China – Africa Relations and the European Union in Twenty-First Century Plurilateral World

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Abstract

Several significant contextual concerns and controversies are introduced to the reader in this paper. This paper first examines China's rise and emerging role in the global system, considering its position as a dominant large developing country power and how its increasing engagement with the African continent can be understood as part of a larger trend of China's growing global impact. The historical evolution of ties between China and Africa is then explored, with the Bandung Conference in 1955 serving as a pivotal event that helped shape these interactions for the decades that followed between growing Asian and African countries. The new, more assertive Chinese policy and strategy for Africa, which emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, is then briefly reviewed. The growing link between China and Africa is then discussed in terms of major economic security drivers, the most significant of which are those related to objectives related to supply security, finance and credit security, and techno-industrial capabilities security. It talks about how, since 2000, China's new Africa Policy has generated a lot of discussion, most notably one about rival development models that challenge Western governance conditionality and the Chinese non-interference concept. This paper examines China's positioning as a possible leader in the developing world's pursuit of a new global order that is less controlled by the US and Western powers. China-Africa cooperation is seen as a crucial component of this pursuit. This paper examines how China's Africa policy reflects both the traditional South-South cooperation and the growing alternative development and governance model to the dominant Northern one. Furthermore, a new and more intricate South–South interaction is emerging that cannot be adequately explained by the conventional model (influenced by dependency theory) or even by purported neo-colonialist tactics. Instead, African nations need to adopt a new approach since the China-Africa connection has proven to be just as difficult for them as their interactions with the North. New dynamics in the contacts between developing nations have emerged behind the rhetoric of South-South cooperation; analyzing these shifts calls for a broader lens than a China-Africa perspective. Similar to how North-South cooperation models are becoming less relevant in geopolitics (such as the EU-ACP alliance), new models are needed for emerging nations to cooperate and compete. This paper further contends that groups of countries (such as the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and China) could effectively cooperate in specific problem areas to address global development-related issues in the absence of effective international institutions with "fair" representation of all actors.

Keywords: China, Africa, European Union, Africa Policy, South-South Cooperation, North-South Cooperation, International Development

Introduction

The economic relationship between China and Africa has generated a great deal of scholarly debate for the following reasons: (i) the relationship's quick expansion and current size in terms of aid and economic exchange, as well as the effort to comprehend the main factors influencing this expansion and its effects on the economy and environment; (ii) China's status as a "developing country," which distinguishes it from the typical and long-standing developed country "partners" that African nations have traditionally worked with; (iii) China's differing approaches to the Western powers in forming development partnerships in Africa; (iv) the broader geopolitical implications of China forging closer economic

relationships with developing country regions like Africa, including the challenge posed to Western hegemony.
China is one of many major emerging powers, or new powers, that are strengthening their economic ties with Africa. These nations include Brazil, South Africa, Russia, India, and South Africa (Kragelund, 2018). China, however, is the biggest and most potent member of this group. It has occasionally positioned itself as a mediator between developed and developing nations or as a champion of developing country interests in fora, such as World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations and G20 discussions on the global financial crisis of 2008–2009. It has sought closer economic relationships with other developing country regions and continents such as Latin America and Central Asia, but it is with Africa – the continent that hosts more developing countries than any other – that China has fostered the closest links.
Since 2000, China's new Africa strategy has generated a lot of discussion, most notably one about competing development models that challenge the Chinese non-interference principle and Western governance conditionality (Abah, 2023). Additionally, because of East Asia's economic vitality, it has inspired African leaders to emphasize the new political and economic prospects of a new age of South-South cooperation. Many African nations were able to take advantage of these new dynamics and experience faster growth prior to the financial crisis, particularly because of the huge gains from commodities and oil. China presents itself as the spearhead of emerging nations' efforts to usher in a less US/Western-dominated world order (Shelton and Paruk 2019). As suggested by the Forum for China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) pronouncements and the Chinese White Paper on Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2016), South-South collaboration between China and Africa is a crucial component of this goal. The basic premise of China's Africa strategy, which is seen as an expression of historic South-South cooperation and a growing alternative model of development and governance to the established Northern one, has not received much scrutiny in this discussion (Abe, 2022). Rather, observers have concentrated on one aspect of it, specifically China's realpolitik conundrum of non-interference (Bates et al., 2017, Berger and Wissenbach, 2017, Wissenbach, 2018).
This paper introduces the reader to several significant contextual concerns and arguments. China's rise and emerging role in the global system is first looked at, considering its position as an ascendant large developing country power and how its growing engagement with the African continent can be understood as part of a broader trend of China's growing global impact generally. After that, the historical evolution of ties between China and Africa is explored, focusing on how these interactions were shaped in the decades that followed the Bandung Conference between emerging Asian and African countries in 1955. A succinct summary of China's new, more assertive Africa policy and strategy, which became evident in the late 1990s and early 2000s, follows this. The next section of this paper explores how essential economic security drivers—the most significant of which are those related to supply security, finance-credit security, and techno-industrial capabilities security objectives—may be used to understand the rapidly developing Africa-China relationship. It argues that the conventional South-South model, which is based on dependence theory, is no longer enough to describe the growing new and complicated connection between developing nations, nor can the accusations of neo-colonialism. The emergence of Asian nations, particularly China, shows that external conditions (Western domination of international organizations, trade terms, etc.) do not in and of themselves impede development. This new pattern is motivated by variables like as capitalism, global value chains, uneven economic ties, and interdependencies that were considered diabolical in the previous depiction of South-South interactions. The phrase "scramble for Africa's resources," the friendly engagement of the Western development community, or Chinese solidarity with developing nations are just a few examples of the complex forms of engagement that China, Europe, and even other external partners like the US and Japan are exercising with Africa. These forms of engagement call into question the validity of these simplistic viewpoints. Everybody is motivated by different things inside a more intricate and global framework.

In today's globalized world, the conventional idea of South-South cooperation is as out of date as the ideological conflict between capitalism and communism, popularly known as the Cold War, which first prompted the Bandung Conference in 1955. Rather, as seen in the China-Africa relationship, South-South cooperation has proven to be just as difficult for African nations as relations with the North, necessitating the development of a new approach for African nations to effectively navigate the complex web of interests that underpins China's engagement with Africa (le Pere 2017; Abe, 2022).

Although China's growing influence as a political and economic ally has given the West much-needed fresh perspectives and vibrant alternatives, has it truly given Africa any new avenues for development? Does China really have an economic model that is so distinct from capitalism in the West that it can really be a viable substitute? As it encourages African nations to do, China actually pursued its reforms and opening-up policy with a clear focus on trade and investment relations with wealthy industrialized nations and on joining the Western-dominated international institutions that it had rejected during the revolutionary period, rather than on South-South cooperation (Abah, 2023). In fact, throughout the first twenty years of China's reform program, assistance and commercial ties with Africa declined. China has not been a very active leader of developing nations since entering the World Trade Organization (WTO); instead, Brazil and India have taken on more significant responsibilities. China's strategy and effects on Africa are actually only a small portion of a larger picture, a change in its worldwide strategy based on the fundamental dynamics of its rise to prominence as a major manufacturing hub and economy. China's integration into the global economy is reflected in this picture, where its exports of manufactured goods and imports of resources, machinery, and components for manufacturing are primarily directed towards the Asian region, the major industrialized economies, and, to a lesser extent, Africa and Latin America, depending on the resources or market segments. Nonetheless, China's entry into the world economy has resulted in a sharp increase in the demand for commodities and a steady decline in the cost of produced goods. Both elements have a significant effect on African nations. The demand for energy, minerals, and lumber benefits the nations who possess these resources, but it has a detrimental effect on the nations that must import these goods at greater rates. The competitiveness of Chinese consumer goods has been a mixed blessing for consumers with local industries unable to compete. The industrialization process of African countries is thus under threat.

Africa's proportion of China's international commerce is around 3%, which is comparable to the proportion of trade that Africa has with other major countries (Abe, 2022; Abah, 2023). Investing in Africa is not a strategic move for many Chinese enterprises; rather, the continent serves as a stepping stone to a more global presence in a market with significantly less competition than the West. Thus, China's ascent in the global economy makes South-South cooperation a sub-strategy inside a global pattern of change. Some are even a byproduct of China's overcapacity, such exports of infrastructure projects to Africa. However, the global economic shift brought about by China's economic integration offers other emerging nations experiences and possibilities, as well as the competitive pressure to adapt, which African nations must evaluate for their own growth. Incidentally, China does not provide the only model for study: Arguably, a country like South Korea, once a poor rural economy in a peripheral location, lacking resources and facing post-conflict reconstruction after a civil war and of comparable size to many African countries, could yield at least as useful lessons as China does.

China's growth, whether at the UN or other international multilateral institutions, has energized South-South cooperation's longstanding goal of challenging Western global dominance in politics. China, however, also opposed the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform, which Africa had placed great expectations in. Changes in contacts between developing nations have occurred behind the rhetoric of South-South cooperation; hence, analyzing the new dynamics requires a broader prism than a China-Africa emphasis. In the same way that North-South cooperation models are becoming less relevant in terms of geopolitics, new models are needed to comprehend cooperation and rivalry among emerging nations in the twenty-first century. China's worldwide rise has profoundly transformed the international division of labor and terms of trade (Broadman 2016, Eichengreen et al. 2017). As a result, there is in fact greater possibility than ever for pragmatic economic cooperation between developing nations (Kaplinsky 2018). Both industrialized and developing nations are impacted by this shift, sometimes in comparable ways. For instance, consumer gains may be accompanied by manufacturing closures. However, this is an opportunity that must be used, not idealized or idealized for populist anti-Western motives that frequently mask the failure of the domestic elite. Had China not made the decision to work with and learn from the West in order to better compete with it, its rise would not have been possible.

China, Africa and International Development

China has been among the most economically and technologically sophisticated countries in the world for a large portion of human history. Its quick and steady economic expansion has turned a once-moribund economy into one of the main drivers of the global economic system, which has largely been responsible for its resurgence as a great power. China has been anticipated to take on a more responsible role in the international community as a growing great power, contributing to the resolution of the numerous interconnected and enduring issues facing mankind in the early twenty-first century. China is in a unique position to address the global "development divide" and poverty eradication. The nation has pulled hundreds of millions of its citizens out of poverty over the past few decades—the highest amount in history. It also has access to a vast amount of financial resources; for example, it is the largest retainer of foreign exchange reserves in the world due to large inflows of foreign investment, significant and steady trade surpluses, high levels of domestic savings, and Chinese state policies pertaining to sovereign wealth funds. China is therefore able to provide considerable funding for development aid.

Furthermore, China is largely regarded as a developing nation, and as such, compared to developed nations, it may be more able to understand and recognize the development requirements of African states, having recently had to overcome a number of obstacles in the process of undergoing economic transformation. Many African nations also struggle with the innate issues of China's dualistic growth, such as disparities in welfare, employment, earnings, and skill levels between central urban-industrial zones and periphery rural-interior parts. To put it briefly, China has a lot of recent experience that it can impart to its African allies.

It goes without saying that many developed countries, particularly the United States, prefer that African countries adhere to Western market-liberal democratic values and practices rather than the Chinese "socialist market" model of political economic governance. However, what role does China intend to play in global development, where does it stand in the global order, and how does it see its interests being accommodated within it? The country's "peaceful rise" within a multilateral international order has been carefully articulated in Chinese government foreign policy declarations and papers. "China's development will not bring a threat to anyone but will only bring more opportunities and space for development to the world," as Chinese President Hu Jintao said during his 2012 trip of West Africa (French, 2016: 128). Furthermore, China does not want to significantly disrupt the global economic system that has contributed to the country's increasing affluence and geopolitical prominence. But China is already making a big difference in global economic institutions (such trade, industry, and finance), geopolitical ties, and the discussions and actions of development diplomacy as a growing powerhouse in poor nations.

Africa-China ties have a long history. Bilateral trade records go all the way back to the eleventh century BC, when Alexandria, an Egyptian city, began trading with China (Aning and Lecoutre, 2018). Many Sub-Saharan African peoples were in contact with Chinese explorers several centuries before European explorers did. However, throughout the era of Western imperial dominance, relations between the two sides deteriorated and were not restored until the later part of the 20th century. The origins of China-Africa ties in the contemporary age are frequently attributed to the Bandung Conference in 1955, which brought together 29 Asian and African countries for the first time. China played a key role in organizing the summit, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence it approved were founded on a previous agreement reached between the two countries a year earlier. Respect for sovereignty, non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, economic and technical cooperation, mutual benefit, the needs and rights of developing countries (including investment and the stabilization of primary product prices), and peaceful coexistence were among the main themes and declarations of the Bandung Conference. This mirrored the delegate countries' chosen vision for a multipolar global order and for eschewing "European colonialism and US-USSR neo-imperialistic superpower rivalry," as noted by Mawdsley (2017: 408). However, amid China's slow economic growth under Maoism from the late 1950s to the 1970s, Sino-African ties deteriorated. Beijing just lacked the means to make a major economic contribution to the continent. Additionally, China's primary goals in Africa at the time were more geopolitical and ideological in nature. These goals included politically isolating Taiwan, competing with Western and Soviet influence, and upholding the rhetoric of a common Third World struggle against capitalism and the Cold War superpowers (Konings, 2017, Mbaye, 2017). When the socialist market reforms first started in the 1980s, China was focused on its own internal growth and economic modernization process. However, Sino-African relations were revitalized during the 1990s as China sought to globalize its economy and economic relations more substantively.

Throughout the 1990s, trade and investment flows between China and Africa increased steadily, mostly due to China's rapid industrialization. The Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) met for the first time in Beijing in 2000. According to Mawdsley (2017), the speech delivered by then-President Jiang Zemin at the gathering that exposed the views of the Chinese government at the time had the following four main elements:

• The current global system is unfair and inequitable, and poor nations continue to face significant disadvantages.

• The right to national self-determination and the opposition to foreign intervention in a nation-state's affairs.

• Advocating for more economic cooperation among developing nations, avoiding structural reliance on the West's advanced industrial powers when feasible.

• Commitment to peaceful multilateral resolutions of issues about the environment, politics, economy, and security.

President Hu Jintao presented the framework for China's 2006 Africa Policy statement to the forty-three African heads of state present at the summit during the second FOCAC, which was held in Ethiopia in 2003, and the third, which was again hosted by Beijing in 2006. This was in line with Beijing's proclamation of 2006 as the "Year of Africa," and Beijing's comprehensive white paper on China-Africa relations, which was approved in January 2006, outlines the following essential ideas that guide China's present approach to the continent:

• *Sincerity, friendship and equality*: China adhering to the principles of peaceful co-existence and respect of the African nation’s self-determination regarding economic and socio-political development.

• *Mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity*: China’s promotion of development co-operation with Africa in its various forms, to the mutual benefit of both parties.

• *Mutual support and close co-ordination*: China’s commitment to strengthened co-operation with Africa at multilateral levels, drawing upon the international community to play a more active part in Africa’s peace and development.

• *Mutual learning and common paths of development*: Strengthened exchange and co-operation in various social fields, as well as China’s support for enhancing capacity building and sustainable development in Africa.

These tenets, which include respect for African national self-determination and peaceful coexistence, have some historical roots in the 1955 Bandung Conference proclamation (Aning and Lecoutre, 2018). At the very least, they serve as the foundation for China's Africa policy and strategy. Here, Davies (2017) draws comparisons between China's strategy for internal economic growth and this. The 11th Five-Year Plan (2006–10) of China is centered around the idea of a *Xiaokang* society, which seeks to achieve "five balances" between economic and social development, urban and rural development, development among regions, development between man and nature, and domestic development with wider openings to the outside world. Similarities exist between the *Xiaokang* concept and the UN Millennium Development Goals, both being ‘people-centered’ and converge around human-centered goals and objectives. The 2006 Africa Policy document also outlined plans for substantial increases in aid, investment and trade with Africa, the key objectives here being:

• China to double its 2006 level of assistance.
• Increase Sino-African trade to US$100 billion per year.
• Provide US$5 billion in preferential loans and credits, and a further US$5 billion to support Chinese company investment in Africa.
• China to cancel debts owed by the most heavily indebted nations.
• Increase tariff eliminations on African exports to China from 190 to 440 product lines from the least developed countries from the continent.
• Establish a series of Sino-African trade and economic zones.
• Construction of 30 hospitals, 30 malaria treatment centres and 100 new schools across rural Africa.

A promise of US$120 billion for the infrastructure development of Africa over the next ten years was made by China, which hosted the annual conference of the African Development Bank in Shanghai in 2017. Although Sino-African commerce was only about US$820 million annually in 1979, it increased to US$10 billion by 2000 and US$83 billion overall by 2017 (Abah, 2023). China has just surpassed Britain to become Africa's third-largest trading partner after the United States and France, even though just 3% of China's overall commerce is with the continent. Approximately 900 Chinese investment projects are located throughout the continent, mostly in the mining, energy, commodities, agricultural, and infrastructure sectors.

Economic Security Drivers of the China–Africa Relationship

The goals of foreign economic policy are essentially determined by the pursuit of different types of economic security (Dent, 2002, 2007). In order to achieve economic security, a political-economic body must protect its interests as well as its structural integrity and capacity to generate wealth in the face of several externalized risks and challenges that it faces within the global economic system. Dent offered eight alternative conceptual typologies of economic security in his earlier writings on the formulation of foreign economic policy: supply, market access, techno-industrial competence, finance-credit, socio-economic paradigm, transborder community, alliance, and systemic (Dent 2002, 2007). In this section, the most relevant of these economic security concepts are applied in explaining the determining and motivational factors behind a closer China–Africa economic relationship.

Supply Security

In short, "supply security" refers to safeguarding important supply networks that involve international suppliers. Thus, it is especially related to the several supply chains that nations use to import goods, parts, and technology from outside. In order to keep these chains intact, economic diplomacy may be required. The economy's supply base, which may be viewed as an infrastructure from the standpoint of economic actors (people, businesses) who stand to benefit from increased external economies of scale and scope, is ultimately served by these structures.

The rapid industrialization of China has led to a significant demand for fuel and natural resources both domestically and internationally (Jiang 2019). Africa still has plenty of resources to support this process. For example, several African countries have significant reserves of metal ores, such as copper and cobalt, which are needed to make consumer electronics. China is the sixth-largest oil producer in the world, but by 1993, it was actually importing more oil than it was exporting. Beijing has signed agreements with several African countries, including Angola, Algeria, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Nigeria, and Sudan, for the delivery of oil and other energies. Approximately 25–30% of China's oil imports currently come from Africa (Prah, 2017). Other high-volume levels of natural resources that the continent supplies to China are cobalt, copper, aluminium, platinum, iron, uranium, tin, manganese and timber (Konings, 2017).

Chinese businesses are facing increased competition from industrialized nations with far longer-standing economic interests in Africa when it comes to resource needs (Gu, 2019). China's "rapacious thirst" for Africa's resources has been the subject of much reported worry and even alarm in the Western media and policy sectors, but this has to be understood in the larger picture. The resource sectors on the continent have been controlled for decades by Western companies, and this trend is mostly still in place. For instance, in 2016 China bought 9% of Africa's petroleum exports, while the US bought 33% and Europe 36% (Aning and Lecoutre, 2018; Abe, 2022). In 2016, the United States still consumed around three times more oil than China in total and imported almost four times as much (Abe, 2022).

Analyzing the characteristics of the Chinese economy's resource demand drivers is also beneficial. China still uses more energy than the rest of the world for every US dollar of GDP expansion in the industrial sector, while having relatively low levels of resource processing and productivity efficiency (French, 2016). These figures are, nonetheless, maybe to be anticipated from the economy of a growing nation, and the Chinese government is acting forcefully to address the problem of production inefficiency. More significantly, what does the term "Chinese economy" actually mean? The enormously important role foreign invested companies (FIEs) play in the Chinese economy and the country's economic growth is often overlooked in analysis of China-African economic ties. FIE operations account for almost 60% of China's exports and 40% of all foreign investment in the nation (Breslin, 2017; Abah, 2023). Thus, the increasing number of American, European, Japanese, and other foreign multinational corporations operating in China is largely responsible for the country's growing need for energy and other natural resources. China's claims for Africa's resources so reflect the most recent stage of the growth of capitalism worldwide. Furthermore, China is frequently seen as a danger and rival to industrialized nations for access to Africa's natural resources, as noted by Davies (2017: 8). This ignores the reality that a large portion of China's resource imports are exported again as goods or commodities with value added to support the consumption of developed nations. Although the Chinese government and its affiliated organizations have been in charge of formulating policies and negotiating resource contracts with their African counterparts, the underlying factors influencing these actions are intimately connected to the globalization of the economy.

Finance-Credit Security

This means maintaining, to the greatest extent feasible, the financial stability of nations participating in the international system and their ability to access, influence, or control global credit sources. In light of Third World debt, emerging countries are now gravely concerned about their economic security. Numerous African nations are deeply indebted to international lenders while also being impoverished. China possesses a greater quantity of excess financial resources than any other country, which has given Beijing a great deal of flexibility in assisting African countries to lessen their problems with finance and credit security. China has made significant progress toward canceling the debt of 31 African states since 2000. In 2016, for example, China lent US$8.1 billion to Angola, Mozambique, and Nigeria alone, while the World Bank loaned US$2.3 billion to all of Africa in the same year (Eisenman and Kurlantzick, 2016; Abe, 2022). In its interactions with China, African nations continue to rely heavily on finance, as China's "policy banks" and state-run commercial banks—such as China Development Bank and China Export-Import Bank—are aggressively organizing and concluding a number of investment-for-resource exchange deals. A much cited example is the China–Angola agreement whereby the former offered US$2 billion to help repair the latter's national railway system in return for offshore oil concession rights (Chan-Fishel and Lawson, 2017; Foerstel, 2018; Adebowale, 2021: 324).

Aning and Lecoutre (2018) list many more notable instances of China funding infrastructure projects in Africa, such as the building of road networks in Nigeria, Rwanda, Angola, and Ethiopia; the Tekeze Dam in Ethiopia; Nigeria's railway system; and Sudan's oil pipeline network. Furthermore, the China Road and Bridge Corporation has worked on more than 500 building projects to far. Due to a strong combination of cost advantages, including lower operating margins, cheaper imported Chinese labor, capital, and materials, the use of standard designs, and Chinese government subsidies, Chinese businesses have been outbidding foreign competitors for government procurement contracts in Africa more broadly (Kaplinsky et al., 2017; Adebowale, 2021). By the end of 2020, Chinese firms had won construction contracts in Africa worth around US$60 billion (Adebowale, 2021). There are strong overlaps between finance-credit and techno-industrial capability security considerations in the China–Africa economic relationship, as discussed below.

Techno-Industrial Capability Security

This category of economic security focuses on maintaining and enhancing the economy's capacity to produce wealth, productivity, and other elements that contribute to wellbeing via techno-industrial methods. This relates to problems with access to the acquisition of foreign technology and might originate from domestic or international sources. These capacities may be used to achieve certain goals of foreign economic policy, such as boosting export competitiveness or drawing in more high-value foreign investment. On the other hand, certain measures used by foreign economic policy (such as trade-industry policy and economic diplomacy) can help promote the growth of techno-industrial capacities. The majority of China's funding for Africa's techno-industrial capacity enhancements has gone toward infrastructure expansions; comparatively, far less investment has been allocated to enhancing and expanding industry sector growth thus far. The fact that so few African states have requested this kind of aid from China may help to partially explain this. Even though infrastructure development is a crucial and integral part of capacity building, the weak, limited, and in some cases nearly nonexistent industry base of the majority of African states is a major contributing factor to their continued involvement in low-value-adding activities. A structural shift from the current agrarian and agro-processing activities towards sustainable manufacturing sectors would seem essential for African nations improving the long-term prosperity-generating capacity of their economies.

This facet of the economic interaction between China and Africa has some underlying issues. First off, Africa's economic and industrial growth has faced serious challenges from China's growing economic might and techno-industrial competitiveness. Numerous sectors of the interior provincial economy in China, like as textiles, plastics, furniture manufacturing, basic electronics, and other low-tech consumer durable goods, are in direct competition with their equivalents in Africa (French, 2016). Therefore, the Chinese government may have a conflict of interest while attempting to encourage the growth of the infant industry in Africa. A few worldwide occurrences and advancements have added to the complexity of this problem. African textile exporters used to have quota protection rights under the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) to sell their goods to important Western markets. But in a newly liberalized global market, they had to contend with their Chinese rivals following the MFA's dissolution in December 2004.

Due to their inability to compete with Chinese and other Asian companies, several textile factories in South Africa, Lesotho, Ghana, Swaziland, Uganda, and Kenya closed down as a direct result of this (Konings, 2017). Ghanaian furniture and clothing exporters have also been hard hit, as have Ethiopian footwear producers, and South Africa – with perhaps the continent's most developed industrial capacity – has been adversely affected on many fronts by Chinese competition. Yet the empirical data on such displacement effects remains patchy and anecdotal (Prah, 2017; Abah, 2023).

What is China's interest in matching this transition, even if it is assumed that the majority of African nations will eventually choose manufacturing industrial sector investment above infrastructure investment from China? Later talks on conceptualizing development relations take this important subject into account. The establishment of a number of Sino-African trade and economic zones is one of the declared policy objectives in the Chinese government's 2006 Africa Policy paper, which may be the most obvious proof that the Chinese government is addressing this issue. A significant portion of China's economic growth plan, particularly in the early years of its reform era, was focused on supporting the construction of industrial districts or clusters at the zonal level, which were supported by urban centers with access to trained labor and infrastructure. China's economic success has been largely attributed to the integration of these industrial clusters and districts with global production networks and other supply chains. If Chinese funding agencies truly intend to replicate this aspect of their own economic development model, then the proposed Sino-African trade and economic zones may present comparable opportunities for African countries.

South–South Co-operation: A Novel Approach to Development?

The way that Africa, Europe, and China view each other has significantly altered in the almost two decades after the end of the Cold War due to globalization, the now-temporarily stopped commodities boom, and seismic developments in world politics. China and the European Union (EU) have developed a closer strategic alliance, in part to address the difficulties posed by both China's rise and globalization. EU support for China's political, social, economic, and environmental reforms is part of this alliance. China has been a popular destination for both foreign direct investment (FDI) and overseas development aid (ODA).

The original idea behind South-South cooperation was to challenge Imperialism and Northern (Western and Soviet) supremacy in the bipolar world. Therefore, in order to critically analyze this somewhat nebulous concept in the context of China's current Africa policy or partnership, we must consider the relative importance of South-South cooperation to China's emergence, foreign economic policy, and own development when compared to other regions' cooperation, as well as the alternatives China offers to North-South templates in the larger global context. Starting with the distinguishing characteristics of these patterns—trade and development—we will next examine the underlying normative approaches, limiting the scope of our comparison to China and the EU and making sporadic allusions to the defunct Washington Consensus.

Natural, mineral, and human resources leaving Africa and European manufacturers continue to be the major sources of economic interchange between Europe and Africa. Africa and China have an engagement similar to this one, albeit Africa's involvement is now even more limited to that of a provider of raw commodities (Broadman, 2016; Kaplinsky, 2018). This is not consistent with the supposed role of South-South cooperation, which is to provide "a realistic alternative to North-South trading patterns which have dominated global commerce since the colonial era and a shield against exploitation by industrialized nations," as Shelton (2018: 176) puts it. African leaders are cautioned by the same author (2018: 178) not to "switch from a dependency on the West to a dependency on China." One novel feature of China's engagement with Africa is that, in certain instances, China purchases Africa's resources with a package of financing, infrastructure investment, and turn-key aid projects instead of cash. This approach has the advantage of being more difficult to transfer to Swiss bank accounts. African nations can select from a variety of offerings made by China and turn down unduly invasive alternatives, such conditionalities from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Angola (Corkins, 2018) or excessively bureaucratic official development assistance (ODA) from conventional donors. Additionally, it enables financially strapped nations, like Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), to swiftly fund significant infrastructure projects in order to boost their economies or begin reconstruction efforts following a period of violence. This attractive and competitive pattern is not risk free and needs to be monitored in respect of possible consequences of debt sustainability and social and environmental impacts (Dahle and Muyakwa, 2018; Abe, 2022). Many nations still lack the institutional framework necessary to adequately monitor these effects, and many people in Africa and other parts of the world continue to view Western-dominated institutions as being insufficiently impartial to do so. The domain of infrastructure is where the distinctive character of Chinese cooperation is most apparent. It is challenging to fund such significant projects using ODA grants, of which China offers relatively little. The funding is provided by the cash-rich Chinese banks through loans that are essentially preferential in nature. These loans are based on an economic growth-focused business mindset rather than a comprehensive, sector-wide sustainable development strategy with a far wider range of objectives.

In example, trade reveals that the main drivers of China-African economic interactions are well-known patterns of resource exports offset by imports of manufactured goods. This gives birth to the antiquated notion of reliance, which attributes Africa's plight to outside forces and favorable trading conditions, in this context. However, the notable disruption of the commodities boom in 2008–2009 highlighted the concept's limitations. Thus, the present North-South trade pattern is essentially unchanged, but it also hurts African nations that import resources while increasing the bargaining leverage of resource-rich nations due to increased competition and higher pricing. Recent large annual increases of China–Africa trade are not only an expression of *quantitative* rise but are also driven by the sharp rise of the commodity *prices*, especially of oil.

Even while the total amount of recent two-way trade has increased significantly, these top 10 trading partners—South Africa, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, Congo-Brazzaville, Libya, Equatorial Guinea, Morocco, and Algeria—have shown notable stability since 2016 (Abah, 2023). In 2018, the top five nations—South Africa, Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt, and Angola—accounted for 61% of all two-way commerce, with the top 10 contributing 79% (Abah, 2023). The trading partners that ranked highest in terms of exports to China between 2016 and 2018 were also published by Abah (2023: 266-267). This indicates that in 2018, these five nations (Angola, South Africa, Sudan, Congo-Brazzaville, and Libya) accounted for 79% of all exports from Africa. In the same year, 93 per cent of exports came from these 10 countries (Angola, South Africa, Sudan, Congo-Brazzaville, Libya, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mauritania and Algeria), with little movement within these top 10. While the majority of other African nations tend to import more from China than they export, these nations often have a positive trade balance with that country. Additionally, South Africa is essentially the only nation in Africa with significant investments in China. Abah (2023: 383) provides some insight into how China's cooperation with Africa compares to that of the EU. Among other things, this indicates that concerns about China potentially taking over Africa are unfounded, and that trade patterns between the EU and Africa are more diverse than those between China and Africa, which are primarily focused on resource (primarily oil) exports from Africa (Kaplinsky, 2018; Abah, 2023).

Would resource nationalism be a component of South-South cooperation and advantageous to China if it is the new option (Baregu, 2018)? Resource nationalism may alter the conditions of trade with any foreign partner, industrialized or developing, more profoundly than one may think. Due to its relative disadvantages, China will need to negotiate hard for access from resource-rich nations as a fast-growing consumer and a newcomer hindered by deficiencies in management and technology. Additionally, it may offset this by strategically utilizing what Kaplinsky (2018) refers to as the three interaction vectors—trade, investment, and aid—that Beijing often combines into cohesive "policy package" agreements in order to obtain access to new sources.

Moreover, China would get preferential treatment if resource nationalism was characterized by South-South cooperation. Due to the fact that most agreements are opaque and can be explained by a variety of other, potentially more significant reasons, there is not much proof for this in Africa. A few instances are the short-term interest in building infrastructure for development and domestic political reasons (such as in the DRC and Angola) as well as the lack of access to alternate sources of funding due to these or other factors. The majority of African nations appear focused on diversifying their clientele and maximizing profits from a range of purchasers.

Examining China's relations with developing nations in its neighborhood ten years prior to the implementation of its new Africa policy is fascinating (Eichengreen et al., 2017). Subsequently, China's ties with Southeast Asia began to follow suit, with the area serving as both an investment destination and a source of components and raw materials. This appears to support the theory that China is the one setting the pattern closer to home, and that involvement with Africa is not a singular phenomenon but rather a component of a larger one. Additionally, there are no signs that China's Southeast Asian allies gave Beijing special treatment or access to their markets, or vice versa.

Quite to the contrary, as China absorbed and gradually diverted foreign direct investment (FDI) away from Southeast Asia, affecting the region negatively in its global trade and investment position. Southeast Asian fears of China were gradually allayed by China's solidarity in the 1997–1998 East Asian financial crisis and a progressive political and treaty-based engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This is significant in two respects: the multilateral engagement broke with China's bilateral foreign policy tradition, and it shows how important it is for the smaller partners to work collectively when engaging China.

The main goals of development as stated in the UN framework—which poor nations view as the sole valid framework—are broadly shared by China, Africa, and the EU; nevertheless, there are distinct disparities in how these goals will be achieved. The governments of China and Africa frequently concur to prioritize economic development above sustainability or pro-poor measures, despite their differing moral philosophies. This strategy is based on pragmatism, a popular evaluation of the shortcomings of Western development theories, and firsthand knowledge of China's developmental trajectory, where success is primarily determined by economic growth. However, up to now, Africans have mostly used it as a political outlet for their political resentment of previous Western ODA policies, while China has mostly utilized it to strengthen its reputation as an alternative, if not radically different, commercial and development partner. While both China and the EU have stated that they want to see Africa flourish, whether one trusts analysts or Senegal's President Wade, their approaches to the continent are quite different. The opinion of the EU as a benign player contrasts with the perspective of the Southern nations, which perceive the EU as an aggressive economic operator, as noted by Biscop (2019).

Discussions in Europe these days concerning a broader definition of development cooperation that goes beyond the strict division of official development assistance from economic cooperation, including trade, investment, and remittances, seem to suggest that Western nations are trying to imitate China's effective approach of engaging with Africa. However, this evolution also follows logically from the globalization-induced transition from a charity-based strategy to an equitable partnership strategy (with fewer privileged trade laws) (Grimm, 2018).

Instead of pursuing a vision of global change, China pursues a narrow national project (revival, recognition, and reunification), which it implements with a high degree of pragmatism and embellishes with rhetoric about its global role in fostering a harmonised world that partially caters to domestic constituencies but primarily aims at foreign opinion. For this reason, discussions on China's soft power are quite popular in Chinese foreign policy journals. China wants as much stability and predictability as possible in the international arena so that its leaders may focus on the home agenda (Men, 2017). Thus, this agenda serves as a stabilizing force in international politics and for organizations involved in global governance.

Due to its limited ability to handle external risks, China frequently acts from a well-disguised position of weakness. Examples of this include its low GDP and social welfare per capita indicators, growing income inequality, issues with governance and the environment, a lack of hard power to project abroad, and its limited influence in the media and culture (Wissenbach 2019). In actuality, China's reform project is still in its infancy and faces several internal obstacles. In comparison to Western nations, the foreign policy machinery is quite tiny, and it is ill-equipped to handle the intricacies of development strategy as it is now practiced in Europe, let alone the difficulties associated with coordinating with so many allies or adversaries.

China's primary challenge in international relations is balancing national interest based on interconnected primary domestic and secondary foreign policy goals as well as pressure from the global community (He, 2017). African nations are exerting more and more political and economic pressure on this international level. China's internal policies have a variety of effects on the globe, sometimes having a greater influence than Beijing's stances in international forums. One example is the influence of China's economic growth policies on the pricing of commodities globally. China has therefore been obliged to create both a global and regional policy that address and clarify these processes. These dynamics are also reflected in the evolution and adaptations of China’s foreign aid policy from a one-way solidarity based approach to a commercial win-win strategy (Zhou, 2018).

A true policy line that seeks to realign the present global order in China's favor is consistent with South-South cooperation, which is increasingly becoming a component of that balancing act. It is simply believed that China's interests are essentially the same as those of other developing nations, with the scope being restricted to safeguarding China's political system and sovereignty as well as amplifying its influence in international events. The prevalent belief that China is a status-quo power and intentionally behaves as such contrasts with the frequently held hopes in Africa that China will spearhead the challenge to the West. The idea of a peaceful world is obviously intended to refute suggestions that China would try to challenge superpowers. This rebalancing was intended to be accomplished by a worldwide revolutionary battle against imperialism during the height of South-South cooperation during the Mao period, and China participated in both the less glamorous Cold War power struggles in Africa and the anti-colonial struggle. Chinese policy at the period frequently involved meddling through the use of force or financial support for different liberation or rebel organizations (Zhou, 2018). China's approach to Africa has changed gradually but dramatically since the opening-up and reform policies began more than

30 years ago. However, the fundamentals of this approach—such as Zhou En Lai's eight principles of foreign aid—have remained constant, albeit with practical adjustments made to account for changing circumstances. The new realities are no longer a struggle against imperialism, capitalism or Soviet revisionism but a struggle for resources, markets, diplomatic interests and development.

The increased range of Chinese players and aims must also be included in any examination of China's engagement in Africa. There are conflicts of interest between the goal of many Chinese businesses, provinces, or cities to make money in Africa regardless of development, ethical, or image considerations, and the goal of the central government to project an image of responsibility internationally and, more specifically, of genuine friendship to Africans. There is competition with businesses from other growing economies and in a challenging climate. As a result, various actors' behaviors elicit various responses. However, many partners mistakenly think that every firm is remote-controlled, or at the at least, can be swayed by a phone call from the Chinese Prime Minister, because China's government seeks to present a consistent image overseas. At first, the Chinese government believed that trade, high-level visits, declarations of solidarity, small amounts of development aid, and ostensibly win-win cooperation would be enough to accomplish the goals of the central government. As a result, it did not examine national politics, state-society relations, domestic social conditions, or the effects of "unleashing" the various Chinese actors in Africa (such as provinces, state-owned enterprises [SOEs], private businesses, individuals, exporters, and investors) (Guenther, 2018).

It is not a simple task to adapt the language of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is based on historical diplomatic traditions and aims, to complicated reality. China's intentional combination of assistance, investment, and commerce exacerbates the issue. Despite being economically beneficial, this bundling raises political issues since it makes it difficult to distinguish between government and corporate entities as well as between "business = competition" and "aid = solidarity." Considering China's competitiveness, the potential harm to African businesses might outweigh the benefits of even a modest assistance contribution—especially in light of China's GDP. The first effect is a great deal of criticism, both domestically and internationally, of Chinese "aid," which is really "business" that cannot be evaluated under terms of assistance criteria. Second, it raises expectations in Africa that China is unable to satisfy. In actuality, even if China contributes a sizable amount of funding (for example, through the China Development Bank or the EXIM Bank), only a tiny portion of the interests that are subsidized should be considered aid. While China is actually an investor with a variety of goals, some have mistakenly believed that it is suddenly a major contributor due to the careless handling of these large amounts of money as help.

China's proposed approach to Africa, which is based on equality, friendship, and solidarity, does not align with criticism from other countries, particularly from Africa, of a relationship based on raw material exports with little added value in Africa, strained labor relations, and frequent violations of environmental, labor, or immigration laws by Chinese companies (Heinrich Boell Foundation, 2018). African civil society criticism and challenges are written off as sponsored or driven by the West. This does not convey the idea of a serious analysis on the ground, but rather of conspiracy theory or hysteria. This disparity is due to the complexities and conflicts that exist in the real world between many players, including those inside the Chinese bureaucracy, rather than necessarily calling into doubt the sincerity of the government's Africa diplomacy (Altenburg and Weikert, 2016; Li, 2018). Like investors, foreign and development ministers are not philanthropists, even if they sometimes portray themselves in such a way.

Paradoxically, political allusions to South-South cooperation as a framework for FOCAC are commonplace at the same time as China's economic interactions with Africa begin to mimic the conventional North-South pattern and its previous engagement with Southeast Asia (Abah, 2023). There is a discernible trend toward the global South coming together and challenging Western agendas, particularly those related to development, like the efficacy of aid, good governance, and the predominance of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) standards in the UN Human Rights Council (Dahle and Muyakwa 2018). Given the stark differences in trade interests between China and the majority of other developing nations, the harsh treatment of Africa's textile industry, the concentration of power in a small number of resource-rich nations, and the harm that Chinese exports of low-cost manufactured goods cause to emerging African industries, the challenge to the West in the areas of trade and finance is far more subdued (Besada, 2016, Kaplinsky and Morris, 2018). The profitability of Chinese enterprises and the existence of genuine commercial possibilities in Africa continue to determine the level of economic participation. Some Chinese operators have already partially disengaged as a result of falling commodity prices in 2018–2019, while state-backed enterprises are shopping around for deals (Herbst and Mills, 2019; Abe, 2022). If this were not the case, the government would have difficulties sustaining the comprehensive engagement it pledged to African leaders.

The outcomes of the FOCAC process must nevertheless be upheld, as must the growing negotiating power of certain African nations. There is by no means agreement on the advantages or benign nature of this specific strand of South-South cooperation, as Shelton and Paruk (2019) describe seven different reactions of African countries to the FOCAC. These reactions range from satisfied to needing to fine-tune and limit interaction with China to fear of new dependence to Machiavellian playing off China against others to merging FOCAC with New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) or the African Union (AU). This is not shocking, given China's involvement affects African nations in a very unique way, each with their own objectives. Similar differences may also be seen in European relations with China, despite the fact that the EU has an integrated approach that is far more potent than the AU's. According to Shelton and Paruk (2019: 2), FOCAC is portrayed as a "unique diplomatic mechanism... which will advance constructive South-South co-operation for mutual benefit." The only real distinction between the FOCAC mechanism and other North-South models, such as the EU's Africa Caribbean Pacific (ACP) framework and Japan's Tokyo International Conferences on African Development (TICAD), is that China, the mechanism's organizer, is a developing nation. President Hu of China made one-way promises to African nations, similar to the North-South system. In contrast to the EU-ACP or the Africa-EU Joint Strategy, Africa has a far smaller institutional and managerial role. As an example, neither an African secretariat nor a monitoring system exist. Certain commitments, including doubling aid if the baseline is unknown and the allocation of cash, are difficult to quantify. Businesses are placed in charge of a variety of tasks. It serves as a loose framework or multilateral cloak that ties bilateral cooperation and connections together. The FOCAC currently lacks the ability for Africa to engage in collective bargaining, such as through the AU. It is likely that this will change in the 2024 ministerial meeting of the FOCAC in Egypt, but given the abovementioned lack of African consensus on how to deal with the FOCAC, this will be a challenging process. The new joint mechanism to implement the Africa–EU strategic partnership could provide some inspiration.

African nations may learn a lot from China's growth model, which is based on its practical strategy of playing mostly by the rules laid down by the West to further its own internal development (Dollar, 2018; Ravallion, 2018). China's programs, however, also violate the Washington Consensus, which is also generally ignored in EU development policy. This gives African nations new partners, but it's definitely not a different set of Southern recommendations—rather, it's a development route that's exclusive to China. China emphasizes that other nations should follow their own growth paths rather than imitating China's.

Thus, under the framework of the FOCAC, sharing and exchanging experiences through initiatives like the International Poverty Reduction Center in China and scholarship programs are important tools for South-South cooperation. China has therefore demonstrated that the Washington Consensus cannot be viewed as a global development paradigm, but it has just offered to share its own experiences rather than offering a substitute template that would direct South-South cooperation on development.

Normative Perspectives on Africa: Is There Truth Beneath the Hysteria?
Scholars and foreign and European officials alike have focused more attention on the EU's overtly normative foreign policy. Yet the Chinese "passively normative" strategy, which is predicated on noninterference, *laissez-faire*, and upholding accepted values, has also done so (Aggestam, 2018; Wissenbach, 2019). Both China and the EU struggle to balance their respective rhetoric, short- and long-term developmental demands on the African continent, and their political and economic interests and repercussions (Berger and Wissenbach, 2007). In addition to certain misconceptions about external development, such as the lack of local ownership, the duplication of aid, and the dogmatic ideas of the international liberal mainstream about political transformation, some European states carry post-colonial baggage (Yates, 2016; Kiely 2017; Adebowale, 2021). In reaction, the EU has begun to retreat from "conditionality" and has refocused on ownership at the continental, regional, and national levels in Africa, under the direction of the European Commission (EC), in an effort to "Europeanize" development and Africa policies (Linklater, 2015; Mayall, 2015). The success of the transformation of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the inability of previous approaches to produce the desired development outcomes, and social pressure to use public funds transparently in ways that combat poverty, advance social agendas, combat corruption, and expand the EU to include non-colonial powers all contribute to the explanation of this move.

These days, the EC provides financial and political incentives for sound governance. This is partially because of the realization that change cannot be forced from the outside and partly because of the belief in the strength of African democracy and good governance tendencies, as shown in the AU Charter and advancements in many nations. This is a departure from the Washington Consensus's highly prescriptive attitude and the unwavering support given to African tyrants in exchange for strategic advantages during the Cold War. The new language actually shares certain similarities with China's Africa strategy, including ownership, equality, solidarity, and shared goals (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2016). In turn, the Africa–EU Joint Strategy provides a new, more balanced partnership template which challenges the lop-sided FOCAC structure.

China's normative strategy has its origins in the Bandung Conference in 1955, which established the fundamental principles of South-South cooperation and the anti-colonial movement (Abe, 2022). In China's rhetoric on its contemporary ties with Africa, South-South cooperation is frequently mentioned. This stands in stark contrast to the typical post-colonial perception of Europe's Africa policy. As we have previously observed, this remark tends to appear out of place and plays to collective emotion rather than to economic facts, especially in light of the post-Cold War changes in Europe's Africa policy generally and the tendencies of globalization. In fact, as Europe has adapted its post-colonial policy to a policy around responses to the challenges of globalization and global governance, an alignment on Africa’s priorities and a partnership of equals, the question should be asked: Would not the tenets of South–South co-operation need a thorough revision to formulate specific and concrete responses to globalization and development challenges instead of simply continuing *ad nauseam* to call for a change in the balance of global power? This is not to deny that the policy approaches of developing countries towards their peers are and probably have to be different from those of developed countries. In actuality, Bandung's protest cry for a new global economic order is currently evolving from one of political solidarity to one of something more concrete. East Asia is becoming the most active region of the world economy, undermining the North's economic hegemony. Africa now has more opportunities because to China's assistance, commerce, and investment, but Africans will closely monitor whether China upholds the Bandung-era goals. The language of non-interference and unity, however, is clearly at conflict with the realities of African politics and economy, as well as with interdependence, competitiveness, and foreign interests. It also appears that African agendas have changed, most notably with regard to non-interference.

This rhetoric appears to be getting more and more out of step with the normative objective of the AU and with how European policy toward Africa is changing. China bases its African strategy on the ideas of sovereignty and non-interference in internal matters, but it stresses different international rules than the AU. The new Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Constitution reaffirms them, which have scarcely altered since 1949 (Zhou, 2018). However, they are sufficiently generic to permit some reasonable modifications at the edges (le Pere, 2018). However, given that China has mostly adopted the Western economic model, how applicable are Chinese ideals in the modern world and in anti-Western discourse?

The non-interference concept may, in part, just serve as a handy mask for the incapacity to exert influence over other nations. Rich in resources nations can profit from China's requirements, lack of alternatives, and events in Angola; in fact, China's struggles to persuade Sudan's government to approve the UN-AU hybrid force serve as evidence of its limited influence (Srinivasan, 2018). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat is China's one true advantage (especially when compared to other growing countries), but even that is not much of a plus given China's desire to avoid upsetting the other members of the UNSC. China's long-term interests may suffer from criticism of a neutral stance based on non-interference. There are signs that China is preparing to react to challenges it has encountered without abandoning its fundamental principles.

China is finding that many nations may be classified as fragile or quasi-states, where the notion of sovereignty has extremely limited significance and may be subject to a *coup d'état* at any time. This is because China is becoming more aggressive in international affairs generally. The governments' sovereignty in producing nations may impede the long-term sustainable use of resources and raise the financial and political costs for investors. According to Taylor (2017), China may have more negotiating leverage when it comes to resource access because of the theoretical sovereignty of quasi-states, but over time, the absence of state authority and regulations may pose a threat to all parties involved in Africa, including China.

Therefore, China's insistence that other nations not meddle in their internal affairs serves its interests only to the extent that these nations refrain from making decisions that have an impact on China's most important interests, which include investment operations and the security of Chinese nationals (e.g., killings or kidnappings in Ethiopia, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Zambia, and Nigeria). After then, it becomes counterproductive because, should China take action to defend its interests, it would set up a credibility trap. The example of another developing nation demonstrates that China's status as a developing nation does not shield it from the credibility dilemma: South Africa already experiences a similar credibility gap in Africa between its avowed foreign policy principles and the aggressive pursuit of primarily economic national interests (DIE Studies, 2018; Landsberg and Monyae, 2016; Abah, 2023). As a result, South Africa is labeled a "sub-imperial agent." Similar to China's efforts to help UN and AU peacekeeping while also sending weaponry to war zones or unstable nations, tensions between mediation and peacekeeping operations and South Africa's arms exports further damage the country's reputation.

However, in contrast to economic cooperation, military cooperation with Africa has not risen recently, and China appears to view democratic South Africa—rather than despotic regimes—as its preferred military partner.

Conclusion

This paper introduces the reader to several significant contextual concerns and arguments. The analysis of China's ascent and growing significance in the global system has included consideration of its status as a dominant large developing nation power and how the nation's increasing involvement with Africa fits into a larger pattern of China's expanding worldwide influence. The historical evolution of connections between China and Africa has then been studied, with particular emphasis on how these interactions were shaped in the decades following the Bandung Conference between emerging Asian and African countries in 1955. A succinct summary of China's new, more assertive Africa policy and strategy, which became evident in the late 1990s and early 2000s, is given after this. The growing Africa-China connection has been examined in this paper from the standpoint of major economic security drivers, the most significant of which are those related to different supply security, finance-credit security, and techno-industrial capabilities security objectives. It has also covered how, since 2000, China's new Africa Policy has provoked a number of discussions, most notably one over conflicting development models that go against the Chinese non-interference principle and Western governance conditionality. It has taken into account how China presents itself as a possible leader of the developing nations' drive for a new global order—one that is less controlled by the US and Western powers—and how cooperation between China and Africa is viewed as a crucial component of this goal.

One important aspect of China-Africa cooperation is South-South cooperation. Simply put, China's influence on the world economy and its engagement with Africa offer African nations greater economic prospects for trade and investment, as well as greater flexibility and options in terms of policy, enabling them to resist Western agendas and aid-related directives. One important goal of South-South cooperation can be considered accomplished to this degree. However, it is challenging to identify novel patterns of contact that would indicate a more equitable globalization or a qualitative advancement in South-South cooperation. Economic exchange patterns are mainly limited to resource exchanges between manufacturers and infrastructure providers; development is based on capitalist and business logic, closely aligned with the dominant neo-liberal Western model; and human and social development agendas align with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but receive relatively little funding, as Chinese officials have discovered to their dismay that the approaches that are purportedly more appropriate than Western ones also face challenges in practice.

As a result, there is still conflict between these two strands of the political discourse around South-South development and market-driven economic interaction patterns, which are seen in the connection between China, Africa, and the EU, which is becoming more and more complex. This is not an issue of good against evil, morality vs. immorality, market versus mercantilism, democracy versus authoritarianism, or any of the other dichotomies that, regrettably, have dominated discussions between China and Africa. Instead, it is a management issue including complexity, interconnection, competitiveness, and cooperation, which cannot be sufficiently captured by the antiquated twentieth-century categories and is not exclusive to Africa or China. These problems exist in all partnerships and frequently call for international solutions. Thus, for African countries, South–South cooperation is simply an ingredient of a policy mix that they can use to promote their own interests.

Politically, Chinese and African positions are becoming more aligned in international fora. This is consistent with the underlying political-ideological imperative of South-South cooperation to oppose the domination of Western policies and defend the interests of developing countries based on solidarity. Such an alliance is much less evident in fora where statements and rhetoric are less significant than actual negotiations (like the WTO), and South Africa and China have encountered disagreements regarding textile imports in a manner akin to that of the EU and China, where China emphasized the importance of WTO regulations and competition (Van der Westhuizen, 2017; Adebowale, 2021; Abah, 2023).

Nonetheless, South-South cooperation remains a significant legacy of international relations and diplomacy in the 20th century. Last but not least, by lessening reliance on and intellectual dominance by the West, it gives Africa's liberation and growth a political and psychological boost. Following the collapse of the Washington Consensus, it is an effort to provide a platform for developing nations as well as mechanisms for more equitable globalization and creative approaches to development. Thus, if it shifts from broad generalizations and rhetoric to concrete actions, from a sterile anti-Western discourse that frequently covers up aggressive business practices or elite failure, to suggesting cooperative mechanisms and a cooperative model for addressing globalization that recognizes interdependency and takes into account global value chains, sustainable development, and business models and experiences, it is a useful template. In the lack of effective international organizations that provide "fair" representation for all parties involved, coalitions of nations (such as the AU, the EU, and China) might effectively collaborate in specific problem domains to address concerns. These might advance African interests and improve the discovery of innovative practices and best practices. Global concerns including migration, security, development, environment, climate change, and other important challenges require answers from most of these players not just through functionally structured cooperation but also through North-South conversation or South-South cooperation. Ideological conflict will not advance the cause. Rather than a conflict for resources or political sway over Africa, the EU and China are more likely to interact on a cooperative platform with aspects of competitiveness suggested by Africa. Empirical research are showing that the race for Africa's resources is a prism of analysis that is excessively limited (Ampiah and Naidu, 2018; Abe, 2022).

The strategic relationship between the EU and China is a prime example of continuously deepening and expanding cooperation, controlled but fierce rivalry, and ongoing interest balancing while scrupulously maintaining normative distinctions (Wissenbach, 2017, 2019; Abah, 2023). The EC has suggested a cooperative platform where it would want to have Africa's interests in the center because it believes that a potential conflict over Africa may have upset this equilibrium in the EU-China alliance (European Commission, 2018a; Abe, 2022). The intricacy and interconnectedness of the situation, together with China's approach to addressing it, indicate that practicality, cooperative efforts, and compromise—rather than ideology—are essential in addressing growth obstacles. Diverse methods expand Africa's options. Though conversation and cooperation around these divergent approaches based on a collective African strategy on foreign relations are necessary, Southern partners do not need to adapt to Northern patterns. This is also because, as this paper discusses, South-South cooperation creates obstacles for African commerce, industrialization, and development standards in addition to offering greater chances.

Simple power games, like South against North or the EU against China, or strict normative templates are unable to capture the complex web of opportunities and challenges created by the interdependence between various state and non-state actors, domestic and external policies, and political and commercial activities. Finding synergies is necessary to establish win-win scenarios because of the interdependencies between the EU and China, the EU and Africa, and China and Africa. On the basis of common and mutually defined interests, functional multilateral cooperation regimes may be established in spite of competing ties and differences in values. China has demonstrated such useful multilateralism by holding the Six-Party Talks on the de-nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. One further example of how effective multilateralism may circumvent inadequate conventional setups is the Global Fund to Fight

HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis. Other examples include the UN agencies' compartmentalization and the emergence of new donor categories. More functional partnerships that go beyond North-South models may arise as a result of Africa's diverse range of development challenges, including building continental infrastructure, improving renewable energy capacities, combating desertification, and managing forest resources sustainably.

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