

THE IMPACT OF CHINA ON AFRICA

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Abstract: Nowadays, China's engagement in the African continent has intensified implicating economic, political and social dimensions. China-Africa relations have been facing and garnering global attention and various discussions about its encompassment for the geopolitics. Chinese approach, which is characterised by substantial investments and partnerships based on strategies has positioned its role as the pivotal one in the development of the Africa. The importance of the study of Chinese impact in Africa lies in the understanding the further broader encompassment of this engagement. China represents its model as a great alternative that blends the economic help with useful strategic plans and interests in comparison with western one that currently faces the struggles and re-evaluation. Thus, analysing this dynamics is significant for comprehending shifts in global power structures and finding the answer to «why do countries help other countries?». The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which is established in 2000, acts as a bridge connecting and enhancing the Sino-African relations. China pledges a financial support through FOCAC to numerous countries of the continent. For example, in Beijing summit of 2024 Xi Jinping made an announcement where he said that 360 billion yuans will be used as a financial assistance over the next 3 years. This money will be sunk into the renewable energy projects, high-tech infrastructure which will reflect Chinese commitment to African economic growth. In order to comprehensively address the research objectives as well as research questions, this study will employ a mixed-methods approach, that integrates both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Data collection will include in itself literature review (existing literature, academic articles, policy papers, reports), case studies, interviews taken from articles, and data taken from statistics. The study will utilise the geopolitical framework which will consider factors like economic influence, political alliances.

Key words: China-Africa relations, economic development, infrastructure, investment, trade, debt, geopolitical influence.

China and Africa have a longstanding relationship rooted in shared experiences and mutual support. Both sides have maintained close high-level exchanges to deepen traditional friendship and enhance political mutual trust. China supports African countries in independently exploring development paths suited to their national conditions and in formulating national development strategies. Mechanisms such as Bi-National Commissions, strategic dialogues, and political consultations have been established to improve the planning and implementation of strategies regarding China-Africa relations and cooperation. Encouraging exchanges among think tanks, universities, and research institutions on topics like governance, development, and law. Over 80 think tanks and academic institutions have participated in the China-Africa Joint Research and Exchange Plan.

Implementing initiatives such as the China-Africa People-to-People Friendship Action and the Silk Road Community Building Program to promote exchanges among trade unions, NGOs, and social groups. Events like the China-Africa People's Forum and the China-Africa Young Leaders Forum have been organized to strengthen people-to-people connections. Offering financial assistance, including loans, aid, and investments, to support various sectors in African countries. For instance, during a summit in Beijing, China pledged \$50 billion in financial support to African nations.

In addition, China gains several strategic advantages from its engagement with African nations at the United Nations (UN):

1. Diplomatic Support – Africa has 54 votes in the UN General Assembly, giving China a large bloc of potential allies. Many African nations support China’s policies on issues like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and human rights, often siding with China in key UN resolutions.
2. Influence in International Organizations – With African backing, China has been able to secure leadership positions in major UN bodies like the World Health Organization (WHO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
3. Support for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – African nations often endorse China’s global infrastructure projects in the UN, reinforcing China’s narrative of “South-South cooperation” and development.
4. Blocking Western Criticism – African countries frequently abstain from or vote against Western-led resolutions that criticize China’s policies on human rights, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong.
5. Economic and Trade Benefits – China ensures African countries receive infrastructure investments, debt relief, and trade incentives, strengthening its relationships and ensuring reciprocal diplomatic support.

African regional organizations play a crucial role in shaping the continent’s response to China’s growing presence, particularly in terms of economic development, security cooperation, and political diplomacy. These organizations facilitate dialogue, regulate foreign investments, and influence military partnerships, ensuring that Africa’s engagement with China aligns with regional priorities and long-term interests.

1. African Union (AU): The African Union has generally welcomed China’s investments in infrastructure and economic development, as they align with the AU’s Agenda 2063, which aims to promote economic integration and sustainable development across the continent. However, the AU has also expressed concerns about the potential negative impacts of rising debt levels and the risk of Chinese influence overshadowing African sovereignty.
2. Regional Economic Communities (RECs): Regional organizations such as the East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have seen both opportunities and challenges in China’s rising influence. While some countries have seen improved infrastructure and economic ties with China, others are becoming more cautious about long-term dependence on Chinese investments.
3. East African Community (EAC): The EAC, which includes Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and DR Congo, has been a major recipient of Chinese infrastructure investments (railways, ports, highways). China’s involvement in East African ports (e.g., Mombasa, Djibouti, Dar es Salaam) has led to concerns about debt sustainability and economic dependency. The EAC is working on regional regulations to prevent debt distress while benefiting from Chinese-funded projects.
4. Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): China has increased its presence in West Africa, particularly in sectors such as energy, mining, and railways. ECOWAS countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal have received major Chinese investments in ports, roads, and energy projects. ECOWAS has been engaging China to ensure technology transfer, local job creation, and fair trade agreements.
5. Southern African Development Community (SADC), which includes major economies like South Africa, Angola, and Zambia, has strong economic ties with China, particularly in mining, energy, and industrialization. Some SADC nations (e.g., Zambia, Angola) are facing debt crises due to Chinese loans, pushing the organization to seek debt restructuring and better financial management policies.
6. Security Cooperation: China has increasingly been involved in supporting regional security efforts, such as counterterrorism operations in the Sahel and peacekeeping missions in South Sudan. African countries, particularly those in the Horn of Africa, have found China’s military support valuable in addressing local security challenges.

Despite the economic benefits, China's lending practices have raised concerns about debt sustainability in African nations. Between 2000 and 2023, Chinese loans to Africa are estimated to have exceeded \$170 billion, funding significant infrastructure projects. However, this substantial borrowing has led to fears of "debt-trap diplomacy," where countries may struggle to repay their debts, potentially compromising their sovereignty. Critics argue that China extends excessive credit to African nations, creating dependency and gaining leverage when these countries face difficulties in servicing their debts. For instance, Kenya has borrowed at least \$9.8 billion from China between 2006 and 2017, accounting for 21% of its foreign debt and 72% of its bilateral debt. These funds have been used to build highways and a railway between Mombasa and Nairobi, totaling over \$6.5 billion by 2020. There have been concerns about Kenya's ability to repay these loans, with speculation that a default could result in China taking control of strategic assets like the Port of Mombasa.

To maximize the benefits of Chinese investments while mitigating the risks of debt dependency, African nations need to adopt strategies that ensure long-term financial stability. Diversifying funding sources by seeking investments from multiple partners, including Western countries, development banks, and private investors, can help reduce overreliance on Chinese loans. Improving debt management through better fiscal policies, transparent loan agreements, and sustainable borrowing practices is also crucial. Promoting local industrialization to reduce reliance on resource exports and increase value-added production can enhance economic resilience. Additionally, enhancing governance and negotiation capacity can ensure fairer terms in contracts with China. China's economic engagement in Africa has significantly contributed to infrastructure development, job creation, and trade growth. However, the increasing debt burden poses long-term economic risks. Striking a balance between leveraging Chinese investments for development and maintaining financial independence is crucial for Africa's sustainable future.

In 2015, negotiations began with President Ismail Omar Guelleh on China establishing a strategic base in Djibouti. In January 2016, China and Djibouti agreed to build naval facilities, and construction began in March of that year. The Chinese base is located in the western part of Djibouti City, where the Chinese port of Doraleh is found. The other foreign military bases located in southern Djibouti: Japan Self-Defense Force Base of Djibouti, Camp Lemonnier of United States, Base Aérienne 188 (France). (Wikipedia). Djibouti not only has access to the Red Sea, which provides passage to North Africa and the Middle East region, but also controls the Indian Ocean, connecting the Asia-Pacific region, the Horn of Africa region and the Persian Gulf. In 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project was launched, as a result of which Djibouti became logistically important hub on trade routes from China to the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden, and from there to the Mediterranean via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. Chinese banks finance about \$14.4 billion to Djibouti's infrastructure projects. The route through the Suez Canal is commonly used because it is shorter and more cost-effective than going around Africa. The typical journey from major Chinese ports (e.g., Shanghai, Shenzhen) to European ports (e.g., Rotterdam, Hamburg) via the Suez Canal takes about 25 to 30 days.

Around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope is a longer route. If a ship bypasses the Suez Canal and goes around the Cape of Good Hope, the journey extends by 10 to 15 days, making the total trip 35 to 45 days. This detour is usually taken due to Suez Canal congestion, security concerns, or high canal toll fees. In summary Suez Canal Route takes 25–30 days (shorter, preferred) and around Africa Route takes 35–45 days (longer, used when necessary).

USA, France, Japan and other western nations have military bases in Djibouti. China's presence counters Western influence in the region.

Determining the exact percentage of investments by various countries in military bases in Djibouti is challenging due to limited publicly available data. However, information on annual lease payments provides some insight into the financial contributions of these nations. In a figure 1, there are estimated percentage of foreign military investments in Djibouti. In addition, according to a 2020 report, the annual lease payments were approximately: United States: \$63 million. France: \$40 million. China: \$20 million. Japan: \$3.5 million. Italy: \$2.5 million.

These figures totaled around \$129 million, accounting for 18% of Djibouti's revenue and donations in 2020. In 2017, Djibouti generated approximately \$70 million from leasing land to foreign countries, with the U.S. and French military installations contributing around \$30-36 million annually.

It's important to note that these lease payments represent only a portion of the overall economic impact and strategic investments associated with foreign military bases in Djibouti. Comprehensive

data on total investments, including infrastructure development and other expenditures, are not fully disclosed in public sources. Djibouti's strategic location near the Bab el Mandeb Strait, a vital chokepoint for global maritime trade, makes it an essential hub for China's naval operations. The base supports anti-piracy missions, peacekeeping efforts, and humanitarian aid operations, while also providing logistical support for Chinese naval vessels operating in the region. Additionally, it ensures the security of China's extensive economic investments in Africa, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which includes critical infrastructure projects such as ports, railways, and energy facilities. Beyond its economic motivations, China's presence in Djibouti also has clear military and strategic implications. Unlike other foreign bases in the country, the Chinese facility is equipped with a deep-water pier capable of hosting large naval vessels, advanced surveillance systems, and facilities for troop deployment, suggesting a capacity for more than just logistical support. This development has drawn attention from global security analysts, particularly given its proximity to Camp Lemonnier, the largest U.S. military base in Africa.

The establishment of this base highlights China's growing challenge to Western military dominance in the region. While Beijing maintains that its presence is focused on peacekeeping and regional stability, some experts argue that it also enhances China's ability to project power and secure critical trade routes. This has contributed to geopolitical tensions, particularly with the United States, which views China's military expansion with increasing concern. At the same time, China's deep economic involvement in Djibouti raises questions about the country's sovereignty. Djibouti has received significant Chinese investment and loans for infrastructure development, leading to concerns that it may become overly dependent on Beijing, both economically and politically. Djibouti's location is close to Somalia, a hotspot for piracy in the Gulf of Aden. The base supports Chinese naval patrols, so it prevents anti-piracy and ensures maritime security. China's Djibouti base marks a shift from a regional defense strategy to a global power projection capability. This could lead to future military bases in Africa or other strategic locations, such as the Indian Ocean and the Middle East.

The global competition for microchip dominance is intensifying, with major economies striving to secure their positions in semiconductor manufacturing. Africa is emerging as a key player in this landscape due to its rich deposits of essential minerals, such as cobalt and rare earth elements, which are crucial for microchip production. Countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) hold significant reserves of these materials, making Africa strategically important in the global semiconductor supply chain. As nations seek to reduce dependence on specific regions for chip production, Africa's potential as a manufacturing and supply hub is gaining attention. While the continent is not yet a major producer of semiconductors, international partnerships and investments could accelerate its involvement in the industry. Initiatives aimed at developing local semiconductor capabilities, coupled with Africa's resource wealth, position it as a valuable contributor to the evolving global microchip market. Africa's growing significance in the semiconductor industry is largely due to its vast reserves of essential minerals, such as cobalt from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which are critical for chip manufacturing. The increasing demand for these resources underscores Africa's strategic potential in the global semiconductor market. Although China has not made major direct investments in semiconductor production in Africa, the country continues to push for self-reliance in chip manufacturing through its "Made in China 2025" strategy. Meanwhile, international partnerships, such as the one between the U.S. and African nations, signal a shift towards integrating Africa into the global semiconductor value chain.

Despite facing limitations such as export controls from Western nations, China continues to develop its chip-making infrastructure, emphasizing innovation and supply chain independence. The country's efforts are part of a broader initiative to secure long-term technological resilience, ensuring it remains competitive in the rapidly evolving semiconductor market.

China is actively investing in Africa's lithium mining sector to secure essential resources for electric vehicle (EV) batteries. In Zimbabwe, state-owned Kuvimba Mining House plans to finalize a \$270 million lithium project with two Chinese companies, anticipating a recovery in lithium prices. Since 2021, Chinese firms have invested over \$1 billion in Zimbabwe's lithium industry, with companies like Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt and Sinomine Resource Group acquiring assets to strengthen China's position in the global battery metals market. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), China has invested heavily through its Belt and Road Initiative, providing infrastructure and loans in exchange for mining rights. The DRC holds 70% of global cobalt reserves and significant lithium deposits, making it a strategic location for China's resource acquisition efforts.

Conclusion. The research highlights the complexity of China's involvement in Africa, covering economic, political, and social dimensions. Key investments were made in the infrastructure, digital networking, technology, energy and mining industries, which gave Africa a wide range of opportunities. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has improved African connectivity but also raised concerns about debt sustainability. While Chinese funding has boosted development, fears of "debt-trap diplomacy" persist, as seen in Kenya and Zambia. In addition, the presence of large debts is the reason for weakening independence. China's military base in Djibouti and its growing role in Africa signals about changes in geopolitical dynamics and foreshadows future rivalry with the West for dominance. Ultimately, the future of China-Africa relations will depend on how effectively African nations assert their agency in shaping agreements that promote sustainable development. Instead of viewing China as a sole benefactor, African countries should leverage this partnership strategically, ensuring that economic growth translates into long-term prosperity for their citizens.

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