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China's Africa Policy during the Xi Jinping Era (2012-2022)

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Abstract

This study examines China's Africa policy during the Xi Jinping era, in the context of political, economic, security, and socio-cultural aspects. Africa is one of the regions of strategic importance, especially in terms of meeting the energy and raw material demands of global and regional actors, despite the significant lack of accumulated capital. In this regard, China has notably intensified its relations with African countries, particularly since the 1990s. China's approach to Africa began with collaborations based on economic interests, progressed to consolidating political relations through soft power elements, and the establishment of reliable relations in this process has also paved the way for China to become a security actor in the region. In the study, these aspects are considered as turning points and are examined through the process tracing method. Consequently, the main objective of this study is to analyze China's Africa policy during the Xi Jinping era specifically using the process tracing method.

Keywords: China, Africa, Xi Jinping, and Geopolitics

Introduction

The People's Republic of China has become a prominent actor in today's global power struggle, with its rapidly growing economy and increasing visibility in international affairs. Since the second half of the 20th century, the People's Republic of China has been steadily developing economically and has been actively developing political relations with African countries since the 1980s. In this context, China conducts diplomatic visits, summits, and signs economic, trade, and military cooperation agreements. Particularly, China is expanding its influence in Africa by providing aid, infrastructure development, and investment. In the 21st century, it has become one of the main actors on the African continent. Indeed, following the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's (then Russian Federation) withdrawal from Africa in the 1990s, China has filled the power vacuum and become one of the strong actors in the region.¹

¹ Hakan Fidan-Bülent Aras, "The Return of Russia-Africa Relations", *Ahmet Yesevi University Board of Trustees*, 2010, (52), p. 47-68.

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Received: 28.01.2024 **Accepted:** 15.03.2024 **Published:** 29.03.2024

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Africa is a continent of particular economic importance for China. China is engaged in intensive cooperation with Africa in areas such as trade, investment, infrastructure, energy, and natural resources. China accesses Africa's rich resources to meet the energy and raw material needs of its rapidly growing economy.² Africa is China's largest supplier of oil and a significant source of minerals and agricultural products. Additionally, Africa's young and dense population is expected to surpass that of China and India by 2050, which signifies a potential market and source of cheap labor for China. In this context, China is increasing its trade volume with African countries to exploit Africa's vast and potential markets. Currently, China is Africa's largest trading partner, and the trade volume between the two sides was \$192.7 billion in 2020.³ China contributes to Africa's development and benefits its own companies and workforce by investing in large-scale infrastructure projects in Africa, including railways, roads, ports, dams, power plants, and communication networks.⁴

China establishes various mechanisms and undertakes initiatives to deepen economic cooperation with Africa. For example, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is the primary platform for economic cooperation between the two sides and has been held regularly since 2000. Additionally, China develops joint projects with African countries under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's economic relations with Africa benefit both China and Africa. However, these relations also bring certain problems, such as the terms and transparency of loans provided by China, concerns regarding the debt sustainability and sovereignty of African countries, and whether China's investments and activities in Africa are in line with the interests of the local population, the environment, and human rights. China's approach to Africa in the context of security has become more noticeable since 2013, shaped in line with global political goals such as the New Silk Road Project and the China Dream vision. China's policies in Africa, including bilateral military diplomacy, the increasing presence of the Chinese navy off the African coasts, establishment of military bases, changing approach to United Nations (UN) operations, and supporting the military capacity building of African regional organizations, are used to advance China's strategic interests and protect its overseas interests. China's security policies in Africa adhere to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, but this principle is pragmatically determined in practice.⁵

This study focuses on the period from Xi Jinping's presidency in 2012 to 2022. However, background information before 2012 is also provided where necessary. The reason for this is the process tracing method adopted in the study, which is deemed necessary to support the analysis of developments between 2012 and 2022. The use of process tracing in this study is beneficial in identifying cause-and-effect relationships based on the turning points in the relations between China and Africa during these years. For example, during this process, China, under Xi Jinping, announced its decision to open its first overseas base in Djibouti in 2015, signed agreements with Sahel countries, where the threat of terrorism has increased since 2012, for military training and the export of security equipment, and in addition, the Beijing administration has also taken steps to sign new agreements with relevant African countries for the energy and raw materials it needs, as well as to develop its socio-cultural relations.

Consequently, the study is examined under five main headings. The first is the basic characteristics of Chinese foreign policy and its approach to African countries, aiming to provide background on the limitations and potential of China's approach to Africa during the Xi Jinping era. The second heading is China's geopolitical approach to African countries, aiming to identify Africa's position in initiatives such as bilateral political relations with African countries, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The third heading

² Fatih Kılıç, "Küresel İlişkiler Bağlamında Çin'in Afrika'daki Ekonomi Politikası: Nijerya, Angola, Sudan ve Demokratik Kongo Cumhuriyeti Örnekleri", *International Journal of Politics and Security*, 2019 1(1), p. 71-96.

³ Meriç Subaşı Ertekin, "Çin'in Büyüyen Enerji Talebinin Karşılmasında Afrika'nın Önemi", *Iğdır Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 2017, (12), p. 189-22.

⁴ TRT Haber, "Yükselen Kıta Afrika'da Güç Mücadelesi: Çin" <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/yukselen-kita-afrikada-guc-mucadelesi-cin-549983.html>, son erişim tarihi 02.02.2024.

⁵ Seval Çolak, "İçişlerine Karışmama İlkesi Bağlamında Çin'in Afrika'daki Askeri ve Güvenlik Politikaları (1955-2021)" *Topkapı Journal of Social Science*, 2022, 1(1), p. 71-87.

is China's soft power policy in Africa, intended as a complement to the geopolitical approach and providing a positive background to the economic and security relations with Africa discussed in the following headings. The fourth heading is China's economic relations with African countries, and the fifth is security relations. Additionally, this order of headings also identifies the turning points in China's Africa policy between 2012 and 2022 in the context of the process tracing method.

1. Basic Characteristics of Chinese Foreign Policy and Its Approach to Africa

Chinese foreign policy towards Africa, especially since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has become one of the main agendas in international politics. Considering that every country in international politics strives to maximize its interests, China is consolidating its economic, political, and military power and consolidating its relations with global and regional actors. The basic characteristics of Chinese foreign policy include multilateral diplomacy, mediation in conflict resolution, promoting joint development, non-interference in the internal affairs of any country, and respecting sovereignty rights. Especially since the 2000s, parallel to its rapidly growing economy, China has consolidated its position in international politics, particularly in organizations such as the UN.⁶ Particularly, China's establishment of the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank and the revival of the historic Silk Road through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are indicative of its global leadership aspirations and challenge to the US-dominated international system without directly confronting the US. Therefore, China's foreign policy is based on consolidating its economic and military power and aiming for global leadership without engaging directly with the dominant power, the US. However, this strategy is criticized by other actors and is particularly interpreted by the US as a challenge to its influence in international politics.

Moving from this background, the basic parameters of China's approach to Africa in its foreign policy are based on economic relations, diplomacy, development aid, cultural relations, and military cooperation. In terms of economic relations with African countries, China has established and maintained strong relations before and during the Xi Jinping era. Africa's natural resources and market are of strategic importance for China's manufacturing industry and export of value-added products. Economic relations are consolidated with diplomacy, development aid, cultural relations, and military cooperation.⁷ In this regard, China is increasing the number of its embassies in Africa and the capacities of the existing ones, continuing its search for peaceful solutions to regional conflicts, increasing development aids in various fields from education to health, strengthening its positive image through Confucius Institutes, and increasing military cooperation both under the UN and bilateral relations when legitimate governments fail to combat terrorism.⁸

2. Geopolitical Approach

On November 15, 2012, Xi Jinping assumed the role of General Secretary at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and on March 14, 2013, he became the President of China. Xi Jinping, considered the most powerful and nationalistic leader since Mao Zedong, has implemented policies in China's foreign affairs markedly different from his predecessors, resulting in significant changes. Since coming to power in 2013, Xi Jinping has endeavored to deepen China's relationship with Africa, reaching new heights in diplomatic and economic terms during his tenure. A notable development in this period is the establishment of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aimed at enhancing infrastructure connectivity between China and Africa, among other regions. The BRI has

⁶ Zheng, Chen, "China debates the non-interference principle." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2016, 9(3) p. 349-374.

⁷ Larry Hanauer-Lyle J. Morris, *Chinese engagement in Africa: Drivers, reactions, and implications for US policy*, Rand Corporation, Washington, 2014, p. 26-39.

⁸ Denis M. Tull, "China's engagement in Africa: scope, significance and consequences", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 2006, 44(3), p. 459-479.

opened avenues for major projects across Africa, making significant strides in industries, infrastructure, health, education, agriculture, and communication.⁹

The Belt and Road Initiative was first announced by Xi Jinping during his 2013 visit to Kazakhstan at Nazarbayev University. Encompassing 65 countries, the project is deemed one of the 21st century's most significant and strategic, with China committing a trillion dollars to its realization.¹⁰ The BRI aims to establish connections between Asia, Africa, and Europe, increase trade flow, foster long-term economic growth, and benefit all participating nations.¹¹

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) plays a crucial role in China's relations with the continent. Through FOCAC, China has approximately tripled since 2000, its financial commitments to Africa and garnered increased support from African nations in the UN.¹² Established in 2000 to enhance cooperation between China and African countries, FOCAC has seen significant advancements in many areas of China-Africa cooperation during Xi Jinping's era. Notably, under Xi Jinping, the period has been marked by increased Chinese investment and aid to Africa through FOCAC. Xi Jinping, after becoming the President of China in 2012, made his first visit to Africa in 2013, emphasizing the importance of FOCAC.¹³ At the 2015 FOCAC Johannesburg Summit, Xi Jinping announced a credit support of \$60 billion to African countries.¹⁴ This support encompasses trade, investment, infrastructure, financing, and economic aid. China's economic relations with Africa significantly impact both China's access to energy resources and Africa's development.¹⁵ Overall, FOCAC continues to be a vital platform for enhancing and strengthening cooperation between China and Africa, with the meetings held during Xi Jinping's era signifying China's emphasis on Africa. Additionally, FOCAC has also facilitated the development of China's diplomatic relations with Africa.¹⁶ In this context, China's diplomatic presence in Africa plays a significant role both for its own interests and for Africa's development.

China's diplomatic presence in Africa also leads to competition among international powers. Traditional powers with significant political and economic interests in Africa, like the USA, France, United Kingdom, and Russia, are concerned about China's growing influence. China, on the other hand, claims to approach African countries with mutual respect and a win-win principle, exemplifying a new type of global relationship. The embassies China has established in Africa during this period are significant steps in enhancing its diplomatic presence and influence on the continent. China has established diplomatic relations with 54 African countries and has embassies in 53, making it the region where China has the most embassies worldwide.¹⁷ China's embassies in Africa reflect the importance it places on African countries and the value Africa holds in China's global strategy. These embassies serve as tools for enhancing economic, political, cultural, and military cooperation with Africa, engaging in various activities like credit support, infrastructure projects, trade agreements, health aid, educational scholarships, and military training. They also strengthen China's image and reputation in Africa.

⁹ David H. Shinn, "China in Africa", *Africa in World Politics*. Edt. John W. Harbeson and Donald Rotschild, Routledge, Cambridge, 2023, p. 217-236.

¹⁰ Berkan Karamurtlu, "Kuşak Yol Projesi Bağlamında Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin Küresel Hegemonya Girişimi", *Doğu Asya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2020, 3(6), p. 54-81.

¹¹ Zhao Hong, *Trends in Southeast Asia: China's One Belt One Road: An Overview of the Debate*, ISEAS Publishing, Singapore, 2016, p. 5-9.

¹² Ian Taylor, *The forum on China-Africa cooperation (FOCAC)*, Routledge, Cambridge, 2010, p. 81-89.

¹³ Kılıç 2019, p. 71-96.

¹⁴ Kenneth King, "China-Africa education cooperation: From FOCAC to belt and road" *ECNU Review of Education*, 2020, 3(2), p. 221-234.

¹⁵ Kılıç 2019, p. 71-96.

¹⁶ Zeng Aiping and Shu Zhan, "Origin, achievements, and the prospects of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation", *China Int'l Studies*, 2018, 72, p. 88-108.

¹⁷ Foreign Affairs Committee, "China Regional Snapshot: Sub-Saharan Africa" <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/china-regional-snapshot-sub-saharan-africa/#:~:text=China%20also%20has%20an%20estimated,One%20Belt%20One%20Road%20initiative>, son erişim tarihi 02.02.2024.

During Xi Jinping's tenure, various bilateral agreements have been signed to support both China's interests and Africa's development in the realm of political relations. These agreements cover trade, investment, infrastructure, financing, economic aid, health, education, culture, military cooperation, and international issues.¹⁸ Through partnership agreements with African countries, China aims to contribute to Africa's peace and stability and enhance its role in the international community.¹⁹

In this context, bilateral agreements in China-Africa political relations are evaluated in terms of challenges and opportunities faced by both China and Africa. For China, Africa offers strategic opportunities like access to energy resources, new markets and investment opportunities, and gaining global influence and reputation. Africa also provides solutions to international challenges faced by China, such as securing African countries' support against Western criticisms regarding human rights violations. For Africa, China represents a significant source of financing for economic development and infrastructure improvement. China's policy towards Africa also offers African countries the opportunity to determine their own fate and escape the pressure of Western countries.²⁰

Relations with the African Union (AU) during Xi Jinping's era are crucial in the context of China's political relations with Africa. During this period, China and the AU have developed various cooperation mechanisms to address the common interests and problems of both China and Africa. China views the AU as an important partner for Africa's development and integration and supports its role. Political, economic, social, and cultural agreements have been signed between China and the AU.²¹ In 2015, a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement was signed between China and the African Union. This agreement forms the foundation of cooperation between the two sides and defines their shared vision, principles, and objectives. In 2018, a development plan agreement was signed between China and the AU, aiming to harmonize the AU's Agenda 2063 with China's Belt and Road Initiative.²² In 2020, a cooperation agreement against COVID-19 was signed between China and the AU, strengthening cooperation in areas like information sharing, medical supply provision, vaccine development, and distribution.²³ Thus, the relations between China and the AU contribute to both parties playing a more effective role in global issues. China, along with the AU, seeks joint solutions to issues like climate change, terrorism, regional peace, and security.²⁴ The relations between China and the African Union also interact with other actors, including the establishment of a trilateral cooperation mechanism with the European Union.²⁵ This mechanism expands cooperation between the two sides with the participation of a third party. In conclusion, China's relationship with Africa has become increasingly significant in recent years, with economic and political ties continuing to deepen. As China seeks to expand its global influence, its relationship with Africa remains a key component of its foreign policy.

¹⁸ Selim Öterbülül, "Xi Jinping Döneminde Çin'in Ortadoğu'daki Güvelik Stratejisi", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 2022, 53, p. 41-70.

¹⁹ Gözde Söğütü, Pasifik'ten Afrika'ya: Yükselen Güç Çin'in Afrika Politikası, *Africana-Inönü Üniversitesi Uluslararası Afrika Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2021, 1(1), p. 72.

²⁰ Öterbülül 2022, p. 41-70.

²¹ Daniel Large, "China, Africa And The 2021 Dakar Focac", *African Affairs*, 2022, 121(483), p. 299-319.

²² Keiran E. Uchegara, "Yüzyılda Çin-Afrika İlişkileri: İlgı, Uzlaşma ve Çatışma", *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 2009, 6(23), p. 95-111.

²³ Large 2022, p. 299-319.

²⁴ Charles Ukeje and Yonas Tariku, "Beyond symbolism: China and the African Union in African peace and security", *China and Africa: Building peace and security cooperation on the continent*, 2018, p. 289-309.

²⁵ Policy Center For The New South: "AfCFTA and the Creeping Power Play: Africa, the European Union, and China", <https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/afcfta-and-creeping-power-play-africa-european-union-and-china>, son erişim tarihi 02.02.2024.

3. China's Soft Power Policy in Africa

In international politics, the concept of soft power refers to elements beyond hard power, which encompasses military and economic sanctions. Soft power is a more abstract concept, rooted in historical continuity and not possessed by every state. It can be defined as the reflection of a country's cultural heritage in contemporary times and its ability to influence other states and make them aspire to its values. Historical continuity plays a crucial role in shaping soft power. According to Joseph Nye, soft power is the second face of power. Desired outcomes in international politics can be achieved not only through hard power but also through the admiration and desire of other states for a country's values and prosperity.²⁶ The European Union, the USA, and the United Kingdom are primary examples of this, where a country's ability to set the global agenda and direct the preferences of other countries indicates its soft power. From this perspective, soft power concerns an international actor's capacity to prioritize its values over other options. The sources of soft power are culture, political values, and foreign policy. Nye emphasizes that a country's culture must be attractive to others, its political values practiced both domestically and in foreign policy, and its foreign policy should conform to legitimate and ethical values accepted by the international community.²⁷

China, with its historical background, profound state tradition, large population, and rapidly developing economy, is a prominent actor in international politics. Parallel to its economic rise, China values soft power elements to positively shape its image in countries with which it engages and to develop sustainable relationships. China has emphasized soft power elements both before and during Xi's era on national and international stages. The literature on soft power, especially regarding China, discusses the limitations of its soft power policy, whether its growing economy will transform it into a superpower, and propositions for the future, considering the impact of recent global events on China's soft power. This section examines China's soft power policy in Africa in terms of culture, political values, and foreign policy, elucidating the limitations of China's soft power and the reasons contributing to its rise in political, economic, and military terms.

Since the 1990s, China has incorporated the concept of soft power into its agenda. Chinese intellectuals have produced academic works on this concept, and especially since the 2000s, alongside its rising economic and military power, the Chinese government has discovered the importance of soft power policies in the political realm. With Hu Jintao's presidency in 2002, the concept of soft power started gaining attention among Chinese leaders.²⁸ The popularity of Nye's soft power concept among Chinese policymakers and thinkers is primarily attributed to the Confucianism present in Chinese history and culture, which emphasizes moral power over physical force in governance. Thus, soft power emerges from the potential inherent in a civilization with a profound historical background like China.²⁹ Moreover, following the Soviet Union's collapse, intensive discussions in China about the rise and fall of great powers in the international arena suggested that the Soviet Union lost the Cold War due to its neglect of soft power against the USA. Consequently, Chinese elites and academics agree that China must value soft power alongside hard power to avoid a similar fate and maintain its global influence.³⁰

²⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *Yumuşak Güç*, Elips Yayınevi, Ankara, 2005, p. 14-15.

²⁷ Nye 2005, p.15-17.

²⁸ Joseph S. Nye-Jisi Wang, "Hard Decisions on Soft Power: Opportunities and Difficulties for Chinese Soft Power", *Harvard International Review*, 2009, 31(2), p.18-22.

²⁹ Bonnie Glasser-Melissa E. Murphy, "Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: The Ongoing Debate", *Chinese Soft Power and its Implications for the United States: Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World*, Edt. Carola McGiffert, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, 2009, p. 10-26.

³⁰ Glasser-Murphy 2009, p.10-26.

In Africa, China employs key tools like Confucius Institutes, classes, CGTN-centered media structure, support for local media outlets, and scholarships for African students. When examining China's position in Africa from the perspective of culture, political values, and foreign policy - the components of soft power as institutionalized by Nye - China presents a positive image culturally and in foreign policy. However, the authoritarian nature of Beijing's regime poses a fundamental limitation regarding the acceptability of its political values. On the other hand, many African countries' authoritarian regimes and Beijing's principle of non-interference in internal affairs result in a positive image concerning political values. China proposes the Beijing Consensus, an alternative to the Washington Consensus, which is based on market economy and authoritarian regime, positively impacting its image in African countries from a political values standpoint.

4. Economic Approach

During Xi Jinping's era, China's investments in Africa, primarily through cooperation agreements, have focused on areas like infrastructure projects, mining, energy, and agriculture. These investments aim to meet China's economic needs and provide development aid to African countries. Although the exact total of China's investments in Africa is unknown, estimates suggest that it was around \$143 billion between 2000 and 2018. The loans China provided to Africa are calculated to be \$148 billion from 2000 to 2019. Major investment partners of China in Africa include countries like Nigeria, Angola, Ethiopia, South Africa, and Algeria.³¹ China's policy towards Africa has elicited mixed reactions from both the continent's nations and other international actors. There are two prominent viewpoints: one sees China's alternative development model and cooperation opportunities in Africa positively, while the other views China as a new colonial power exploiting Africa's resource.³²

China's investments have brought benefits to Africa. For instance, Chinese investments have created over 300,000 job opportunities and provided skill development training to African workers. They have contributed to technology and knowledge transfer in Africa, facilitated 12% of Africa's annual total industrial manufacturing worth \$500 billion, and supported infrastructure financing and development.³³ However, there are also concerns regarding China's investments. Firstly, it's argued that these investments have made African countries economically dependent on Beijing, losing control over their own resources.³⁴ The investments have increased Africa's debt burden, with China demanding strategic assets or political concessions in return, hindering the continent's development of its own technology and knowledge, and making it dependent on Chinese technology.³⁵ They are also said to hinder the development of local industries, forcing African countries to remain as raw material exporters.³⁶

³¹ Philip Akrofi Atitianti-Qian Dai, "Does Chinese foreign direct investment improve the welfare of Africans?" *Journal of African Business*, 2022, 23(4), p. 964-983.

³² Suisheng Zhao, "A neo-colonialist predator or development partner? China's engagement and rebalance in Africa." *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2014, 23(90) p.1033-1052; Kwame A. Insaideo, China: The New Imperialists & Neo-Colonialists in Africa?, *AuthorHouse*, 2016; Okolo, Abutu Lawrence, and Joseph O. Akwu. "China's foreign direct investment in Africa's land: hallmarks of neo-colonialism or South-South cooperation?." *Africa review*, 2016, 8(1), p. 44-59; Alexander Revheim Sherling, China in Africa: New colonialism or sustainable development?, MS thesis. *The University of Bergen*, 2014.

³³ Hüseyin Avni Gümrükçüoğlu, "Çin Yayılmacılığı Kısacasında Afrika", AFAM, 2017. <https://afam.org.tr/cin-yayilmaciligi-kiskacinda-afrika/>, son erişim tarihi 02.02.2024.

³⁴ Berk Çetintaş, *Çin'in Afrika'daki Enerji Politikaları*. Ufuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2020.

³⁵ Kılıç 2019, p. 71-96.

³⁶ Euronews, "Çin'e Olan Ekonomik Bağımlılık Almanları Endişelendiriyor" <https://tr.euronews.com/2022/11/04/cine-olan-ekonomik-bagimlilik-almanlari-endiselendiriyor-analiz>, son erişim tarihi 02.02.2024.

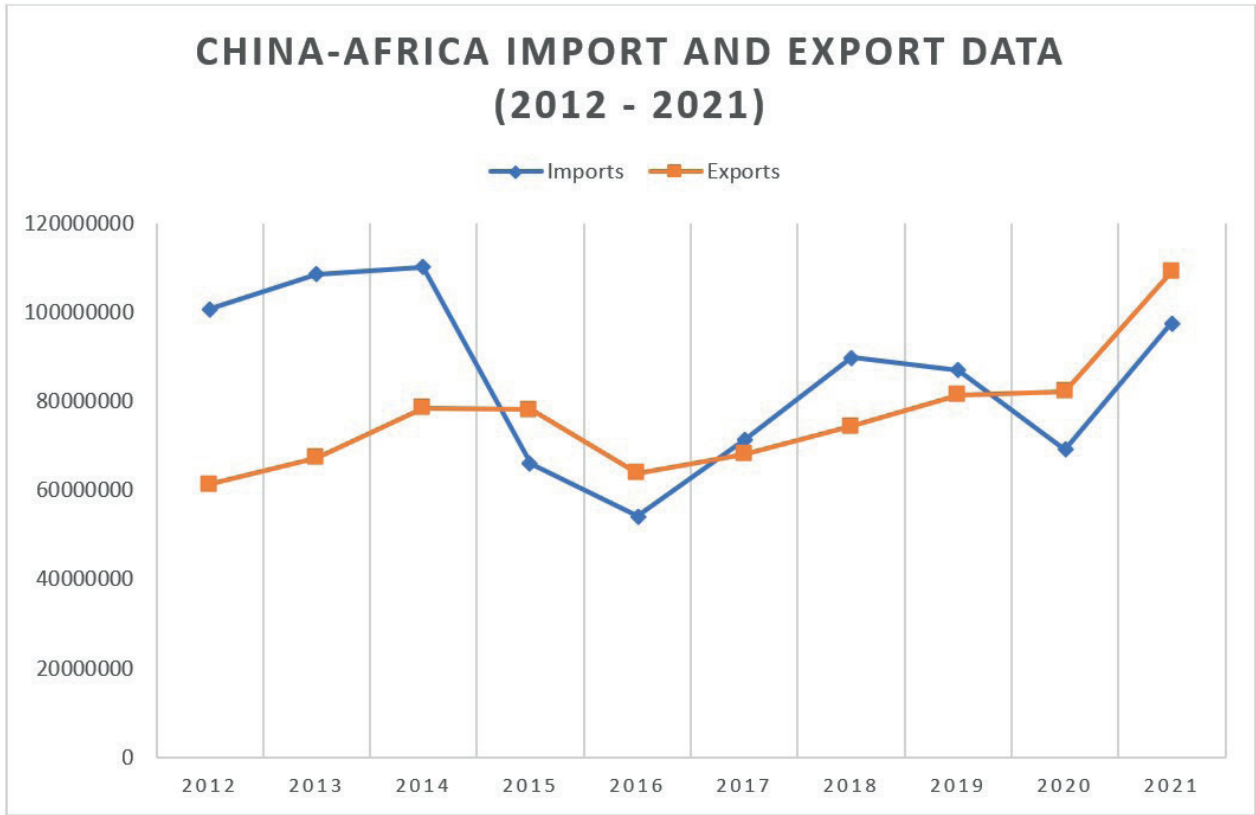


Figure 1. China-Africa import and export data (2012 - 2021).

*US Dollar

Source: World Bank WITS

Secondly, China's investments are seen as serving its neo-mercantilist policies and prioritizing its economic interests over Africa's development needs.³⁷ China's neo-mercantilist policies aim to protect its own market and achieve trade surpluses for expansion into foreign markets. In this context, China's neo-mercantilist policies in Africa involve state-backed investments to secure strategic resources and markets.³⁸

Thirdly, there are concerns that China's investments contribute to the exploitation of Africa's natural resources and environmental issues.³⁹ China imports significant amounts of natural resources like oil, copper, iron, and timber from Africa and offers loans in return, leading to violations of environmental standards, pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss.⁴⁰ These investments are also accused of ignoring the participation and rights of local communities and weakening the management of local resources. Lastly, it's claimed that China's investments

³⁷ Gümrükçüoğlu, 2017.

³⁸ Orhan Şimşek, "Çin'in Merkantilist Enerji Politikaları ve Latin Amerika'daki Yansımaları" *Akademik Araştırmalar ve Çalışmalar Dergisi (AKAD)*, 2019, 11(20), p. 106-115.

³⁹ The Conversation, "La nouvelle stratégie énergétique de la Chine en Afrique : enjeux et défis" <https://theconversation.com/la-nouvelle-strategie-energetique-de-la-chine-en-afrique-enjeux-et-defis-179909>, son erişim tarihi 03.02.2024.

⁴⁰ Semanur Soyuyiğit, "Çin'in Afrika'daki Doğrudan Yabancı Sermaye Yatırımlarının Afrika Ülkelerindeki Ekonomik Etkisi", *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi*, 2020, 21(1), p. 269-292.

use private military companies to threaten security and stability in the region, leading to human rights violations and conflicts, with Chinese private military companies providing armed forces to manage these risks.⁴¹

Overall, China's economic approach to Africa during Xi Jinping's era is part of its effort to develop cooperation among developing countries and demonstrate its status as a rising superpower. China has provided Africa with substantial direct investments, technical assistance, grants, zero-interest loans, and concessional loans. Furthermore, its "Belt and Road Initiative" supports its economic objectives towards Africa, strengthening its connection with the continent. This initiative intertwines China's geopolitical interests with economic, political, and security ties between African countries and China.⁴² China's policies towards Africa are driven by a desire to enhance its influence on the continent by forming strategic partnerships against Western domination.⁴³

5. Security Approach

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has been actively engaging in military cooperation with African countries by providing military training, equipment, and technology. This cooperation serves as a tool for increasing China's influence in Africa and enhancing the security capabilities of African nations. The impact of China's military assistance is assessed differently for China and African countries. For China, military aid is a means to increase its influence in Africa, secure access to energy and natural resources, protect overseas interests, and reinforce its role as a global power. Additionally, China's military assistance to African countries reinforces its image of adhering to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs and respecting the sovereignty of African nations, while also aiming to balance the influence of Western actors in Africa. For African countries, Chinese military aid is seen as an opportunity to enhance their security capabilities, maintain regional peace and stability, combat threats like terrorism and piracy, and achieve development goals.

China's participation in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa has significantly increased in recent years. In 2019, China became the second-largest contributor of troops to UN peacekeeping missions.⁴⁴ China contributes to peacekeeping operations in areas such as Mali, South Sudan, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Western Sahara. The reasons for China's participation in these operations include aligning with its strategy of peaceful development and the image of a responsible major power contributing to international peace and security. Other reasons are protecting its economic interests and overseas citizens in Africa, strengthening the role of the UN and adhering to the principle of international legitimacy, and enhancing China's political and diplomatic relations with African countries. Additionally, these operations offer China the opportunity to develop military capacity and experience and test new weapons systems.⁴⁵

For African countries, China's participation in UN peacekeeping operations is viewed as an opportunity to strengthen their security capabilities, maintain regional peace and stability, combat threats like terrorism and piracy, and facilitate economic aid from China, thereby enhancing their voice in the UN and gaining more international respect. It is also seen as support for escaping the pressure of Western actors and protecting their sovereignty rights.⁴⁶

⁴¹ TERAM, "Çin-Afrika ilişkilerinde Çin Özel Askeri Şirketlerinin Faaliyet ve Etkileri", <https://www.teram.org/Icerik/cin-afrika-iliskilerinde-cin-ozel-askeri-sirketlerinin-faaliyet-ve-etkileri-207>, son erişim tarihi 03.02.2024.

⁴² Kübra Yılmaz, "Çin'in Afrika Parametreleri", *Africana-Inönü Üniversitesi Uluslararası Afrika Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2021, 1(1), p. 87-102.

⁴³ Kılıç 2019, p. 71-96.

⁴⁴ Sam Gitlitz, "Security and Development, the Two Wins of China's African Strategy: Initial Research into China's Win-Win Strategy's for African Security" *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 2023, 18(2), p. 216-221.

⁴⁵ Haluk Karadağ, "Birleşmiş Milletler Barış Operasyonları ve Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin Uluslararası Barış ve Güvenliğe Katkıları", *Journal of East Asian Studies in Türkiye*, 2018, 1(1), p. 55-74.

⁴⁶ Wang Li ve Paul Dottin, "Çin'in Afrika'daki Barışı Koruma Misyonlarının Ardındaki Nedenler: Pekin'in Stratejik Düşüncelerini Yorumlama" *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi*, 2011, 7(14), p. 1-16.

However, criticisms have been raised against China's military presence in Africa by both Western and some African actors. Key criticisms include concerns that China's military presence serves its own interests and could lead to regional instability, escalate conflicts and competition, violate human rights and democracy standards, impinge on sovereignty, hinder the development of African countries' security capacities, weaken the role of the UN, violate international legitimacy principles, disrupt the global balance of power, hinder Africa's development goals, increase dependency, and lead to the colonization of Africa.⁴⁷

Further, China's security policies in Africa have been criticized for causing human rights violations and infringing on the freedoms of local populations, particularly by Western powers and some NGOs. Key reasons for these criticisms include allegations that China's security policies violate the principle of non-interference in African countries' internal affairs, support authoritarian regimes, hinder the advancement of human rights and democracy standards, overlook human rights abuses, exploit natural resources, violate property and labor rights of local populations, impede the right of African countries to self-determination, and exacerbate ethnic conflicts and internal turmoil.⁴⁸

Overall, China's security policies in Africa are a growing area of focus, encompassing cooperation in combating terrorism, drug trafficking, border security, cybersecurity, and other crimes. The reasons for China's cooperation in these areas include protecting its economic interests and overseas citizens in Africa, developing political and diplomatic relations with African countries, promoting peace and stability, addressing regional security issues, taking on global responsibilities in counter-terrorism and crime, and strengthening the role of the UN. Methods of cooperation include providing military training, equipment, and technology; intelligence sharing, joint operations, capacity building support; offering assistance and consultancy in border security, cybersecurity, and judicial cooperation; participating in UN peacekeeping operations; and supporting African countries in counter-terrorism and crime on international platforms.⁴⁹ In conclusion, under Xi Jinping, China plays an active role in security policies in Africa, aiming to enhance Africa's security capacity through military cooperation, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, peacekeeping, and anti-piracy efforts.

Conclusion

China's growing political, economic, security, and socio-cultural influence in Africa since 2012 has become one of the key developments in international politics. This shift highlights Africa's increasing importance in global politics and showcases the arena of competition among global actors. Consequently, China's approach to Africa has significant economic and political implications on the continent. China's strategy towards Africa is part of its broader international strategy based on multipolarity and non-interference, aimed at consolidating its geopolitical interests. This approach, characterized by increased aid, debt cancellation, and the growth in China-Africa trade, especially in the oil sector, is mutually advantageous for both Chinese and African political elites. However, China's approach differs from previous models of economic development aid between African countries and Western nations, primarily because China does not prioritize democratic and human rights values like the West.

Post-Soviet Union, there has been a noticeable shift in Africa's traditional actors - the USA, France, and the UK - with their dominance waning and alternative actors like China becoming more active. The rise of China as an alternative to Western traditional actors in Africa likely signals an increase in East-West competition within the African sub-regional system. Nevertheless, African countries are more inclined to diversify their international relations to strengthen their position in the global system rather than transitioning from Western to Eastern dominance.

⁴⁷ Shinn 2023, p. 217-236.

⁴⁸ Çolak 2022, p. 71-87.

⁴⁹ Bulelani Jili, "The Spread of Chinese Surveillance Tools in Africa: A Focus on Ethiopia and Kenya", *Africa-Europe Cooperation and Digital Transformation* Edt. Chux Daniels, Benedikt Erforth, Chloe Teevan, *Routledge*, 2022. p. 33-36.

Economically, the role of Africa in the global economy remains uncertain in the context of China's approach. However, the diversification of African countries' external economic ties is a significant development. The ambiguity in China-Africa economic relations mirrors the asymmetrical relationship historically observed between Western actors and Africa. The clarity of this uncertainty in China-Africa economic relations will likely emerge in the coming years, particularly in terms of Beijing's investments in Africa contributing to the production of value-added products and know-how sharing. China clearly states that its approach to Africa differs from that of Western actors.

China's economic engagement in Africa also impacts its political and security engagements. For instance, China's commercial engagements with African countries indirectly contribute to the development of political (geopolitical and socio-cultural) relations and consolidate its influence in areas like establishing military bases for trade security, participating in peacekeeping and counterterrorism operations, and exporting security equipment and military training. Therefore, considering the critical turning points in the processes depicted in this big picture, the practices of Chinese policymakers towards Africa reveal a connected and phased approach.

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