbreak in West Africa namely Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The epidemic was declared as a threat to world peace and security by the United Nations Security Council in September 2014. Although both the West and China tried to initiate measures to curb the crisis, yet assistance offered by China was the one most widely accepted and observed as the one with the biggest intensity in the history of China, in terms of its response to global non-traditional security crisis.

China's Health Diplomacy to the continent demonstrated three clear stands of thought – its desire to project itself as a responsible stakeholder in the international arena; its objective to protect its investments in West Africa; and thirdly an attempt to hedge the presence of other foreign powers like India, Brazil and the West on the African territory. This, together with the rising displeasure of the civil society in Africa towards interference in its internal affairs has compelled China to develop new strategies to earn the goodwill of the masses.

Further the much discussed subject of "One Belt One Road" in China's foreign policy realm holds significance for Africa too. Although the Maritime Silk Route covers only the coast of North-East Africa at present yet it is contemplated that a synergy and goodwill in relations will definitely have a spillover effect on the rest of Africa. The Chinese claim that the Silk Route initiative would offer thriving employment opportunities to the local African workforce, which in turn would contribute to the national income of the African countries. The motive behind these measures being undertaken by President Xi is to showcase China's affinity towards a deeper engagement with Africa.

Clearly, in the third phase China has mainly attempted to export its economic model to the countries of Africa. It is through the provision of economic aid and financial support that China seeks to gain political legitimacy in these respective nations. In this manner it is trying to spread the Beijing Consensus in Africa. The Beijing Consensus primarily refers to the "China Model" which

deals with political and more importantly the economic policies of the People's Republic of China. It is believed that over a period of two decades, this model of economic development has helped China in seeking an eightfold growth of its gross national product. The Beijing Consensus is largely viewed as an alternative to the Western model of development or the Washington Consensus.

Western Perspective

China's deepening engagement with Africa has considerably raised the level of Western speculation. Although Sino-African cooperation exists at various levels, the issues that are often deliberated upon are that concerned with the flow of primary goods from Africa to China, migration of Chinese laborers to the continent, construction of African infrastructure by the Chinese and a cohesion on issues that involve differences with the West. These are also the issues raised by the Western media, while discussing Sino-African engagement.[41]

China is often represented as an exploiter of African economies barely showing any concern for the sustainable political and economic development of the latter. Western scholars such as Broadman have highlighted the detrimental effect of the flooding in of cheap Chinese goods into the domestic markets of Africa.[42] Criticism has been hurled against Chinese firms for their outright disregard to adhere to human rights norms as well as for offering inferior conditions of work to the local laborers.[43] Also the nature of competition put in place by China and other new actors could be a serious disadvantage to the American companies. This is primarily because of the fact that as the aid received by the continent doubles the scope of competitive bids on infrastructure projects amplifies.[44] The US government has been very cautious regarding the statements that it makes on China's position in the continent. Without much exaggeration or vocal objection of the legitimate right of Beijing to seek natural resources and oil, the US has voiced its concern on Chinese activities in the region. Foremost criticism has been voiced against China for its support for ruinous and autocratic regimes. A case in point is China's role in Sudan's civil strife. This had resulted in several "feckless and toothless" resolutions by the UNSC.

The Western observers have also discussed about the deplorable impact of Chinese presence in the region. They have mentioned the manner in which certain sections of the African leadership have expressed their support for Beijing's willingness to evade the conditions of transparency, good governance and human rights – the strings that are mostly attached with the Western aid.

There are still a few other challenges that have been identified both by African as well as Western scholars. The trend of import of Chinese laborers for various infrastructure projects in the continent has limited the scope of employment for the local populace. Also, the textile industry in Africa that had earlier enjoyed thriving development under the US-African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), now has suffered great loss. Most importantly, the Chinese presence in the continent has had a devastating effect on the timber industry. Clearly, China has been a chief participant and a key importer of African timber. In order to meet its domestic need of timber, China offers financial assistance and carries out logging in the region of Central Africa. The West claims that through such practices not only does China violate the environmental rules of the land, but also transports its own environmental problems abroad.

The report "More Than Humanitarianism: A Strategic US Approach Towards Africa" published by the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) in January 2006 essentially discussed the US policy towards Africa. The report highlighted that violation of human rights and lack of transparency and good governance were the common features of the Chinese offering protection to the African regimes. It was in response to this report that China had released the White Paper on China's Africa Policy in 2006. China reiterated that the country's foreign policy towards Africa was essentially founded on seeking development, promoting trade and commerce as well as encouraging African representation on global platforms.

It cannot be ruled out that Beijing has relentlessly supported Africa with the much needed aid and investment. This has been followed by several pledges in the Forum of China Africa Cooperation that was created in 2000. The pledges have related to the cancellation of African debt to the tune of \$1 billion, encouraging trade, tourism and investment between the two countries.

Some Western scholars have identified a marked contrast between the Chinese willingness to undertake the construction of infrastructure projects to that of the restricted attention of the US aid programs towards the same. This issue has earned such prominence in the African continent that even those countries that are reliant on aid from the West have appreciated China's policies to contribute in such areas.

In response to the various criticisms hurled on China, the Chinese have abstained from making remarks regarding the drawbacks and hindrances in the Sino-African relations. Although issues relating to the dearth of Chinese desire to mingle with the local populace, complaints relating to the quality of the

cheap Chinese goods and the overall benefit that ordinary people are making from the aid projects are not deliberated upon, yet methods to protect the environment have been duly recognised and acknowledged.

Conclusion

With China emerging strong economically, politically and militarily in the international realm today, one can expect its enhanced role in Africa in the near future. China's African policy continues to reflect Beijing's expanding diplomatic horizon, its continuously widening definition of national interest, together with a transformation of China's status from a regional power player to a global power player. There is some latent realisation within the African community as well, that China will definitely have a role to play in the renaissance of the African economic boom. Today, China seeks to escalate its political influence in the region based on its robust economic ties with the respective states in the continent. Satisfaction of its economic appetite is and will continue to be China's key objective towards the continent. Thus, it is only with a lucid understanding of the historical trajectory of their bilateral ties that one can better identify the shifts, continuities and the strategic dynamism of Sino-African relationship.

Notes

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