

Forum: China's engagement in Africa: opportunities and challenges for Africa

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Introduction

From being one of the largest recipients of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) after its opening up in the late 1970s by attracting foreign investors to contribute to its economic take-off first in its southern region of Guangdong and later in its inland provinces, China has become FDI provider to other countries; particularly in Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America. But China's overseas expansion has been developed through its government's policies in the late 1990s to motivate Chinese state and more and more private companies to go abroad in order to secure resources, gain overseas markets to sell 'made in China' products and contribute to China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI). In its relations with Africa, the 'go out' policy in the late 1990s, the establishment of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, the release of a white paper in 2006 about China's engagement in Africa show China's interests to strengthen its cooperation with African countries.

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Therefore alongside its traditional political and economic partners mainly Europe and United States, Africa has developed economic relations with emerging partners: China, India and Brazil among others. Through the so-called south-south cooperation framework, countries of the global south in general and emerging economies in particular have created a platform for political and economic dialogue; i.e. the BRICS summit. This new tendency is somehow shaping the world political economic order and increasingly changing Africa's position with the rest of the world.

Since 2000, China's engagement in Africa has shifted from aid to economic cooperation underpinned by trade and investments. China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in December 2001 has somehow contributed to boost Sino-African trade. Recently China has become Africa's largest trading partner; trade volume between China and Africa has increased: from US\$ 5 billion in 1997 to US\$ 198 billion in 2012 and China's FDI stock in Africa has drastically increased over the past years: from US\$ 56 million in 1996, it is at US\$ 15 billion in 2012.

The rapid pace of Chinese investments flows in Africa and their expansion to various sectors (resources, infrastructure, services; etc.) lead us to question the various political and economic motives behind China's presence in Africa. However, China's increasing footprint in various sectors of African countries' economies with different actors (state financial and political agencies, state companies, private enterprises and SMEs) raises questions about the opportunities Africa can have with China's presence on the continent and the different challenges behind China's engagement in Africa.

The paper explores the growing relations between China and African countries, the opportunities and challenges for Africa and draws recommendations for African countries to better engage with China.

China's overseas political economy

In the late 1970s, China has opened up to the world; therefore enjoying foreign investments in various sectors needed for its economic development. Such need for Inward Foreign Direct Investment (IFDI) has enabled China to acquire investments to develop its industries, create employment, develop infrastructure and improve its human resources. In the late 1990s, through its 'go out' policy, China has showed interests in investing overseas to promote its economic development. The large part of Chinese overseas investments are channelled via its multinational companies involved in state-to-state development projects and are mainly concentrated in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America where China's presence is more and more growing.

China's overseas investments come with political and economic motivations if one considers the role played by the Chinese government in politically and financially supporting Chinese companies (private or state-owned) and of course the companies' primary interests to access markets elsewhere.

Political motivations

The Chinese government both at the central and provincial level has always been involved in the country's economic development and still has an influence on the large Chinese companies operating in China and overseas even though entrepreneurial and industrial reforms have enabled the country to move towards a more liberal economy. Compared to the Western, Japanese and Korean governments which have progressively pulled out from the companies' activities to enable their internationalisation and competitiveness in the global market, the Chinese government still has a control on the big Chinese enterprises. This somewhat clarifies the mutual influence between political and economic factors in China's 'going out' strategy. Chinese multinational companies play a strategic role in Beijing's political economy; particularly in developing countries where they are heavily involved in different sectors. At the same time, the Chinese government relies on the economic interests of its companies which operate abroad to promote China's eco-

conomic development. With its financial and political means, China's central government influences Chinese companies' expansion; hence the political factors. The Chinese government's footprint in Chinese companies' activities can be seen through the linkage between Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Outward Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI) where the companies receive finance from the Chinese state financial institutions to build infrastructure in developing countries. However, it is important to mention that since few years ago, the lack of the Chinese government's financial support to Chinese private and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to develop their businesses in China has pushed many individual and private entrepreneurs to go abroad for economic opportunities. Therefore Chinese small scale and private investments overseas are increasing drastically. Shen Xiaofang (2013) estimates the share of private investments to be at least 55% of the overall Chinese investments in Africa.

To mount challenges (late arrival in the world market, lack of high technological, entrepreneurial and managerial skills) they face in their expansion process, Chinese State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and big MNCs take into account the government's role even though Beijing claims for more internationally competitive companies as stated in the 12th five-year plan (2011-2015). Through the 12th five-year plan China seeks to refine its economic development by pushing forward the development of emerging strategic industries, expanding independent innovation, and pursuing sustainable economic development alongside social harmony and stability (Fung and Peng, 2012). China aims at greatly enhancing the competency of Chinese enterprises, transforming them from followers into leaders on the global stage, and drivers of global growth (12th five-year plan).

The Chinese government's footprint in the Chinese MNCs' activities makes them different from Western or other foreign multinationals (Japanese and Korean for instance) which have less support from their home governments and invest in stable markets. In a broader perspective, the involvement of the Chinese government in the operations of Chinese companies may be seen as an element of home country activities. In China, for example, SOEs are supported by the government

through financial aid or political influence to overcome their status as late-comers in the international market (Alden and Davies, 2006). Chinese multinational companies' motivations to invest abroad are not only linked to their operations in international markets due to local competition at home but also Beijing's 'go out' strategy that seeks to have more overseas Chinese investments through the SOEs and the private companies that benefit from political influence and financial support.

Economic motivations

In its objectives to have its MNCs globally competitive, China's central government is slowly giving its companies more autonomy in order to enable them accumulate economic benefits which are the basis of their activities. This enables the companies to focus more on their major goals while operating within and outside China according to their strategies. Chinese companies' venture abroad is based on several economic motivations. Through the process of their internationalisation, Chinese companies are building high profile in overseas markets in order to be competitive compared to their Western competitors. With their motivations to increase their participation in the global economy, Chinese companies play a key role in China's overseas investments. Most scholars agree that Chinese companies have classical motivations which are mainly part of their foreign investments strategies. Buckley *et al.*, (2007) argue that Chinese companies are to various extents seeking resources, markets and strategic assets.

Resource-security

China's domestic resources are insufficient to maintain growth. To secure resources at home, modernise and urbanise, China's appetite for more resources in order to satisfy its populations' and economy's growing needs for energy consumption drives the 'middle kingdom' in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Australia endowed with natural resources. China's high demand for resources and particularly for oil has made the country recently become the world largest oil importer after being East Asia's biggest exporter in the 1980s. Giant Chinese oil companies: China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), China National Petroleum

Corporation (CNPC) and China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (SINOPEC) supply China with oil resources while operating in various sectors of developing countries' oil industry: offshore, exploration and refinery (Executive Research Associates, 2009; Jiang and Sinton, 2011).

Besides, China has important reserves of mineral products; particularly rare earth (in the long run crucial for green technologies) from developing countries. Jepson (2012) argues that rare earth elements are especially critical to modern high-strength magnets and constitute vital inputs for a growing range of mass consumer, 'green' technology and military applications. In the mining sector, Chinese multinationals such as Sinosteel, Baosteel, China Minmetals widely present in many African, Latin American and Southeast Asian countries play an important role in making China the world largest mineral resources' reserve. The Chinese rare earths industry has secured a 97% share of upstream production by means of aggressive pricing, backed by state support and technology transfer (Jepson, 2012).

Market-seeking

Over the past few years, China's export-driven economy has been based on market-seeking motivations which enable China to sell its manufactured products overseas. In China's international political economy, investing abroad means an avoidance of current and future trade barriers and the facilitation of exports of domestic products. The search for new markets in order to sell its manufactured goods is somehow obvious for China if one considers its production capacity, price competitiveness and its market saturation level; hence the local competition. China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has led to the end of protectionist measures to enable the establishment of foreign multinationals in the Chinese market. Such developments in China's economy have been push factors for some Chinese companies to explore overseas markets. The production capacity based on abundant manpower, relatively cheap production and labour costs has contributed to boosting Chinese exports towards the world markets (Kathawala *et al.*, 2005; Santiso, 2007).

Asset-seeking

In order to acquire technology, foreign expertise and management style, distribution networks via partnership with local companies in Africa, Chinese companies are more and more present in the African business environment. They sometimes operate under mergers and acquisitions or joint-ventures in order to have important market share or expand to other regions. Building innovative brands as stated in China's 12th five-year plan is also part of this strategy and aims at motivating Chinese companies to create global brand names for higher quality products and prices increase. For instance in 2005, the Chinese electronics and computer hardware company Lenovo has bought over IBM to impose its brand and become highly competitive in the global computer industry (Jiang, 2007).

Efficiency-seeking

For efficiency, profitability and access to inputs (production/labour), Chinese companies exploit the benefits of economies of scale by contributing to China's FDI in Africa. The increasing production and labour costs in China have driven Chinese companies to relocate to countries with lower costs mainly in Southeast Asia and Africa to run businesses in the manufacturing and textile industries.

With the current lack of limited financial support from the Chinese government, the fierce competition related to the saturation level of China's domestic markets and the rise of production and labor costs in China, Chinese private enterprises are also seeking to penetrate foreign markets. Strategic asset-seeking motivations play a key role for Chinese investors abroad (Gu Jing, 2009). These different aspects (resource-seeking, market-seeking, strategic-asset seeking and efficiency-seeking) seen in Chinese multinational companies 'going global' give them different characteristics when compared to investment strategies of Western multinational companies.

Furthermore, to promote its economic development overseas through mechanisms and policies, China has strengthened its relation with Africa, politically based

among other aspects on ‘mutual benefit’ or ‘win-win cooperation’ and ‘non-interference in domestic affairs’ as stated in Beijing’s foreign policy documents. In this sense for instance, many African governments (Sudan, Zimbabwe, Niger, Zambia; etc.) with governance and human rights issues have welcomed Chinese investments. This somewhat contributes to countering relatively high conditions (related to aspects such as good governance, transparency, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), environment and sustainable development; etc.) imposed by Western donor agencies which fund development projects in Africa.

Opportunities for Africa

Since the shift noticed in China’s engagement in Africa which was more aid driven for a more economic cooperation between Africa and China, opportunities exist for African countries to diversify their economic partnership alongside their relations with traditional partners. More and more African policymakers look east and take advantage of China’s economic rise and position in the global political economic order. In a new relationship between China and Africa underpinned by trade and investments, Africa seeks more diverse opportunities for trade and investments which could contribute to the continent’s economic growth. China among other emerging economies has made inroads into Africa’s economy alongside the United States and Europe which are still important economic partners for Africa.

Shifts occurred in the world political and economic order particularly with the establishment of the south-south cooperation framework and the difficulties faced by Europe and the United States since the 2008 financial crisis have been an advantage for China to boost its trade and contribute to OFDI in Africa. Based on its foreign policy rethorics of ‘non-interference’, ‘win-win cooperation’ and ‘mutual benefit’, China has strengthened its engagement in many African countries; particularly in countries with controversial political leaders, bad governance and human rights issues.

China’s investment in Africa is rapidly increasing and is moving from resources and infrastructure development to the services sector. Such investment enables

African countries to move from the extractive industries (energy and mining) and develop other sectors of their economies.

Chinese investment in resources even though contributing to resource security for China in order to satisfy the increasing energy needs for its population has enabled African countries with a large endowment of resources (South Africa, Angola, Sudan, Zambia, Nigeria, DRC among others) to acquire equipment and machinery, techniques, expertise to explore their mineral resources (oil, gas, copper, cobalt, coal, rare earths; etc.). For instance in many African countries (Niger, Chad, Nigeria and Sudan among others), Chinese companies have built refineries to enable those countries to refine their own oil products. However, such deals in the resources sector mainly in the oil and mineral products sectors are secured by exports of oil barrels and minerals to China but also to major oil importers around the world. Overseas oil companies, particularly the Chinese MNCs have brought Sudan's oil to the global market. Extractive industry corporations are essential in producing the value from natural resources through enormous capital investments, advanced technology, technical expertise and access to international markets (Patey, 2007: 3). Chinese investment in Africa has created joint ventures between Chinese and African companies. For instance in the oil sector, while investing overseas, Chinese National Oil Companies (CNPC, CNOOC and SINOPEC) meet China's strategy for energy and resources security. In order to satisfy its population's and manufacturing industries' need for energy, the Chinese government supports its oil companies even though private to secure resource deals abroad. From Angola to Nigeria, expanding to Chad and Uganda, the Chinese NOCs are in all the segments (offshore, exploration, production and refinery) of Africa's oil industry. To enter the Sudanese oil market in 1996, CNPC signed an agreement with Sudapet for oil exploration and production. In Angola, China showed its interests in securing oil. From buying oil in the Angolan market, Sinopec has been heavily involved in other energy projects; and a joint-venture between Sinopec and Sonangol has been established. But Sonangol should provide oil to Sinopec as stated in a cooperation agreement signed in 2005 between Luanda and Beijing.

Following the privatisation of the mining sector in many African countries, the Chinese companies' presence has changed the characteristics of Africa's mining industry, led to the boom of the commodities' prices and contributed to the expansion of the sector.

In the mining sector, the Chinese operations in Africa are moreless similar to their activities in the oil sector. Joint ventures have been created between Chinese and African mining companies. But in many cases Chinese companies are the major shareholders and part of the production was exported to China as signed through agreements. For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sicominex was established in 2008 in order to produce around ten million tons of copper and cobalt and with two-thirds of the investments owned by Chinese investors, it was expected to deliver at normal prices to China (Sumata and Dzaka-Kikouta, 2013).

In the telecommunications sector, the lack of telecom network coverage in rural and remote areas and the high costs of establishing landline networks across vast and often sparsely populated territory are among the major factors influencing the investment decisions of Chinese telecommunications companies such as Huawei and ZTE to tap into Africa. Those two Chinese telecom companies have contributed to bridging the digital divide between urban and rural areas in Africa by enabling people to have access to mobile handsets and reliable network coverage.

More and more China is slightly moving its investments from extractive industries towards the services sector in Africa. Such shift in Chinese investments in the continent could enable African countries to diversify investments in their respective economy. With more and more African entrepreneurs doing business with China, China's financial expansion in Africa through the internationalisation of the yuan could be an opportunity for both Chinese and African businessmen to settle their financial transaction in yuan to avoid fluctuation in foreign exchange. Standard Bank has also expanded to the Chinese financial market by opening up offices in Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong. Standard bank's presence in China contributes to a better understanding of business environment and landscape in Africa for Chi-

nese investors who more and more seek business opportunities in Africa.

In the tourism sector, China granted Approved Destination Status (ADS) to many African countries to welcome Chinese tourists. More and more Africa accounts for China's outbound tourism. African tourism organisations, air companies and travel agencies across the continent cater for Chinese tourists in terms of tour packages, accommodation, hostelry and shopping. According to Chinese government figures, 110,000 Chinese tourists travelled to Africa in 2005 (Eisenman and Kurlantzick, 2006). From 2011 to 2012, the number of Chinese tourists in Africa grew by 56 per cent (An Chuying, 2013).

With a lack of adequate infrastructure to contribute to its economic growth, Africa seeks investments for its infrastructure development to facilitate trade and investments within the continent. China has therefore made inroads in Africa infrastructure building sector; contributing to integrate Africa through infrastructure development projects.

As for trade, China has become Africa's largest trading partner; thus boosting trade volume between China and African countries. During FOCAC III, China has granted zero-tariff treatment to African countries to export their products to China. China agreed in 2005 to exempt from tariffs 190 commodities from 25 least developed African countries (Ajakaiye, 2006). Such decision aims at diversifying African exports and somehow solving the trade deficits between China and African countries. At the same time, China represents an important market for Africa. With a growing middle class population in particular and a large population of 1.3 billion people, China is a potential market for various businesses that African countries can explore. By tapping into the Chinese market, they can develop interests in other Asian countries.

Challenges for Africa

Even though the trade volume between China and African countries is growing, the composition of the Sino-African exports and imports still remains unbalanced.

Rich in resources, African countries such as South Africa, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Sudan among others export oil and mineral products to China. While African oil exporters like Algeria, Sudan and Angola enjoy trade surpluses with China, every other country had a trade deficit (Lyakurwa, 2006). Besides 63 per cent of China-Africa trade share is allocated to Angola (21 per cent), South Africa (18 per cent), Sudan (7 per cent), Nigeria (6 per cent), Egypt (6 per cent) and Algeria (5 per cent) (Cissé, 2012). In return, China exports manufactured goods to Africa. In 2012, trade between China and Africa has reached US\$ 198 billion. But problems remain and need to be adjusted. Diversification in imports and exports is an issue for both sides. The trade imbalances between China and Africa are enormous. The major exports products to China from Africa are oil, copper, coal and iron ore products; consequently, the ten top African countries exporting to China are resource-or oil-rich countries (Cissé, 2012). On the other hand, Africa's imports from China are mainly based on manufactured products: household equipment, motorcycles, footwear, spare parts, construction material, machinery and so on (Cissé, 2012).

The quality of 'made in China' consumer goods in Africa in general is low and somehow aims at satisfying the needs of the largest African population with a low purchasing power. Chinese imports in Africa have also enabled Chinese businessmen to open up shops across Africa; thus creating competition to local businesses in many African countries. South Africa, Lesotho and Nigeria have in the past suffered from China's textile imports and growing footprint in Africa's textile industry. In the leather industry, countries like Ethiopia and Senegal are facing the same issues with more and more Chinese involved in the sector, offering low quality products, copying African design and selling at a lower price.

In essence, Africa is primarily as source of crude materials and also a market for Chinese finished goods (Ajakaiye, 2006). Since their independence, many African countries tried to move from import dependency to export-driven economies. But such shift in many cases did not happen or if it happened is more focused on resources export. The manufacturing industry which could change the trade pattern

between African countries and their trading partners is not taking off. The lack of industrialisation policies to enable the manufacturing sector in Africa to take off in order to satisfy Africans' needs for consumer goods, the fierce competition faced by Chinese entrepreneurs and traders and the restriction to provide them with loans and credit to develop their activities to the detriment of State Owned Enterprises have led Chinese small traders to eye African markets (Gu Jing, 2009; Shen Xiaofang, 2013).

Chinese investments in Africa have been mainly related to resources, particularly in extractive industries which come along with infrastructure development projects that today include dam building for hydropower in many African countries. Although China's investment in Africa somehow contributes to Africa's growth, there are issues regarding social and environmental impacts of China's engagement in the continent. Chinese investments are concentrated in sensitive sectors and areas with weak ecological policies and governance. Investments in extractive industries have raised debates and discussions about the environmental and sustainable development issues around the world. Consequently, Chinese investments in Africa have attracted a lot of attention.

In Africa, Chinese investments in oil, mining, copper and coal occur in environmentally sensitive zones. The location where extractions take place often experience socio environmental struggles over the control of space, governance of territory, access to land and water, defence of human and citizenship rights and dissatisfaction over the distribution of the mineral rents (Bebbington *et al.*, 2008). Chinese investment which has been welcomed by a wide number of African countries has seen positive and negative impacts on Africa's economic growth. The involvement of Chinese State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and today Chinese private companies in Africa is driven by Beijing's Africa political agenda. China is eager to have access to more resources in Africa to sustain its growth. Such investment's pattern comes along with development projects' packages. For instance, China's footprint in Africa's infrastructure includes the construction of dams. Today, Africa's new dams are most popularly backed by Chinese funders and dam builders

and China has committed more than US\$ 3 billion to African hydropower projects (Hathaway, 2010). In Africa, dam building supporters have a clear message: hydropower is cheap, clean, and renewable and an indigenous power source (Hathaway, 2010). Most African governments appear to welcome Chinese investments without a strong focus on social, environmental impacts and sustainable development. China's political strategy contrasts with the western policies on human rights, good governance, environment and sustainable development and is centred around not interfering in internal affairs of countries where it is operating or investing (Brautigam, 2011). Presence of Chinese actors in Africa based on a strict hands-off policy in political and environmental standards has raised debates and discussions about the social, environmental and sustainable development impacts of Chinese investments in Africa (Bosshard, 2008). Chinese investors and extractive companies are accused of undermining good governance, environmental and sustainable policies in Africa.

Chinese investments in natural resources are concentrated in remote areas, inaccessible zones and sensitive extractive industries. Operating in such areas and industries clearly involves social and environmental risks. China's growing presence in extractive industries aggravating environmental degradation and accelerating the exhaustion of non-renewable resources has attracted the world's attention (Gonzalez, 2011). Chinese investments in sensitive sectors raise the debate on sustainable economic development for Africa. Concerns around China's environmental challenges linked to extractive industries in Africa have been tackled. In the long run, African governments that have welcomed Chinese investments (over political, social, environmental issues) in ecologically sensitive sectors with weak governance and control systems will endure the environmental impacts that extractive industries involve without enjoying the economic benefits expected for their growth (Gonzalez, 2011).

China's investments in Africa include infrastructure development projects which very often go hand in hand with investments in other sectors. China's presence in Africa's infrastructure development sector is part of China's development assis-

tance in Africa and somehow contributes to the promotion of China's economic development and economic diplomacy in Africa. In many African countries, Chinese companies are involved in building hydropower dams, schools, hospitals, rehabilitating roads and railways, developing real estate projects, and so on. However, China's growing presence in Africa's infrastructure building sector raises questions related to norms and sustainability if one considers issues that China faces itself to deal with accidents related to the quality of its road and railway networks and unsustainable construction projects.

For instance, hydropower dam building – which enables access to water and power generation for millions of Africans – by Chinese dam builders has, at the same time, caused the displacement of many people in Sudan, Botswana, Ghana and elsewhere living around zones where dams are built.

Chinese investments in Africa should contribute to job creation, technology and skills transfer. Very often it has been noticed that China is investing in Africa and creating jobs for its own population overseas. African governments should take advantage of Chinese companies' presence to somehow offer job opportunities to Africans and contribute to capacity building.

Conclusion

In Africa's engagement with China, there is a need to understand China and their growing engagement in the continent. Africa needs to be strategic while engaging with China and take advantage of Chinese investments on the continent to contribute to economic growth, job creation, skills and technology transfer and sustainable development. China's interests to invest in other sectors of African countries' economies rather than resources should enable African countries to improve or develop other segments of their economies. More transparency and good governance between Chinese and African policymakers could help address issues related to opaque deals that exist. Given the nature of contracts which often come with concessional or preferential loans to only buy Chinese products or services, it remains difficult to clearly quantify Chinese investment in Africa. Revenues made

out of resources export from Africa to China should benefit the majority of Africans rather than governments officials. The commodity prices boom has enabled many African countries to have a steady economic growth; yet such growth is limited for many Africans who live in rich countries but still poor. African countries should learn from their trade relations with their traditional trading partners not to have the same surprise in their engagement with China. There should be linkages between the export sector and other segments of African countries' economies to change the trade pattern with China.

African policymakers should be aware of China's own environmental issues alongside its modernisation and industrialisation. Therefore they should be cautious about environmental concerns which come alongside Chinese investments in Africa. Sustainability norms and standards should be respected by investors for a better sustainable development. Policies and regulations related to environmental sustainability, labour, norms and standards should be developed by different African countries and implemented. The implication of African governments with competent ministries and agencies is therefore needed for the monitoring of rules. Chinese investments in Africa should meet the needs of the population. As for trade and investments, China is an important market in terms of size and population. African countries should take advantage of those aspects to tap into the Chinese market for more diverse exports. Large African companies should aim at investing in China and even expand their businesses to other Asian countries in the long run.

Through regional trade organisations (EAC, ECOWAS, SADC and COMESA), African countries could develop common policies for a better Sino-African trade. More and more China is pushing for regional integration in Africa particularly through infrastructure development projects which will connect locked and unlocked African countries; but on Africa's side a lot needs to be done.

More and more, Chinese investments in Africa are driven by private companies and SMEs. Therefore it remains challenging for African countries to control such

wave of private companies which should comply with regulations. Chinese investments in Africa are an opportunity, but no guarantee for development to happen!

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