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China's Footprint in Africa: Unpacking Beijing's Influence on Politics, Societies, and Economies

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Executive Summary

China's relations with African countries are deepening, comprising economic, political and social ties. Consequently, scholars and policy-makers consider an increasingly broad "toolbox" of Chinese foreign policy as potential means of furthering influence on the continent. In this report, we take stock of the state of research on China's influence in Africa, highlighting the following trends:

- China's economic influence on the continent remains strong, driven by China's interest in access to resources and export markets, as well as in investments by state-owned and private enterprises. More recently, China has shown growing interest in investments in the digital sphere, and in particular in information and communication technologies (ICT). It is in the digital sphere where China's activities are also increasingly discussed as instances of influence on politics and governance in African countries.

- China's relations with African countries are becoming more political, through multilateral diplomacy, strategic state-to-state engagement, the deepening of party-to-party relations through political training and influence, and with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) advocating for its governance approach and reforms of the international institutional architecture. China also started to develop a stronger focus on security co-operation with African partner countries.

- China's footprint on African societies is also increasing. Among the formal co-operation mechanisms in the fields of education, culture, press and media, in particular the training of journalists and content development co-operation are seen as potent means of influence. Moreover, migration and diaspora relations increasingly matter for African citizens' views on China and the Chinese.

The Megatrends Afrika project has contributed to debates on China's influence in Africa by investigating China's activities on the continent in comparison with other external actors, in particular "the West", for instance in the following areas:

- The local reception of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in East Africa, a large-scale infrastructure scheme and its impact on regional thinking on connectivity;

- China's investments in Africa's ICT sector and questions over whether the interests of China and Chinese companies align with those of African governments, highlighting socio-economic benefits as well as risks surrounding data sovereignty, digital surveillance and censorship;

- China's "Initiative for Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa" as an example of how Chinese foreign policy thinking on the security–development nexus is undergoing profound changes, and what this means for the established peacebuilding architecture on the continent.

Based on the review, we suggest that more robust empirical data is needed, for instance on the link between China's economic co-operation and welfare outcomes, Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) follow-up mechanisms and Beijing's evolving activities in the field of peace and security on the continent. Furthermore, future research should strengthen the link between empirical data and broader theoretical debates on status, power and influence in international relations and take a comparative view to better situate China within the wider field of Africa's international relations.

Contents

Acronyms

AU   African Union

BRI   Belt and Road Initiative

CI   Confucius Institute

CCP   Chinese Communist Party

DAC   Development Assistance Committee

EU   European Union

FDI   Foreign Direct Investment

FOCAC Forum on China–Africa Cooperation

ICT   Information and Communication Technology

IMF   International Monetary Fund

ODA   Official Development Assistance

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SOE   State-owned enterprise

US   United States of America

WTO   World Trade Organization

Introduction

China–Africa relations are an intensely debated subject of research in Africa's international relations. Scholarly interest in the relationship has risen sharply in the last two decades, largely inspired by the rapidly increasing economic, political and social impact of China and Chinese people on African states and societies. By now, the literature on Africa–China relations is vast. China's strong economic influence in Africa compared to other external actors is particularly well documented. Over the past two decades, China has become Africa's most important bilateral trading partner.[1] China has accelerated its engagement as a major funder of infrastructure development across the continent, not least with its "going out" foreign policy approach, followed by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)[2] – a large-scale infrastructure investment initiative that aims to establish trade connections between China and the rest of the world. Chinese annual foreign direct investment (FDI) flows have also increased steadily, reaching USD 4.2 billion in 2020.[3] Politically, the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) receives wide attention on the continent and in international media, as do the frequent high-level visits of Chinese officials in between summits. And on the social level, China's influence through cultural and media co-operation and human mobility is increasing, with surveys showing overall positive perceptions of Chinese economic and political influence on the continent.[4] At the same time, surveys show that perceptions of China and of Chinese people in Africa are also controversial and differ significantly between countries and societal groups. (For further details, see the section "China's influence on societies in Africa" below.) Overall, the relationship is highly complex and evolving, featuring an increasingly broad set of agents, including African and Chinese officials, business communities and individuals.

While much of the early research on Africa–China relations mapped China's existing engagements in different sectors, research has become more comparative in recent years, discussing China's co-operation with African countries in the wider context of growing multipolarity, which Priyal Singh describes as "a concerted effort among global powers to revamp relations with African partners against the backdrop of increasing rivalry".[5] Reflecting these trends at the level of research, strategic positioning in a so-called "new scramble for Africa" or a new Cold War between "Western" and "non-Western" actors has started to feature more prominently in contemporary analyses of external engagements in Africa. China's foreign policy ambitions are increasingly seen through the lens of geopolitical competition.[6] On the one hand, research is focused on China's interventional practices and alleged "predatory" interests – resource exploitation and the creation of financial dependency. On the other hand, research takes Chinese foreign policy ideals as the starting point of scholarly investigation, highlighting China's ambitions as a responsible great power and the win–win character of the Africa–China relationship. In some fields, interpretations of the character and consequences for the relationship differ significantly. Chinese lending practices are just one prominent example: Africa–China researchers such

1 Wade Shephard, "What China is Really Up To in Africa", *Forbes*, 10 October 2019.
2 Yu Jie and Jon Wallace, 2021, "What is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)?" *Chatham House Explainer*, 13 September 2021.
3 Chinese Investment in Africa, database, China Africa Research Initiative, 2022, accessed 10 February 2022.
4 Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny and Edem Selormey, *Africans Welcome China's Influence but Maintain Democratic Aspirations*", Afrobarometer Dispatch 489 (Accra: Afrobarometer, 2021).
5 Priyal Singh, "Africa Has a Rare Chance to Shape the International Order", *ISS Today*, 20 August 2022.
6 Chris Alden and Daniel Large, "Studying Africa and China", in *New Directions in Africa–China Studies*, ed. Chris Alden and Daniel Large (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 6.

as Deborah Bräutigam have repeatedly cast doubt on the allegation that China intentionally lures African countries into financial dependence through loans for infrastructure deals.[7] Yet incommensurate positions on the "debt trap" being a real danger for African countries or a myth can be found not only in the media but also in policy-oriented research. As Daniel Large notes: "The topic of China's relations with Africa has become an information minefield. […] China–Africa is not a subject that follows any neat, coherent narrative but has become a topic about which opinion is required and, increasingly, judgement."[8]

Much of the research is concerned with questions of power dynamics, status-seeking and means of influence at play in China's relations with African countries. However, defining and measuring means of influence in international relations is a challenging task that has caused much conceptual and theoretical controversy. As Lukas Fiala notes, "understanding how states – especially China – shape the international environment in their favour has been fraught with metaphors and simplifications that sound good in a headline but do not stand up to closer scrutiny."[9] In view of the vast number of publications on Africa–China relations, the different understandings and means of measuring influence across disciplines, the views on China's role in Africa are necessarily highly diverse. What the majority of scholars agree on though is that China's impact on the continent has increased, and relations are becoming more political. (For further details, see the section "China's political influence in Africa" below.)

Against this backdrop, this report takes stock of research contributions that have engaged with questions of China's influence and impact on the continent, including in terms of how Beijing's engagement is received by citizens and decision-makers in African states. We take a broad look at the state of research in various disciplines, including economics, international relations, areas studies, and social sciences, and give preference to research that is substantiated by empirical data. By taking a multi-domain perspective (i.e., trade relations, investment initiatives, party-to-party relations, media co-operation, diaspora relations and so on), we aim to capture the evolution and current status of the relationship as much as the plurality of views on China's role in different African countries. Based on the review, we highlight loose ends in the literature that could be picked up on by future scholarly enquiry interested in questions of influence in Africa–China relations.

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7 Deborah Bräutigam and Meg Rithmire, "The Chinese 'Dept Trap' is a Myth", *The Atlantic*, 6 February 2021.
8 Daniel Large, *China and Africa* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021), 7.
9 Lukas Fiala, "Understanding Chinese Influence", *China Global South Project*, 9 December 2022.

Literature Review: China's Influence on Economy, Politics and Society in Africa

In the following chapters we take stock of what has been discussed in the literature on Africa–China relations regarding China's assumed impact on the former. We account for a broad spectrum of means of influence, including conventional "hard" power but also drawing attention in particular to how China's influence is evolving and how "softer" means of influence have gained increasing importance. While "soft" power is by no means a distinctly Chinese attribute (the United States (US) has long been a far more prominent example of a country using the attraction of its culture to gain influence), certain features of China's relationship with Africa, as we will demonstrate, can be regarded as distinctive means of "influence with Chinese characteristics", derived from China's history, development path, culture and current role in the international system.[10] Where comparative studies are available, we also situate scholarly views on China within the wider field of research on engagement by external actors in Africa.

China's Economic Influence in Africa

China's rapidly growing economic engagement is visible across the African continent in its bilateral trade relations, overseas investment and development-aid activities. In the last two decades, China has, for example, evolved from being an aid recipient to becoming one of Africa's largest sources of official development assistance (ODA).[11] Its lending activities in Africa are greater than those of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or of all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) governments combined.[12] It has also heavily invested in construction, mining, manufacturing and, to some extent, also in social sectors such as health and education.[13] In this section, we review the existing evidence – mainly based on quantitative empirical research – of the impact of the different resource flows recorded between China and Africa on African development indicators such as growth rates in income per capita.

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10 Paul Nantulya, "Strategic Application of the Tao 道 of Soft Power: The Key to Understanding China's Expanding Influence in Africa", *The African Review* 47, no. 2 (2020): 481-529.
11 Austin M. Strange, Axel Dreher, Andreas Fuchs, Bradley Parks, and Michael J. Tierney, "Tracking Underreported Financial Flows: China's Development Finance and the Aid–Conflict Nexus Revisited", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 5 (2017): 935-963.
12 Sebastian Horn, Carmen M. Reinhart, and Christoph Trebesch, "China's Overseas Lending", *Journal of International Economics* 133 (2021): 103539.
13 Tim Wegenast, Mario Krauser, Georg Strüver, and Juliane Giesen, "At Africa's Expense? Disaggregating the Employment Effects of Chinese Mining Operations in Sub-Saharan Africa", *World Development* 118 (2019): 39-51.

Aid

In what follows, we focus on China's ODA to Africa, which has to be distinguished from other financial flows that have a stronger commercial orientation. The definition of China's ODA does not exactly match the standard definition employed by the OECD. Unlike the OECD, for instance, China counts military assistance with development intent as ODA.[14]

Not only in terms of the amounts disbursed do China's aid activities stand out among the group of donors not belonging to the established OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). While other non-DAC donors, such as Brazil and India, largely focus on neighbouring or culturally related countries, almost all developing countries – except those that maintain diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan) – are recipients of some form of Chinese aid,[15] indicating China's aspiration to be more than a regional power. Roughly half of Chinese aid goes to Africa.

Is Chinese aid any different from Western aid?

It is unclear a priori whether China's particular way of providing aid is conducive to economic and social development in Africa or not. The factors that shape China's aid allocation tend to deviate from those of other donors in several dimensions.

First, China is well-known for its policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of recipient countries.[16] While recipient country governments tend to see this principle as a sign of China respecting their countries' sovereignty, critics view it as a convenient rationale for economic involvement in undemocratic and corrupt regimes and suggest that it makes it easy for local politicians to exploit Chinese aid. Isaksson and Kotsadam obtain regression results based on geo-referenced data that consistently indicate that Chinese aid projects in Africa fuel local corruption.[17] They provide suggestive evidence that this comes about at least partly through negative impacts of China's presence on local norms vis-à-vis corruption. Running equivalent regressions for World Bank aid projects, for which geo-referenced data are available covering a large multi-country African sample, the authors find no consistent evidence of a corresponding increase in local corruption around project sites.

Second, the Chinese aid allocation process tends to be demand-driven.[18] As described in detail in Dreher et al. (2019), China's aid allocation is often based on requests from the governments of recipient countries.[19] Its aid packages and projects tend to be negotiated in high-level meetings with political leaders, with the initiative generally coming from the recipient side. Interpreted favourably, this could again be seen as a sign of ensuring partner-country ownership of development policy. At the same time, however, a request-based system of aid project delivery may provide opportunities for recipient country governments to use funds strategically, for example by promoting a sub-national distribution of funds that favours patronage networks, as detected by Dreher et al. in their empirical analysis.[20]

14 Strange et al, "Tracking Underreported Financial Flows".
15 Gerda Asmus, Andreas Fuchs, and Angelika Müller, "BRICS and Foreign Aid", in *The Political Economy of the BRICS Countries: BRICS and the Global Economy*, ed. Soo Yeon Kim, (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2020), 139-177; Finn Ole Semrau and Rainer Thiele, "Brazil's Development Cooperation: Following in China's and India's Footsteps?" *Journal of International Development* 29 (2017): 287-307.
16 Deborah Bräutigam, *The Dragon's Gift, The Real Story of China in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
17 Ann-Sofie Isaksson and Andreas Kotsadam, "Chinese Aid and Local Corruption", *Journal of Public Economics* 159 (2018): 146-159.
18 Deborah Bräutigam, "Aid 'with Chinese Characteristics': Chinese Foreign Aid and Development Finance Meet the OECD-DAC Aid Regime", *Journal of International Development* 23 (2011): 752-764.
19 Axel Dreher, Andreas Fuchs, Roland Hodler, Bradley C. Parks, Paul A. Raschky, and Michael J. Tierney, "African Leaders and the Geography of China's Foreign Assistance", *Journal of Development Economics* 140 (2019): 44-71.
20 Ibid.

Third, it is often argued that China's aid allocation is predominantly motivated by political and economic self-interest, neglecting recipient need and the quality of local institutions. Moisés Naím famously coined the term "rogue aid" to describe this kind of engagement.[21] Empirical research reveals a more nuanced picture, however. Several studies do find that, in line with the principle of non-interference in recipient countries' internal affairs, the allocation of Chinese aid across countries is not affected by differences in the quality of institutions in recipient countries, and that China's aid policy and practices are guided by commercial interests.[22] Yet, China also appears to consider recipient need by giving more aid to poorer countries. With this mix of selfish and altruistic motives, China's aid allocation is not fundamentally different from that of major OECD-DAC donors such as the United States and Japan.[23]

Does China's particular approach to development co-operation translate into positive development outcomes?

According to results from cross-country panel regressions by Busse et al. for the period 1991 to 2010, Chinese aid has had no robust effect on economic growth in African countries.[24] However, as cross-country analyses of the relationship between aid and growth face various methodological challenges, they have to be interpreted with considerable caution.[25] Dreher et al. (2021) examine the effects of Chinese development projects on economic development at the sub-national level, through which some of the methodological concerns are mitigated.[26] Their results suggest that, despite the widespread political favouritism detected by the earlier study,[27] Chinese aid has been successful in promoting regional development, as measured by night-time light emissions. Bluhm et al. show that Chinese aid promotes local economic connectivity through large-scale regional infrastructure projects.[28]

Martorano et al. study the impact of Chinese aid on household welfare in sub-Saharan Africa by combining data on Chinese development projects with data from demographic and health surveys.[29] They find that Chinese aid projects improve education and child mortality but have no effects on child nutrition. The improvements in health and education can mainly be attributed to social sector projects but may additionally be driven indirectly by a positive effect of Chinese aid on general economic welfare.

Overall, given the short time period in which Chinese aid flows to Africa have been tracked at the sub-national level and the considerable time lag before the effects of some types of foreign aid, such as assistance for social infrastructure projects, become evident, the question of whether Chinese aid is associated with higher economic growth and improved social indicators in African countries can so far only be answered with a low degree of precision.

21 Moisés Naím, "Rogue Aid", *Foreign Policy* 159 (2007): 95-96.
22 See, for example, Axel Dreher and Andreas Fuchs, "Rogue Aid? An Empirical Analysis of China's Aid Allocation", *Canadian Journal of Economics* 48, no. 3 (2015): 988-1023.
23 Anke Hoeffler and Olivier Sterck, "Is Chinese Aid Different?" *World Development* 156 (2022): 105908.
24 Matthias Busse, Ceren Erdogan, and Henning Mühlen, "China's Impact on Africa – The role of trade, FDI and Aid", *Kyklos* 69, no. 2 (2016): 228-262.
25 Rainer Thiele, "Development Cooperation, Growth and Poverty Reduction: A Survey of the Evidence", in *Transitioning to No Poverty*, ed. Isabel Günther and Rahul Lahoti, (Basel: MDPI, 2021), 271-283.
26 Axel Dreher, Andreas Fuchs, Bradley Parks, Austin Strange, and Michael Tierney, "Aid, China, and Growth: Evidence from a New Global Development Finance Dataset", *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 13, no. 2 (2021): 135-174.
27 Dreher et al., "African Leaders and the Geography of China's Foreign Assistance".
28 Richard Bluhm, Axel Dreher, Andreas Fuchs, Bradley Parks, Austin Strange, and Michael Tierney, *Connective Financing: Chinese Infrastructure Projects and the Diffusion of Economic Activity in Developing Countries*, AidData Working Paper 64 (Williamsburg: The College of William and Mary, 2018).
29 Bruno Martorano, Laura Metzger, and Marco Sanfilippo, "Chinese Development Assistance and Household Welfare in Sub-Saharan Africa", *World Development* 129 (2020): 104909.

Debt and Lending

Over the past two decades, the Chinese state and its state-owned banks have become the largest official lenders to the developing world, but until recently very little was known about the exact volume of Chinese loans, the specific conditions attached to them and their impact on different development outcomes.

The data situation has improved over the past few years. Horn et al. provide a first systematic overview of China's overseas lending, including to Africa, for the period 1947–2014.[30] Mihalyi and Trebesch introduce the Africa Debt Database (ADD), the most granular and comprehensive dataset on external borrowing by African governments thus far.[31] It contains information on both the size and financial terms of about 7,000 individual loans and bonds between 2000 and 2020. According to this database, Africa's record-lending boom of the 2010s was mainly driven by large sovereign bond issuances and growing lending by Chinese state-owned banks. China's state-driven lending abroad typically involves relatively high interest rates and short maturities, in contrast to the mostly concessional lending terms of other official lenders such as the World Bank or OECD governments. On average, Chinese banks charge between 2 and 4 per cent, and multilateral organizations just 1 per cent.[32]

Horn et al. (2021) show that debt to China is much larger than publicly known.[33] About 50 per cent of total overseas loans are "hidden" in the sense that they are not picked up by the standard databases of the World Bank and the IMF. Likewise, defaults and debt distress associated with Chinese loans often remain "hidden", as missed payments and restructuring details are not disclosed.[34] Horn et al. (2022) find that sovereign debt restructurings with Chinese lenders are surprisingly frequent, exceeding the number of Paris Club restructurings. Chinese lenders follow a debt resolution approach similar to that of Western lenders in the debt crisis of the 1980s; they seldom provide deep debt relief with face-value reduction.[35]

The comprehensive new data have not yet been used to assess the impact of Chinese lending on African development, but some tentative conclusions can be drawn. On the one hand, Chinese loans have helped to finance large-scale investments in infrastructure, energy and mining in African countries, with potentially large positive effects for growth and prosperity. Employing annual panel data for 15 African countries covering the period of 2000 to 2017, Mlambo finds that infrastructural loans have, on average, translated into higher economic growth.[36]

On the other hand, the debt levels incurred to finance these investments have become unsustainable in many cases. Of the 73 low-income countries eligible for the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), introduced at the outset of the Covid-19 crisis, more than 50 per cent are estimated by the IMF and World Bank to be in debt distress or at high risk of a sovereign debt crisis.[37] In the case of China, the problem of high debt levels is reinforced by the lack of transparency caused by hidden debt. Debt sustainability analyses

30 Sebastian Horn, Carmen M. Reinhart, and Christoph Trebesch, "China's Overseas Lending", *Journal of International Economics*, 133 (2021): 103539.
31 David Mihalyi and Christoph Trebesch, *Who Lends to Africa and How? Introducing the Africa Debt Database*, Kiel Working Paper 2217 (Kiel: Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2022).
32 Ibid.
33 Horn et al., "China's Overseas Lending".
34 Sebastian Horn, Carmen M. Reinhart, and Christoph Trebesch, "Hidden Defaults", *American Economic Review* 112 (2022): 531-535.
35 Ibid.
36 Courage Mlambo, "China in Africa: An Examination of the Impact of China's Loans on Growth in Selected African States," *Economies* 10, no. 7 (2022): 154.
37 Horn et al., "Hidden Defaults".

are hampered if a country's true debt service burden remains unknown and if part of the debt is excluded from the published aggregates.[38] Moreover, this is an obstacle to crisis resolution, because information on the size and composition of a country's debt is crucial to assure a fair burden sharing. As Gelpern et al. document, China's loan contracts often explicitly rule out being part of a transparent, multilateral, co-ordinated debt relief initiative with comparable treatment. Most Chinese debt restructuring deals are arranged bilaterally and outside the public domain.[39]

In sum, since much of the high-quality data have become available only recently, key research questions – for example why China's debt relations with Africa are characterized by such a notable lack of transparency, or whether Chinese loans have on balance benefited the continent – have not yet been fully addressed.

Trade and Investment

Increased trade and investment linkages constitute a key mechanism through which China might contribute to economic development in Africa. Again, as in the case of foreign aid, economic and political aspects of China's engagement are strongly interdependent. For a discussion of the political economy of Chinese trade and investment relations with Africa, see the section "Political economy" (p. 11).

As far as trade is concerned, De Grauwe et al. note that during the global financial crisis of 2008 and 2009 China became Africa's most important trading partner.[40] Chinese demand may have helped stabilize African economies when traditional trade partners such as the European Union (EU) and the US experienced economic crises. However, with increasing trade dependence, African exports have also become more exposed to fluctuations in Chinese demand. The trade pattern between China and Africa has frequently been questioned because it mainly involves exporting natural resources from Africa to China and importing manufactured goods from China to Africa.[41]

Bastos finds that the growth of China's trade following its internal transformation and accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 significantly boosted the export performance of Belt and Road economies – including African ones – in the period 2000 to 2015.[42] The increase in imports by China significantly boosted African economies, but this effect was attenuated by increased competition from China in export markets. The positive effects of China's demand for imports were stronger in more upstream industries, while the effects of competition from China in export markets were stronger in industries that produce goods that are closer to final use. The effects of competition were stronger in countries that are relatively poorer than their neighbours and geographically closer to China. For the period 1991 to 2010, Busse et al. show that African economies that export

38 Laura Alfaro and Fabio Kanczuk, *Undisclosed Debt Sustainability*, NBER Working Paper 26347 (Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2019).

39 Anna Gelpern, Sebastian Horn, Scott Morris, Bradley Parks, and Christoph Trebesch, *How China Lends: A Rare Look into 100 Debt Contracts with Foreign Governments*, CEPR Discussion Paper 16331 (London and Paris: Centre for Economic Research, 2021).

40 Paul De Grauwe, Romain Houssa, and Giulia Piccillo, "African Trade Dynamics: Is China a Different Trading Partner?" *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies* 10, no. 1 (2012): 15-45.

41 Olu Ajakaiye, "China and Africa: Opportunities and Challenges", AERC Scoping Studies on China-Africa Economic Relations (Nairobi: African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), 2016); Callisto Enias Madavo, "China and Africa: Opportunities, Challenges and Forging a Way Forward", *Journal of the Washington Institute of China Studies* 2 no. 3 (2007): 1-13; Maxi Schoeman, "China and Africa: Whose Challenge and Whose Opportunity?" *Afrika Spektrum* 43, no. 3 (2008): 403-413; Daouda Cissé, "China's Engagement in Africa: Opportunities or Challenges for Africa", *African and East Asian Affairs/The China Monitor* 4 (2013): 72-90.

42 Paulo Bastos, "Exposure of Belt and Road Economies to China Trade Shocks", *Journal of Development Economics* 145 (2020): 102474.

natural resources benefited from China's rising demand for raw materials due to both positive changes in their terms of trade through rising global resource prices and an overall increase in imports of natural resources by China.[43]

Chinese FDI in Africa includes manufacturing, especially textiles, but still remains quite concentrated on transport infrastructure and resources. Busse et al. find that it has no robust effect on economic growth in African countries.[44] The insignificant results from their regressions concerning FDI from both China and the rest of the world may point to an insufficient FDI environment in African countries. Regressions by Donou-Adonsou and Lim for 36 countries over the period 2003 to 2012 indicate that Chinese FDI improved income in Africa.[45] According to Bräutigam et al., Chinese firms pay a wage premium relative to domestic firms. Also, as with other foreign firms, Chinese firms source roughly 70 per cent of their inputs locally.[46] Systematic evidence on the extent to which Chinese FDI contributes to job creation in Africa is not available.

China's Belt and Road Initiative aims to improve connectivity between China and more than 70 countries through infrastructure investment and regional co-operation. Maliszewska and van der Mensbrugghe show that most of these countries would benefit from these investments in terms of higher growth and lower poverty, but that the effects in Africa would be very modest as compared to (East) Asia.[47]

Most of these studies cover impacts of China's engagement at the macro level. There is very little evidence so far on the trade and investment links of individual enterprises, even though it would be highly relevant to know whether and under which conditions Chinese companies create positive spillover effects on the local economy.

Repercussions for "Traditional Partners"

Taken together, China's growing weight in Africa in terms of aid, trade and investment relations is likely to lead to responses by companies and governments in OECD countries as well as by multilateral institutions. Donou-Adonsou and Lim show in cross-country regressions that Chinese investment crowds out FDI by other actors.[48] Previous research provides mixed evidence on whether multilateral development banks, including the World Bank, adjust their aid giving in response to competition from emerging donors.[49] Humphrey and Michaelowa examine whether China's increasing activity has changed the aid level and sector allocation of multilateral development banks. While their cross-country regressions do not reveal significant effects for the average recipient country, complementary regressions and a qualitative analysis suggest that the effect of Chinese aid is more "game changing" in countries that apply for non-concessional finance.[50] Hernandez finds that countries with a larger influx of Chinese aid receive less severe conditions from the World

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43 Busse et al., "China's Impact on Africa".
44 Ibid.
45 Ficawoyi Donou-Adonsou and Sokchea Lim, "On the Importance of Chinese Investment in Africa", *Review of Development Finance* 8, no. 1 (2018): 63-73.
46 Deborah Bräutigam, Xinshen Diao, Margaret S. MacMillan, and Jed Silver, *Chinese Investment in Africa: How Much Do We Know?* PEDL Policy Insight Series 3 (London and Paris: Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR), 2018).
47 Maryla Maliszewska and Dominique van der Mensbrugghe, *The Belt and Road Initiative: Economic, Poverty and Environmental Impacts*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 8814 (Washington, D.C: The World Bank, 2019).
48 Donou-Adonsou, "On the Importance of Chinese Investment in Africa".
49 Diego Hernandez, "Are 'New' Donors Challenging World Bank Conditionality?" *World Development* 96 (2017): 529-549; Christopher Humphrey and Katharina Michaelowa, "China in Africa: Competition for Traditional Development Finance Institutions?" *World Development* 120 (2019): 15-28.
50 Ibid.

Bank.[51] Similar analyses of the responses of bilateral donors to Chinese aid activities have not yet been carried out, and a specific focus on Africa is also missing so far.

China's Political Influence in Africa

China's political and diplomatic footprint in Africa has implications for African countries' domestic affairs as well as for their engagement with other "traditional" and "emerging" partners. Beijing's political influence also has impacts on African economies. By politically engaging with African governments, China expands its economic interests across the continent, which in turn earns Beijing support among African officials for its global political influence (e.g. at the United Nations).[52] In addition, China has adjusted its position on issues of stability and security in other world regions, including in Africa.[53] China's new approach contrasts with its established non-intervention and non-interference rhetoric as Beijing is seeking to strengthen its ties with the African Union and expresses its hopes that the Union might become a major stabilizing regional security player.[54] China's interests in contributing to security, peace and stability also have economic implications: for example, the investment of Chinese companies in projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative across the continent.

This section analyses China's political influence in Africa. It explores the political economy of China's engagement in Africa, multilateral diplomacy in Africa–China relations through the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and UN voting, China's health diplomacy and bilateral security co-operation.

Political Economy

China's engagement in Africa developed through its government's policies in the late 1990s to motivate Chinese state companies and an increasing number of private companies, to look abroad for resources and overseas markets in order to contribute to China's outward FDI. In its engagement in Africa, China has developed political economic strategies and policies which are supported by its state political, economic and financial agencies. The "go out" policy in the late 1990s, the establishment of FOCAC in 2000, the release of a white paper in 2006 about China's engagement in Africa show China's interest in strengthening its presence on the continent and deepening its co-operation with African countries. Political influence goes hand in hand with economic influence as Beijing uses politics and diplomacy to build ties that set the path for its economic interests.

With political and financial support from Beijing, Chinese companies (state-owned and private) are at the heart of China's trade, investments and aid vis-à-vis Africa. China's political agencies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, among others) and financial institutions (policy banks such as China Eximbank and commercial banks such as China Development Bank) provide

51 Hernandez, "Are 'New' Donors Challenging World Bank Conditionality?".
52 Peter Stein and Emil Uddhammar, *China in Africa: The Role of Trade, Investments, and Loans Amidst Shifting Geopolitical Ambitions*, Observer Research Foundation Occasional paper, Issue 327 (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2021).
53 Christof Hartmann and Nele Noesselt, *China's New Role in African Politics: From Non-Intervention Towards Stabilisation* (London: Routledge, 2019).
54 Ibid.

guidance, policies and finance to Chinese companies. In the late 1990s and the 2000s, more support was provided to state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to seek resources and acquire new markets for their enterprises. This aligned with Beijing's political and economic motivations for political influence and diplomacy on the one hand, and trade, investment and aid on the other. The lack of limited or non-existent support, rising costs of production and labour, and domestic competition at home has driven Chinese private companies to venture to Africa following their entrepreneurial and business motivations. Chinese provincial governments also contribute to the expansion of Chinese private companies in Africa. Such a process is based on bidding for provincial government contracts to operate in Africa.

However, following its objectives to have globally competitive companies, China is slowly giving its companies more autonomy in order to enable them to generate economic benefits. Chinese companies' ventures abroad are based on several economic motivations (such as internationalization, access to foreign markets, and competitiveness).[55] Buckley et al. argue that Chinese companies are to various extents seeking resources, markets and strategic assets.[56]

Chinese investments and loans through financial resources available to Chinese state agencies and companies contribute to expanding Beijing's influence across the continent. Global geopolitical changes, with shifts in partnerships, contribute to China's emergence as a major political and economic partner in Africa. While many studies related to China's political economic influence in Africa focus on trade, investments and aid through state-to-state engagement and the activities of SOEs, less has been done regarding the presence of private companies in a wide range of sectors beyond the traditional one of resources. However, the fierce competition faced by Chinese private companies at home, the restrictions on the provision of loans and credit to develop their activities compared to Chinese SOEs, and the increasing costs of production and labour have driven Chinese private companies and entrepreneurs to venture overseas, including to Africa.[57]

The opportunities and challenges for African countries presented by China's engagement have attracted the attention of researchers and analysts. Binnatli evaluates the impact of co-operation with China on African economies, and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of China's relationship with African states.[58] Compared to the EU's and United States' engagement in Africa, China's economic policy is perceived to be more effective, since China actually invests in Africa.[59] Dreher et al. (2018) state that China's engagement in Africa is strategic, as African countries offer real opportunities for investment, across various sectors.[60] Yet, as shown in the chapter "China's economic influence in Africa" (p. 4), empirical evidence on the economic impact of China's activities in Africa does not provide a fully conclusive picture.

55 John Child and Suzana B. Rodrigues, "The Internationalization of Chinese Firms: A Case for Theoretical Extension?" *Management and Organization Review* 1, no. 3 (2005), 381-410; John H. Dunning and Sarianna M. Lundan, Multinational Enterprises and the Global Economy (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2008); Ping Deng, "Outward Investment by Chinese MNCs: Motivations and Implications", *Business Horizons* 47, no. 3 (2004): 8-16; Randall Morck, Bernard Yeung, and Minyuan Zhao, "Perspectives on China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment", *Journal of International Business Studies* 39 (2008): 337-350.
56 Peter J. Buckley, Jeremy L. Clegg, Adam R. Cross, Xin Liu, Hinrich Voss and Ping Zheng, "The Determinants of Chinese Outward Foreign Direct Investment", *Journal of Business Studies* 38 (2007): 499-518.
57 Xiaofang Shen, *Private Chinese Investment in Africa: Myths and Realities*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper no. 6311 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2013); Jing Gu, "China's Private Enterprises in Africa and the Implications for African Development", *European Journal of Development Research* 21, no. 4 (2009): 570-587.
58 Binnatli Azer, "Advantages and Disadvantages of the Contemporary Relationship between China and Africa", *Historia i Polityka Papers* 28, no. 35 (2019): 37-43.
59 Ibid.
60 Axel Dreher, Andreas Fuchs, Brad Parks, Austin M. Strange, and Michael J. Tierney, "Apples and Dragon Fruits: The Determinants of Aid and Other Forms of State Financing from China to Africa", *International Studies Quarterly*, 62, no. 1 (2018): 182–194.

Multilateral Diplomacy

The Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)

External actors have recently shown their growing and renewed interests in the continent by proposing so-called 'Africa+1' summit diplomacy. One of the first 'Africa+1' summit meetings was the FOCAC meeting in 2000. Through FOCAC, China seeks to promote south–south co-operation and strengthen political, economic and diplomatic ties.

Over the past two decades, policy-makers, academics and media experts have analysed the role FOCAC plays in growing political and economic relations between African countries and China. While much of the literature on FOCAC has focused on politics, economy (trade, investments and aid) and diplomacy, there also exist studies on the cultural and educational implications of FOCAC on relations between African countries and China.

Through FOCAC and bi-lateral relations with African countries, China has traditionally avoided presenting itself as a donor, preferring to portray itself as a large developing country working alongside other developing countries. In this way, Beijing has pursued a gradualist and integrated approach towards co-operation that emphasizes the mutuality and two-sidedness of the co-operation.[61] However, King argues that the various pledges, promises and targets gave it more of the flavour of aid, and that while this need not make China into a Western- or Japanese-style donor, it will certainly have consequences for China's interactions with African partners.[62]

The first FOCAC Summit and third Ministerial Conference held in Beijing in 2006, and announced by Chinese officials as the most important diplomatic event organized in China since 1949, revealed China's increasing engagement with African countries. The participation of African countries in FOCAC 2006 also signalled the recognition by African governments of the major political and economic role China plays on the continent.[63]

Taylor seeks to detail the origins, structure, workings and activities of FOCAC and its development.[64] Yu looks at the evolution of FOCAC (how it has shaped the Africa–China relationship today) and explores the history and purpose of FOCAC.[65] Grimm argues that FOCAC will increasingly consider the sustainability of the relationship and this is likely to relate to changing political expectations of African countries' relationship with China, changing economic policies in China, and common challenges in addressing environmental concerns.[66]

Increasingly, the debates and discussions on governance, environmental protection and sustainability contribute to shaping policies for sustainable Africa–China relations in Africa as well as in China. Li and April assess measures raised at FOCAC that aim to strengthen relations between China and Africa through cultural means, notably human resource development, training and exchange, and knowledge production.[67] Large states that FOCAC is usually an important and high-profile event at which to take stock of developments in Africa–China relations, but interest in the 2021 Dakar FOCAC was more muted than

61 Kenneth King, "The Beijing China-Africa Summit of 2006: The New Pledges of Aid to Education in Africa", *China Report* 43, no. 3 (2007): 337–347.
62 Ibid.
63 Adeline Defer, "China's influence in Africa", (term paper, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 2007).
64 Ian Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011).
65 Shirley Ze Yu, "What is FOCAC? Three Historic Stages in the China-African relationship", *Africa at LSE Blog*, London School of Economics, 3 February 2022.
66 Sven Grimm, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) – Political Rationale and Functioning,* Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS), University of Stellenbosch Policy Brief (Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 2012).
67 Anshan Li and Funeka Yazini, *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: The Politics of Human Resource Development* (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2013).

previously as the meeting was of ministers – rather than heads of state – and took place during the challenging conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic.[68]

China's political leadership role in FOCAC is influential and effective in Africa–China relations and contributes to strengthening its foreign policy strategy. FOCAC ministerial conferences and meetings serve as platforms to set roadmaps for the future of Africa–China relations, and in the various sectors where China engages with African governments. Even though FOCAC is considered a strategic mechanism through which China and Africa can cooperate, in many ways it still lacks transparency, needs to further adjust and adapt to new political and socio-economic realities in order to take full advantage of the changing world situation and the Africa–China relationship.[69]

While FOCAC ministerial conferences and summits end with action plans between African countries and China to be implemented, they require a strong mechanism for the assessment and implementation of promises and commitments. Institutional frameworks to monitor progress and for further planning are key to addressing weak follow-up mechanisms in FOCAC. In comparison with previous FOCAC action plans with commitments to development finance, grants and interest-free loans, FOCAC VIII action plan is more detailed [70] and reflects the further maturation and deepening of Africa–China relations.[71]

FOCAC and African Agency

Summits and other high-level platforms that involve the continent offer opportunities for African policy-makers to express and exert agency in both symbolic and substantial ways.[72] Through the numerous summits, fora and high-level meetings, African countries' governments seek to attract investments, diversify partners and strengthen political and diplomatic ties. However, for a more balanced and sustainable relationship between African countries and China, academics, civil society organizations and NGOs have made calls to African governments for a more co-ordinated approach to engaging with Beijing. African agency is key to reshaping African governments' political, diplomatic, economic and social engagement with external actors. In the context of our study and international relations, African agency means bringing African decision-makers to the centre of their engagement with external actors and contributing to negotiations which benefit their country, the continent and its populations. African agency enables African policy-makers and institutions to centrally engage in debates and discussions that concern the continent and its future, as well as in negotiations that have impacts and implications for the global political economy. Such an approach contributes to reshaping and rebalancing African countries' existing relations with their "traditional" partners and new relationships with rising powers, and in which African non-state actors are critical both to the definition and implementation of policies in fields as diverse as governance, security, health, environment and migration, among others.[73] Structural constraints in African countries, and African governments' limitations in terms of policy drivers and implementation, and in terms of

68 Daniel Large, "China, Africa and the 2021 Dakar FOCAC", *African Affairs* 121, no. 483 (April 2022): 299–319.
69 Centre for African Studies, Peking University, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: From a Sustainable Perspective* (World Wildlife Fund for Nature, 2012).
70 FOCAC VIII action plan covers key priority areas for co-operation: "medical and health; poverty reduction and agricultural development; trade promotion; investment promotion; digital innovation; green development; capacity building; cultural and people-to-people exchange; and peace and security". Secretariat of the Chinese Follow-up Committee of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024),* 22 December 2021.
71 "FOCAC Dakar Action Plan 'more detailed and wide-reaching' than previous ones", editorial, *China-Lusophone Brief*, 7 December 2021.
72 Folashade Soulé, "'Africa+1' Summit Diplomacy and the 'New Scramble' Narrative: Recentering African Agency", *African Affairs* 119, no. 477 (2020): 633–646.
73 William Brown and Sophie Harman, *African Agency in International Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

agency in international relations, have attracted the attention of various groups wishing to influence change in Africa's engagement vis-à-vis its external partners, including China.

In previous years, Africa's agency in Africa–China relations has triggered interest and research among scholars following the debates and discussions around Africa's position, strategy and agenda vis-à-vis China.[74] Even though African agency is clearly unfolding, according to these studies, future research needs to explore the potential role of African regional organizations in FOCAC, in particular, and in Africa–China relations, in general, in order to contribute to a more balanced engagement between China and African countries.

UN voting

Political and diplomatic engagement is at the heart of Africa–China relations. Beijing's needs for support from African governments in international organizations shows the importance of Africa as a regional voting bloc. The sheer number of African states can dominate and influence the outcome of votes on relevant issues in international affairs, and African support through voting alignments enhances China's domestic and international legitimacy.[75]

Even though based on multilateral diplomacy, the alignment of African governments with China on voting on key decisions at the United Nations shows Beijing's political and economic clout across Africa. Due to China's economic influence on Africa through investment and aid flow, many countries on the continent see China as a strategic partner when voting at the UN. Abdeleli argues that support for China from African countries at the UN is quasi-systemic and that such support is expected to continue for a long time.[76] For instance, African resource-rich countries tend to vote in favour of China during elections at the UN. An increase in resource exports to China increases the probability of voting in line with China in the UN.[77] At the same time, voting patterns among African countries are sometimes also more diverse.

To justify their voting decisions on issues that involve China (e.g. human rights issues related to the situation of the Uyghur in Xinjiang, and China's national security law in Hong Kong), many African governments focus on political rhetoric of south–south co-operation, solidarity as well as economic gains, and reciprocal support from Beijing at the UN.

China's pledge of economic and development aid to Africa thereby appears to give Africa more international influence, to enhance its negotiating power in multilateral institutions and, ultimately, to help China.[78]

South–South co-operation

Through the so-called South–South co-operation framework, countries of the "global South" in general, and emerging economies in particular, have created a space for political

74 Gwinyayi A. Dzinesa and Lesley Masters, *Taming the Dragon? Defining Africa's Interests at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*, Ed. by Adekeye Adebajo and Yazeed Fakier, Centre for Conflict Resolution Policy Brief (Centre for Conflict Resolution, 2009); Bob Wekesa, "FOCAC, African agency and Africa's China policy", *Global Dialogue, An International Affairs Review* (Institute for Global Dialogue and University of South Africa (UNISA), 2017); Cobus Van Staden, Chris Alden, and Yu-Shan Wu, *In the Driver's Seat? African Agency and Chinese Power at FOCAC, the AU and the BRI*, South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) Occasional paper no. 286 (SAIIA, 2018); Lloyd G. Adu Amoah, "Why Africa's Strategy Matters for Dealing with China", *Africa at LSE Blog*, London School of Economics, 24 February 2022.

75 Rayna Martinez, "Chinese Soft Power, Africa, and the United Nations General Assembly" (master's dissertation, University of Nevada, 2015).

76 Abdelhafidh Abdeleli, "Why Arab and African Countries Stand with China at the UN", *SWI swissinfo.ch*, 11 October 2022.

77 Yi Che, Xiaoyu He, and Yan Zhang, "Natural Resource Exports and African Countries' Voting Behaviour in the United Nations: Evidence from the Economic Rise of China", *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue Canadienne d'économique* 54, no. 2 (2021): 712-759.

78 Bishnu Rathi, "How China Controls Africa's Voting Rights at UN", *TFIGlobal News*, 12 November 2022.

and economic dialogue. This tendency is somehow shaping the world political economic order and is increasingly changing Africa's position vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

Beyond China's interest in African votes at the UN, Beijing officials use South–South co-operation rhetoric to achieve China's political and diplomatic goals. They claim that China's growing presence in Africa is an example of South–South co-operation based on mutual benefit, win–win, and equal partnership, among others. Such a rhetoric contributes to positioning China with a positive image among African political elites. China's approach to reaching its economic objectives helps to leverage donor–recipient co-operation and leads to win–win development and self-reliant development, particularly among low-income developing states.[79] On the one hand, FOCAC with China and African countries, and on the other, the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) with the emerging economies, continue to foster a renewed debate on the importance of South–South co-operation. Even though the South–South co-operation rhetoric is politically and diplomatically framed, it enables a strengthening of economic relations between African countries, China and emerging economies, and contributes to unlocking development prospects.

Health Diplomacy

Health diplomacy has become a key topic in Africa–China co-operation, particularly since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which once more revealed the importance of global public health diplomacy in relation to Africa. There was a race to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and masks and to make vaccines available and accessible for "developing" countries left behind in the early phases of the pandemic. China, the US, the EU, Russia and India competed for sales of their home-grown vaccines and donations to developing countries. Such a strategy, with its political, social and economic implications, contributed to influencing public perception among African governments and populations. Lee states that with the advent of Covid-19, home-grown national vaccines, when distributed all over the world, can play an integral role in nation-branding as a technique for projecting soft power and capitalizing on new economic and geopolitical opportunities.[80]

China mainly engages with African governments in the field of public health diplomacy by providing assistance to set up health infrastructure and strengthen capacity building through medical exchanges and training. State-led engagement dominates China's public health diplomacy in Africa. Such an engagement contributes to promoting positive perceptions among African populations, notwithstanding Chinese officials' poor-handling of Covid-19 at home as well as globally. Van Staden concludes that vaccine and medical diplomacy can be considered a diplomatic victory for China, compared to the West's response, which many perceived as disappointing and underwhelming.[81] For African governments, China is filling a gap left by their traditional partners and donors. Rudolf states that the lack of leadership and solidarity by traditional aid providers (mainly the EU and US) have enabled China's health diplomacy to gain traction.[82]

79 R. Matthews, Xiaojuan Ping, and Li Ling, "Learning From China's Foreign Aid Model", *The Diplomat*, 25 August 2016.
80 Seow Ting Lee, "Vaccine Diplomacy: Nation Branding and China's Covid-19 Soft Power Play", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 19, no. 1 (2021): 64-78.
81 Cobus Van Staden, "Chinese Vaccine Diplomacy in Africa", *Asia Policy* 17, no. 3 (2022).
82 Moritz Rudolf, "Masks, Vaccines, and Investment Promises: The Geopolitics of China's Covid-19 Health Diplomacy", *Verfassungsblog*, 28 May 2021.

While critics of China's involvement in Africa claim that China's health diplomacy is motivated exclusively by economic self-interest, it is difficult to determine the extent to which this is true. China typically favours horizontal initiatives in global health that focus on supporting individual African countries, while the US typically favours vertical initiatives through programmes that aim to tackle specific infectious diseases.[83] [84] Even though African countries' traditional partners (mainly the EU and US) have bilateral approaches for health assistance and support, global health crises are shaping and changing dynamics for more multilateral partnership and collaboration between actors.[85] Often African countries' partners have operated in the margin of multilateral health organizations and driven their own agenda for health assistance on the continent instead of taking African priorities as a starting point.[86]

A better understanding of Chinese global health diplomacy in Africa can contribute to the implementation of more effective policies for health assistance.[87]

Party-to-Party Diplomacy

Since Xi Jinping took office, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), through its International Department, has bolstered its efforts to reach out to other parties, and maintains a wide-reaching network with political elites across the globe, with party relations also emerging as a key instrument to promote China's vision for reforming the global order.[88] China increasingly uses co-operation between the CCP and political parties in other countries as a vehicle of authoritarian learning by sharing experiences of its economic modernization and authoritarian one-party regime.[89] China's party diplomacy in Africa has impacts on authoritarian regimes, or those with a single dominant party that learn from the CCP through party-to-party visits, exchanges, training, and strategies. However, it is worth noting that party-to-party relations in Africa–China relations go beyond interactions between the CCP and African authoritarian regimes as they also involve African ruling parties in democratic regimes. Bilateral visits between the CCP and African ruling parties seek to contribute to party building and country construction based on learned experiences and China's development model, with many African parties express their wish to have the CCP train their senior leaders.[90]

The CCP's party diplomacy in Africa revolves around training, official visits by CCP heads, support for the establishment of communist party schools and youth party member exchanges, amongst other means. By 2012, the CCP had managed to secure relations with 81 African political parties, and, over the years, Beijing's strategy shifted from primarily supporting African ruling parties to collaborating with various political parties to ensure good working relations with whichever party is in power.[91] Even though party-to-party

83 Charles W. Freeman III, *China's Emerging Global Health and Foreign Aid Engagement in Africa*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Report (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2011).
84 Erica Penfold and Pieter Fourie, "Ebola and Cultures of Engagement: Chinese versus Western Health Diplomacy", Council of Councils Global Memo, Council for Foreign Relations (CFR), 3 October 2014.
85 "Fact Sheet: U.S-Africa partnership in health co-operation", The White House, 13 December 2022.
86 Ibid.
87 Olivia J. Killeen, Alissa Davis, Joseph D. Tucker, and Benjamin Mason Meier, "Chinese Global Health Diplomacy in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges", *Global Health Governance*, 12, no. 2 (2018): 4–29.
88 Christine Hackenesch and Julia Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence: The Chinese Communist Party's Global Outreach", *International Studies Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2020): 723–733.
89 Ibid.
90 Christine Hackenesch, *The EU and China in African Authoritarian Regimes: Domestic Politics and Governance Reforms*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
91 Mandira Bagwandeen, "Of the Ties that Bind: China's Party Diplomacy in Africa", Africa-China Reporting Project, Wits Centre for Journalism, 14 October 2021.

relations are growing between the CCP and African parties, Cabestan states that there are limits to China's influence, as African political parties are open to other countries, such as the US and European nations, and to other ideologies, particularly Islam and liberalism (i.e. political liberties, checks and balances, fair elections, and multiparty democracy).[92] China is increasingly involved in political and electoral processes in African democracies, whether intentionally or coincidentally, as Beijing deploys three overarching modes of influence that can have a compounding impact on democracy in targeted countries: economic investment, promotion of CCP-style governance and, in some instances, explicit support for political and electoral outcomes favourable to China.[93]

Military Diplomacy and Security Co-operation

China is deepening its security co-operation with African countries in various forms. Peace, stability and security have become more prominent topics in recent FOCAC meetings, as shared concerns of China and Africa.[94] China is not only engaging with UN peace operations; bilateral engagement with individual African countries on peace and security has gained prominence. To strengthen long-term relations with African counterparts in these domains, Beijing is intensifying defence and military diplomacy, for instance through continent-wide security force assistance.[95] Moreover, security relations with Africa are an increasingly important element of China's global positioning on international security issues.

China's security engagements abroad are embedded in a foreign-policy framework focused on the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other sovereign states. From this point of view, it would be somewhat contradictory to discuss these activities as instances of China exerting influence on African countries. However, recent policy initiatives suggest a turn towards more pragmatic security engagements abroad. For example, Xi Jinping's Global Security Initiative, though upholding the non-interference principle, puts security in Chinese foreign policy on an equal footing with the previously much more prominent primacy of development.[96]

In this section, we thus take stock of research that engages with Beijing's means of influencing national policies and institutions in African security sectors. Examples include how risks and security issues are handled in a partner country (e.g. terrorism laws, kidnapping of foreign citizens) and partner countries' positioning on international security issues (e.g. security alliances, military assistance agreements).

A primary subject of interest regarding China's security engagements in Africa has long been its contributions to UN peacekeeping missions, for example its troop deployments to peacekeeping in Mali (MINUSMA), South Sudan (UNMISS) and Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO),[97] as well as China's participation in multilateral counter-piracy

92 Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Party-to-Party Relations and Political Training", in *Political Front Lines: China's Pursuit of Influence in Africa*, ed. Nadege Rolland, National Bureau of Asian Research Special Report no. 100 (Washington, D.C.: NBR, 2022).
93 Caitlin Dearing Scott, "Does China's Involvement in African Elections and Politics Hurt Democracy?" *Democracy in Africa*, 27 September 2021.
94 Lukas Fiala, "Seeking Stability: China's Security Engagement in Africa", in F*OCAC at 21: Future Trajectories of China-Africa Relations*, ed. Lukas Fiala (London: LSE IDEAS, 2021): 16-23; Large, "China, Africa and the 2021 Dakar FOCAC".
95 Ilaria Carrozza, and Nicholas J. March, "Great Power Competition and China's Security Assistance to Africa: Arms, Training and Influence", *Journal of Global Security Studies* 7, no. 4 (2022): 1-22.
96 "President Xi Jinping Chairs and Delivers Important Remarks at the High-level Dialogue on Global Development", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 25 June 2022.
97 Wu Zhengyu and Ian Taylor, "From Refusal to Engagement: Chinese Contributions to Peacekeeping in Africa", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29, no. 2 (2011): 137-154; Ian Taylor, "China's Peacekeeping Efforts in Africa: Assessing the Contributions, Future Prospects, and Challenges", in *Peacekeeping in Africa*, ed. Thiery Tardy

measures in the Gulf of Aden.[98] Analyses have largely focused on China's rationale behind participating in multilateral peace and security initiatives, its evolving security policies and ambitions for reforming the multilateral order, and the possible consequences of China's increased involvement for the design and governance of UN peacekeeping operations – and less on China's influence on regional security architectures. Some research contributions have found that China's development-for-security approach has only a limited impact on security dynamics on the ground, for example in Mali.[99] Yet China has also stepped up its engagement with institutions of the regional peace and security architecture (African Union, Regional Economic Communities), most prominently through providing funding and military assistance to regional initiatives such as the African Standby Force and African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises. These activities have been read as cues for China getting more directly involved in Africa's continent-wide security architecture.[100] Such contributions at times also discuss China in the context of "emerging powers" and their activities with the African peace and security architecture, highlighting its difference from "traditional" peace and security actors on the continent.[101] What most contributions, especially the early ones, have in common is that they highlight the security angle (troop contributions) and pay less attention to the political involvement in UN peacekeeping institutions, though this has increased in recent years as well. For instance, the Global Development Initiative and related activities of China in multilateral fora lead analysts to detect "strong signals of China's growing centrality at the UN".[102]

Recent research has also started to pay more attention to China as a bilateral security actor in Africa. With the growing presence of Chinese assets and people, the country has developed a keen interest in security and political stability on the continent. This is especially the case in regions that are crucial for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), such as East Africa, where Chinese citizens are increasingly exposed to security threats.[103] China's Djibouti naval base, built in 2017, is a prominent manifestation of this trend. While it was officially established as a logistics base to support China's peacekeeping and counter-piracy operations abroad, as well as humanitarian activities, it is also widely seen as a form of "hard" power projection, in the light of great power rivalry in the region.[104] There are also

and Marco Wyss (London: Routledge, 2014), 93-112; Miwa Hirono and Marc Lanteigne, *China's Evolving Approach to Peacekeeping* (London: Routledge, 2012); Courtney J. Fung, "What Explains China's Deployment to UN Peacekeeping Operations?" *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 16, no. 3 (2016): 409-441; Courtney J. Richardson, "A Responsible Power? China and the UN Peacekeeping Regime," *International Peacekeeping* 18, no. 3 (2011): 286-297; Cedric De Coning and Kari M. Osland, *China's Evolving Approach to UN Peacekeeping in Africa* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2020); Katharina P. Coleman and Brian L. Job, "How Africa and China May Shape UN Peacekeeping Beyond the Liberal International Order", *International Affairs* 97, no. 5 (2021): 1451-1468.

98 Peter J Pham, "Pirates and Dragon Boats: Assessing the Chinese Navy's Recent East African Deployments", *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 4, no. 1 (2013): 87-108; Susanne Kamerling and Frans-Paul Van der Putten, "An Overseas Naval Presence without Overseas Bases: China's Counter-piracy Operation in the Gulf of Aden", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40, no. 4 (2011): 119-146.

99 Lina Benabdallah and Daniel Large, *Development, Security, and China's Evolving Role in Mali*, China African Research Initiative Working Paper 40 (Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, 2020).

100 Chris Alden, *Seeking Security in Africa: China's Evolving Approach to the African Peace and Security Architecture* (Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2014); Dries Velthuizen, "Peace and Security in Africa: How China Can Help Address Weaknesses", *The Conversation*, 18 April 2021.

101 Elling N. Tjønneland, *Rising Powers in Africa: What Does This Mean for the African Peace and Security Architecture?*, NOREF Report (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2014).

102 Cobus Van Staden, "China's Global Development Initiative Meeting Signals Growing UN Influence", *China Global South Project*, 22 September 2022.

103 Cullen S. Hendrix, "Chinese Nationals Have Become Targets for Violence as China Deepens Its International Reach", *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, 15 June 2022.

104 *Effects of Foreign Power Presence in Djibouti and Lessons for Horn Countries*, HORN Policy Brief 09 (Nairobi: HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2018); Zach Vertin, "Great Power Rivalry in the Red Sea: China's Experiment in the Djibouti and Implications for the United States", Global China (Doha: Brookings Doha Center

frequent rumours that China could deploy troops from the Djibouti base to conduct security operations on the continent. Similarly, rumours about plans for new bases in Africa (e.g. in Equatorial Guinea) have been primarily viewed through the prism of great power rivalry.[105]

Coming to the "softer" aspects of Chinese security co-operation, research contributions have highlighted the role of economic development and human resource development through capacity-building programmes for African security sectors.[106] This trend suggests that Chinese security-oriented policy concepts such as "indivisible security" and the formation of a "global community of destiny" will feature more prominently in Africa–China relations in the future.[107] Moreover, Chinese private security companies have intensified their activities in Africa[108] to promote bilateral arrangements on security provision to Chinese citizens, for example in the form of police and law-enforcement co-operation programmes.[109]

Overall, the vast majority of research contributions on China's military diplomacy and security co-operation are policy-oriented papers, drawing on interviews with security and foreign-policy experts, and discussing implications for regional peace and security architectures and Africa–China relations,[110] as well as for "Western" actors active in this field.[111] Instead of the heavy military footprint that has been deployed by Western actors such as the US and France, observers note that "Beijing has integrated a military and security component into its economic partnerships with African states, making China's defence presence in Africa part of the fabric of the continent's development."[112] In this light, China is likely to increasingly impact regional security architectures and African states' foreign policy strategies, as the boundaries between China's economic and security engagement in Africa continue to blur.[113] Yet, what most analyses of China's security co-operation with African countries have in common is the descriptive approach that provides little, if any, data on the actual consequences in terms of influence on African states' policies and institutional set-ups in the security sector.

2020); Neil Melvin, "The Foreign Military Presence in the Horn of Africa Region", SIPRI Background Paper (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019).

105 Eric A. Miller, "More Chinese Military Bases in Africa: A Question of When, Not If", *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 16 August 2022.

106 Lina Benabdallah, "Towards a Post-Western Global Governance? How Africa–China Relations In(form) China's Practices", *Rising Powers Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (2016): 135-145; Wang Xuejun, "Developmental Peace: Understanding China's Africa Policy in Peace and Security", in *China and Africa*, ed. Chris Alden, Abiodun Alao, Zhang Chun, and Laura Barber (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 67-82.

107 Zhou Pingjian, "Global Security Initiative: A Sure Path to Lasting Peace, Tranquility", *NATION*, 22 May 2022; Nadine Godehardt, "Andocken – Diskursmacht – Versicherheitlichung, Chinas geopolitischer Code und die Belt and Road Initiative", *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, October 2022; Abishek Mishra, "China's Growing Security Activism in Africa", *Observer Research Foundation*, 7 October 2020.

108 Alessandro Arduino, "Chinese Private Security Firms Are Growing Their Presence in Africa: Why It Matters", *The Conversation*, 8 August 2022.

109 Paul Nantulya, "China's Growing Police and Law-Enforcement Cooperation in Africa," NBR Special Report 100 (Washington D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2022).

110 Paul Nantulya, "Chinese Hard Power Supports Its Growing Strategic Interests in Africa", Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 17 January 2019; Hannah Ryder and Ovigwe Eguegu, "Africans Welcome China's Role in Peace and Security, but Are Pushing for Greater Agency and Responsibility", *ACCORD*, 10 February 2022; Steven C. Y. Kuo, "China's Approach to Peace in Africa is Different. How and Why?", *The Conversation*, 27 January 2020.

111 Tom Bayes, *China's Growing Security Role in Africa, Suggestions for a European response*, MDPD Papers (Brussels: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2020); *China's Growing Role as a Security Actor in Africa*, EPRS European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019 ; Lukas, "Seeking Stability: China's Security Engagement in Africa".

112 Michaël Tanchum, "China's New Military Base in Africa: What it Means for Europe and America", *European Council on Foreign Relations Commentary*, 14 December 2021.

113 Natalie Herbert, "China's Belt and Road Initiative Invests in African Infrastructure – and African Military and Police Forces", *The Washington Post*, 30 April 2021.

China's Influence on Societies in Africa

Though most research attention – academic and policy-oriented – is on China's economic and political impact through investment and trade, its social influence has increasingly become a subject of interest. An oft-quoted Afrobarometer poll from 2019/2021 showed that African citizens overall hold positive views of China's influence (somewhat/positive: 63%), with China coming second to the US as the people's preferred "development model" (USA: 33%, China: 22%).[114] Similar views seem even more pronounced among young people: a 2022 perception poll among young Africans in various countries found that the majority saw China as the most influential foreign power active on the continent (China: 77%, USA: 67%). A similar number of respondents assessed that influence as positive (China: 76%, USA: 72%).[115] Another recent perception survey on activities of the EU and China in Africa found that China gains ground on various performance indicators (such as market access, investment quality and reputation) faster than the EU. The authors suggest "that China will easily close the gap and overtake the EU on most of the aspects of partnership with Africa."[116] How do these positive perceptions among African citizens come about? The research contributions reviewed in the following section provide a multifaceted and at times ambivalent picture of how public diplomacy, the media and social encounters interact in shaping China's influence on African societies. They also reveal in which fields scholarly knowledge is still limited and further research should be conducted.

Public Diplomacy: Educational and Cultural Co-operation

Africa is increasingly taking centre stage in China's positioning vis-à-vis the "global South". Beijing pursues a public diplomacy approach that depicts relations between China and countries in Africa as an "all-weather" friendship, founded on the shared experience of colonial occupation and the declared desire to build a "community of shared destiny". As China's role in Africa is presented as distinct, compared with that of other external partners and especially "Western" development actors, it is increasingly presented as a potential model for recasting African countries' relations with external partners. To convey this "branding" of China and of Sino-Africa relations, China engages in cultural diplomacy and education co-operation across Africa.

   Education and human resource development feature prominently in the final declarations of recent FOCAC summits.[117] Activities in this field of co-operation comprise student scholarships, short-term training and capacity development programmes in various sectors. Though China has also supported the development of schools to a limited extent, the focus is on higher education. Research on these educational and capacity-building measures is limited to a few qualitative case studies. Most studies have been conducted on, for example, African students studying in China,[118] the role of Mandarin

114 Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny and Edem Selormey, "Africans Welcome China's Influence but Maintain Democratic Aspirations", Afrobarometer Dispatch 489, 2021.
115 "5 Key Takeaways from the 2022 African Youth Survey", Business Insider Africa, 14 June 2022,
116 James Shikwati, Andero Nashon and Josepat Juma, The Clash of Systems, African Perceptions of the European Union and China Engagement, Policy Paper (Potsdam: Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 2022).
117 Kenneth King, "China-Africa Education Cooperation: From FOCAC to Belt and Road", ECNU Review of Education 3, no. 2 (2020): 221-234; Tebogo Lefifi and Carine Kiala, "Untapping FOCAC Higher Education Scholarships for Africa's Human Capital Development: Lessons from Haigui", China International Strategy Review 3, no. 1 (2021): 177-198.
118 Hannane Ferdjani, African Students in China, An Exploration of Increasing Numbers and their Motivations in Beijing (Stellenbosch: Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Stellenbosch, 2012); Changsong Niu, Si'ao Liao, and Yi Sun, "African Students' Satisfaction in China: From the Perspectives of China-Africa Educational Cooperation",

studies in South Africa's higher education[119] and on China's education and training co-operation in selected African countries.[120] Those studies provide overviews of existing programmes and some insights into participants' views. They point to an increase in interest in learning Mandarin and receiving training in China but, to date, the limited strategic value of these activities in Chinese "soft" diplomacy.

In the field of cultural co-operation, the picture is not much different. The few studies available have focused on the cultural and educational activities of Confucius Institutes (CIs). China has established more than 60 CIs in African countries, mostly in universities and colleges,[121] as well as Confucius Classrooms, extensions of CIs in local schools and education centres. CIs organize Chinese language classes and cultural programmes, such as exhibitions, film screenings and talks. The limited research that has been conducted on CIs in Africa so far comes to different results regarding the success of CIs in promoting China and fostering Sino-Africa relations.[122] While some research contributions attest to CI's success in fostering cultural bonds and fostering Chinese "soft power",[123] other studies conclude that CIs only have a minor effect, rarely going beyond increasing public knowledge of China and the sporadic uptake of Chinese as a foreign language.[124] Overall, research on the influence of China's educational and cultural co-operation on societies in African countries is very limited and barely allows for generalized conclusions.

Press and Media Co-operation

Significantly more attention has been paid to China's press and media co-operation with African countries. Media relations have increased noticeably since the early 2000s.[125] Chinese media outlets (e.g. CGTN, CCTV, Xinhua, China Daily, China Radio International) have established partnerships with local stations and broadcast in local languages, with a focus on regional hubs such as South Africa, Angola, Kenya and Nigeria.[126] They cater for Chinese nationals in Africa and for African audiences. As many of them have direct links to the Chinese government, most research considers them as part of China's public diplomacy. Against this backdrop, studies have focused on representations of China and

Journal of Studies in International Education 27, no. 2 (2021); Adams Bodomo, "Africans in China: The Experiences from Education and Training", Paper presented at the international conference "China and Africa Media, Communications and Public Diplomacy", Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) (Norway) in co-operation with Institute of Journalism and Communication Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2014.

119 Y. Wang Qi and E. M. Lemmer, "Teaching Mandarin as a Foreign Language in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa", *Per Linguam* 29, no. 1 (2013).

120 David Monyae, "The Role of Culture and Education in South Africa–China Relations", in *South Africa–China Relations*, ed. Chris Alden and Wu Yu-Shan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

121 Ari Rickman, "Can Mozambique Learn to Love China?" *The Diplomat*, 28 February 2020.

122 Falk Hartig, "Communicating China to the World, Confucius Institutes and China's Strategic Narratives", *Politics* 35, no. 3-4 (2015): 245-258.

123 Zhao Alexandre Huang, "The Confucius Institute and Relationship Management: Uncertainty Management of Chinese Public Diplomacy in Africa", in *Public Diplomacy and the Politics of Uncertainty*, ed. Pawl Surowiec and Ilan Manor (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 197-223; Siyuan Li, "China's Confucius Institute in Africa: A Different Story?" *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development* 23, no. 4 (2012): 353-366.

124 Maddalena Procopio, "The Effectiveness of Confucius Institutes as a Tool of China's Soft Power in South Africa", *African East-Asian Affairs* 0, no. 1-2 (2015); Anita Wheeler, "Cultural Diplomacy, Language Planning, and the Case of the University of Nairobi Confucius Institute", *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 49, no. 1 (2013): 49-63; Zhenjie Yuan, Junwanguo Guo, and Hong Zhu, "Confucius Institutes and the Limitations of China's Global Cultural Network", *China Information* 30, no. 3 (2016): 334-356.

125 Yung, Oliver, 2022, "Media Forums Promote Journalist Collaboration and Position Chinese Narratives in African News Agencies", *China Digital Times*, 30 August 2022.

126 Fei Jiang, Shubo Li, Helge Rønning, and Elling Tjønneland, "The Voice of China in Africa: Media, Communication Technologies and Image-Building", *Chinese Journal of Communication* 9, no. 1 (2016): 1-7; Michael Leslie, "The Dragon Shapes Its Image: A Study of Chinese Media Influence Strategies in Africa", *African Studies Quarterly* 16, no. 3-4 (2016):161-174.S

Sino-Africa relations in the media, Chinese influence on local media landscapes and local media consumption habits.

"Telling China's story well", a slogan issued by Chinese president Xi Jinping to journalists and media outlets[127] has become a well-known expression in examinations of China's communication strategies towards foreign audiences. Chinese media outlets are often found to display a positive image of China and Sino-Africa relations, geared to countering the prevalent negative coverage of Africa in "Western" media.[128] In a case study on China's media influence in Ghana, Dogbevi suggests that China not only exerts influence on the media but also aims to control what the media publishes about China.[129] Matanji investigated media representations of Chinese investments and found that Chinese, Kenyan, Nigerian and South African media framed Chinese investments mostly in a positive way, while US and UK media were more likely to apply a negative framing.[130] Also Nassanga and Makara found that media coverage in Uganda of China was mostly neutral to positive, as opposed to media coverage in "Western" outlets.[131]

These different framings of China and Sino-Africa relations in different media are likely to have implications for China's influence on African societies. Some studies have focused on reporting and media consumption habits in African countries in relation to public perception of China and other external actors. For example, Bailard found a positive correlation between public opinion towards China and the extent of Chinese media presence across six African nations.[132] In contrast, several country-level case studies presented a more mixed picture. For instance, Zhang and Mwangi analysed China's media engagement in Kenya, finding that the influence of Chinese media was moderately successful in terms of increasing knowledge about China.[133] Zhang, Wasserman and Mano found that China enjoys a rather positive image in public media in Zimbabwe, while public opinion over China's influence was more divided in South African media.[134] In the case of Kenya and South Africa, Madrid-Morales and Wasserman (2018) conclude that Chinese media had a limited impact on students' information habits, and that students had rather sceptical perspectives on China and, by extension, on Chinese media outlets.[135] Furthermore, Madrid-Morales found that African news organizations are significantly less likely to use content distributed by Chinese media than by other global news agencies.[136] Turning attention to the importance of co-operation and training, Benabdallah suggests that professional development training for African media practitioners is effective in terms of China's "image-building", as those measures are geared to socializing journalists into

127 "China's Xi Urges State Media to Boost Global Influence", editorial, *Reuters*, 19 February 2016.
128 Anbin Shi, "Re-orienting the 'Charm Offensive' to the 'Charm Defensive': A Critical Review of Chinese Media Development in Africa", *African Journalism Studies* 36, no. 1 (2015): 135-140; Dani Madrid-Morales and Lauren Gorfinkel, "Narratives of Contemporary Africa on China Global Television Network's Documentary Series Faces of Africa", *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 53, no. 6 (2018): 917-931.
129 Emmanuel K. Dogbevi, "China in Africa's Media: A Case Study of Ghana", in *Political Frontlines, China's Pursuit of Influence in Africa*, ed. Nadège Rolland (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2022), 57-68.
130 Frankline Matanji, "China in Africa: Representation of Chinese Investments in Africa by Western, Chinese, and African Media", *International Journal of Communication* 16 (2022): 1713-1736.
131 Goretti L. Nassanga and Sabiti Makara, "Perceptions of Chinese Presence in Africa as Reflected in the African Media: Case Study of Uganda", *Chinese Journal of Communication* 9, no. 1 (2016): 21-37.
132 Catie Snow Bailard, "China in Africa: An Analysis of the Effect of Chinese Media Expansion on African Public Opinion", *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 21, no. 4 (2016): 446-471.
133 Yanqiu Zhang and Jane Muthoni Mwangi, "A Perception Study on China's Media Engagement in Kenya: From Media Presence to Power Influence?" *Chinese Journal of Communication* 9, no. 1 (2016): 71-80.
134 Zhang, Xiaoling, Herman Wasserman, and Winston Mano, "China's Expanding Influence in Africa: Projection, Perception and Prospects in Southern Africa Countries," *South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research* 42, no. 1 (2016): 1-22.
135 Dani Madrid-Morales and Herman Wasserman, "Chinese Media Engagement in South Africa, What Is Its Impact on Local Journalism?" *Journalism Studies* 19, no. 8 (2018): 1218-1235.
136 Dani Madrid-Morales, "Who Set the Narrative? Assessing the Influence of Chinese Global Media on News Coverage of Covid-19 in 30 African countries", *Global Media and China* 6, no. 2 (2021): 129-151.

Chinese values and expert knowledge.[137] Supporting this suggestion, Diakon and Röschenthaler found that Malian journalists who were trained in China or were associated with Chinese media were more likely to portray China's role in Mali in a positive light.[138] Yet most studies do not go into further details on how suggested changes in participants' perceptions have come about, and whether journalists' public opinions and/or their personally held beliefs actually changed as a result of their Chinese training.

Overall, accounts of China's influence on reporting, media consumption habits and public opinion vary significantly, depending on the country and region. Most research contributions suggest that China's public diplomacy via press and media co-operation has resulted in moderate influence on public opinion on China in African societies, especially when compared to the much more prevalent local consumption of African and "Western" media. More recent contributions, however, also highlight the steep increase in Chinese media promotion, the growing reach of Chinese state media narratives and content development across African countries. When it comes to media co-operation, most research has been conducted on conventional media tools (e.g. training of newspaper journalists), while less is known about more recent formats, such as co-operation on media development policies, content co-operation, co-broadcasting and digital convergence. Also, the element of strategic geopolitical framing in Chinese, African and "Western" media, in the context of geopolitical rivalry, has not received much research attention so far. For example, China's global image-building during the Covid-19 pandemic (efficiency of the state system, mask and vaccine solidarity) has become a major domain of competition with other external actors for the appreciation of African states and their citizens, yet it has not been subject to much research to date.

Migration and Diaspora Relations

Much scholarly attention has focused on China's official means of fostering people-to-people relations through official programmes of cultural and educational co-operation and professional training, as discussed in previous sections. At least 1 million Chinese are estimated to live in Africa.[139] The largest Chinese diaspora communities reside in South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania and Angola. While many Chinese in Africa are contracted labour migrants, working, for instance, in infrastructure projects and mining operations, biographies and professions are diverse, and include merchants, entrepreneurs, small-scale retailers, students and family dependants.[140] Research has highlighted the vast diversity of forms of "Chinese" and "Chineseness" on the continent and the complexities of migrants' distinct identities, as well as their different interactions with local communities in their host countries.[141] While many migrants may have arrived in Africa through state-sponsored programmes, many have also stayed on their own initiative, independent of the Chinese government. Drawing on case studies of Chinese migrations in the agri-food sector in

137 Lina Benabdallah, "Explaining Attractiveness: Knowledge Production and Power Projection in China's Policy for Africa", *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22 (2019): 495-514.
138 Birama Diakon and Ute Röschenthaler, "The Chinese Presence in the Malian Mediascape," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 29, no. 1 (2016): 96-113.
139 Howard W. French, "Why 1 Million Chinese Migrants are Building a New Empire in Africa", *Quartz*, 10 June 2014.
140 Yan Hairong, "The Truth About Chinese Migrants in Africa and Their Self-Segregation", *Quartz*, 4 June 2020.
141 Obert Hodzi, "Chinese in Africa: 'Chineseness' and the Complexities of Identities", *Asian Ethnicity* 20, no. 1 (2020): 1-7; Yoon Jung Park, "Forever Foreign? Is there a Future for Chinese People in Africa?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 4 (2022): 894-912; Jonathan Sullivan, "Contextualising Chinese Migration to Africa", Journal of Asian and African Studies 53, no. 8 (2018): 1173-1187; Daouda Cissé, "China's Engagement in Africa: Opportunities or Challenges for Africa"; Daouda Cissé, "As Migration and Trade Increase between China and Africa, Traders at Both Ends Often Face Precarity", Migration Policy Institute, 21 July 2021.

Ethiopia and Ghana, Cook et al. note that although these migrants are affected by Chinese regulatory frameworks for overseas business activities they are "[f]ar from being a "silent army" promoting larger Chinese state objectives, they operate independently and serve no agenda other than their own."[142] Similar analyses have been conducted on small-scale Chinese business activities in local markets and their impact on consumer behaviour and local value chains in Ethiopia[143], South Africa[144] and Ghana[145]. While individual migrants are not part of official state-to-state relationship-building efforts, and their social impact is more difficult to assess, most research contributions agree that their presence and activities contribute to shaping public opinion on Sino-Africa relations in host countries.[146]

Drawing on qualitative research in various African countries, Wang and Elliot detected negative perceptions of Chinese nationals, caused by incidents of exploitative labour practices and discriminatory treatment of personnel and clients in Chinese businesses. Furthermore, they highlight that while China's model of economic growth was evaluated positively by citizens across African societies, respondents expressed limited appreciation of Chinese values, culture and governance.[147] Against this backdrop, the authors underline gaps between official co-operation narratives and the behaviour and interests of independently motivated Chinese businesspeople and workers who have settled in African countries. While Chinese officials would craft images of friendship and shared objectives between African and Chinese people, the latter would seek personal business success, while perceiving Chinese officials as not helpful for the Chinese business community. Adding empirical insights from Zambia and Angola, Jura, Kaluzynska and de Carvalho have highlighted discrepancies between official co-operation narratives, which are largely positive, and local perceptions on China and the Chinese, which are more mixed.[148]

Along similar lines, Sautman and Hairong conducted a cross-national empirical investigation of African views on China, finding that "African views are not nearly as negative as Western media make out, nor as positive as official Chinese sources imply".[149] As the main determinants of citizens' perceptions of China, the authors identified the ways in which political discourses between Africa and China play out, and how those relations are presented in the media. Drawing on survey data, Xu and Zhang added that the presence of Chinese development assistance also influences local perceptions of China.[150] They find that recipient populations of Chinese projects tend to have a more positive view of Chinese aid. In contrast, Iacoella et al. find that local areas where projects financed by the Chinese government are implemented are more likely to experience civil protest.[151] These studies largely resonate with the trends identified in cross-country studies. They also reveal that

142 Seth Cook, Jixia Lu, Henry Tugendhat, and Dawit Alemud, "Chinese Migrants in Africa: Facts and Fictions from the Agri-Food Sector in Ethiopia and Ghana", *World Development* 5 (2016): 61-70.
143 Zhengli Huang, "Rwanda Market in Addis Ababa: Between Chinese Migrants and a Local Food Network", *China Perspectives* 4 (2019): 17-25.
144 Edwin Lin, "'Big Fish in a Small Pond': Chinese Migrant Shopkeepers in South Africa", *International Migration Review* 48, no. 1 (2014): 181-215.
145 Katy N Lam, "Chinese Adaptions: African Agency, Fragmented Community and Social Capital Creation in Ghana", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 44, no. 1 (2015): 9-41.
146 Giles Mohan and May Tan-Mullins, "Chinese Migrants in Africa as New Agents of Development? An Analytical Framework", *The European Journal of Development Research* 21, no. 4 (2009): 588-605.
147 Fei-Ling Wang and Esi A. Elliot, "China in Africa: Presence, Perceptions and Prospects", *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 90 (2014): 1012-1032.
148 Jaroslaw Jura, Kaja Kaluzynska, and Paulo de Carvalho, *Events over Endeavours: Image of the Chinese in Zambia and Angola* (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2015).
149 Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, "African Perspectives on China-Africa Links", *The China Quarterly* 199 (2009): 728-759; 729.
150 Zhicheng Phil Xu and Y. Zhang, "Can Chinese Aid Win the Hearts and Minds of Africa's Local Population?" *Economic Modelling* 90 (2020): 322-330.
151 Francesco Iacoella, Bruno Martorano, Laura Metzger, and Marco Sanfilippoe, "Chinese Official Finance and Political Participation in Africa," *European Economic Review* 136 (2021): 103741.

perceptions vary significantly by country/region, depending on how people are affected by the Chinese presence. For example, Mwangi Waweru has analysed the evolving perceptions of China in Kenya, highlighting the segmented character of anti-Chinese sentiments, for example among small-scale traders who experience Chinese competition, intellectuals who have doubts about the viability of Chinese investments, and citizens who have experienced situations of misconduct by Chinese actors, in an overall China-friendly societal context.[152] Amadhila investigated local perceptions of China in Namibia, where Chinese are mostly active in retail trade, finding that Chinese businesses were usually viewed positively when it came to lower-income citizens' access to affordable goods, though negative perceptions were caused by the perceived low quality of products and the crowding out of local businesses. Moreover, the author detected widespread reservations against Chinese nationals as strangers in the country and instances of exploitative labour practices in Chinese businesses.[153] Adusei Amoah, Hodzi & Castilloc have provided further analyses at the local level.[154]

While still a recent phenomenon, initial empirical investigations have been conducted on the societal impact of the global pandemic when it comes to Sino-Africa relations. Wasserman et al. investigated social media users' attitudes towards China in relation to Covid-19 in Kenya and South Africa, suggesting that public opinion of China in both countries has suffered from association with the origin of the virus and the way the outbreak was handled, amplified by the circulation of hoaxes and rumours.[155] Qiu detects deepening cleavages in the Sino-Africa relationship caused by discriminatory incidents against Africans in Guangzhou at the outbreak of the pandemic.[156] These contributions tie into larger, more recent debates on the complex interplay of historical experiences and concepts of "race" and "racism" in Sino-African relations. For an introduction into this debate, see Castillo.[157] Yet, empirical evidence of social dynamics in Sino-Africa relations related to Covid-19 is still scant and does not allow for generalizations regarding implications for China's influence in Africa.

152 Sammy Mwangi Waweru, "Who is Against Sino-African Relations? Evolving Perceptions on Chinese Engagement in Kenya", *Chinese Journal of International Review* 2, no. 2 (2020): 1-22.
153 Nelago Amadhila, "Grassroots Perceptions of China in Namibia: Effects on Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy", *African East-Asian Affairs* 0, no. 2 (2012): 17-44.
154 Padmore Adusei Amoah, Obert Hodzi, and Roberto Castilloc, "Africans in China and Chinese in Africa: inequalities, social identities, and wellbeing", *Asian Ethnicity* 21, no. 4 (2020): 457-463.
155 Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales, "What Motivates the Sharing of Misinformation about China and Covid-19? A Study of Social Media Users in Kenya and South Africa", *Misinformation, Disinformation & False News in Africa Research Project*, 2021.
156 Yu Qiu, "Cleavage: Guangzhou, Covid-19 and China-Africa Friendship Politics", *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 33, no. 2 (2021): 184-193.
157 Roberto Castillo, "'Race' and 'racism' in contemporary Africa–China relations research: approaches, controversies and reflections", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 21, no. 3 (2020): 310-336.

Contributions of the "Megatrends Afrika" Project

Geopolitical shifts and the role of new external actors in Africa are one of the focus areas of research within the "Megatrends Afrika" project. While the project's research on non-Western external actors is not limited to China, several research contributions on Africa–China relations have been published since the project's inception in early 2022. In this chapter, we situate these research contributions within the wider state of research.

Geopolitical Shifts: China and "the West" in Africa

Several publications on China within the "Megatrends Afrika" project have discussed China's engagement on the continent in light of geopolitical shifts and implications for Western actors active on the continent. For instance, Eickhoff and Godehardt turned attention to China's political agenda for peace and security on the continent and its relation to "traditional" peace and security actors, as well as potential implications for the security architecture in the Horn of Africa.[158] Eickhoff and Godehardt argue that it is important to understand China's activities in peace and security in a broader foreign policy context regarding China's changing mindset on the security–development nexus, as well as in terms of how China and other external actors react to each other on the ground. On the one hand, China's increasing engagement raises concerns over competing mandates in a region already heavily affected by proxy conflicts and external power projection. On the other hand, China's political clout, its access to hard-to-reach conflict parties, and considerable economic influence could add new dynamics to the region's various conflict settings and security issues.[159]

Closely related, Cliff Mboya investigated China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the emerging spatial order in East Africa.[160] Framed as a departure from previous colonial infrastructure schemes, Mboya finds that the BRI has a clear element of demarcation from "the West" and their previous spatial planning practices during colonial times. He further finds that this Chinese initiative has been well-received in East Africa and has had a significant impact on regional thinking on connectivity and infrastructure development, thus contributing to re-shaping regional connectivity schemes and political discussions around integration within the region.[161]

Another publication by Oscar Otele (forthcoming) takes China's growing global influence as the starting point and utilizes Afrobarometer's survey data of Round Eight collected in 34

158 Karoline Eickhoff and Nadine Godehardt, China's Horn of Africa Initiative: Fostering or Fragmenting Peace? Megatrends Working Paper 01, (Berlin: Megatrends Afrika, 2022).
159 Ibid.
160 Cliff Mboya, China's Belt and Road Initiative in the East African Community, Megatrends Policy Brief 12 (Berlin: Megatrends Afrika, 2023)
161 Ibid.

African countries in 2019/2020 to explore the extent to which China is selected as a model of development.[162] By conducting a multivariate regression analysis, the publication adds to previous studies that have investigated whether views of the "China model" have implications for political attitudes and levels of socio-economic development in different African countries.

Implications on the Ground: African Agency and Local Perceptions

The project also conducted research on domestic politics, African agency and the local reception of Chinese activities by various stakeholder groups – thus turning attention to the actual impact of Chinese activities on economies, politics and societies on the continent. Cissé explores China's investment in Africa's ICT sector and questions whether China's and Chinese companies' interests align with those of African governments.[163] While African governments and the AU have supported the development of the continent's ICT sector, China, too, has increasingly invested in that sector at home and has shown growing interests in the global digital space, including in Africa. Cissé argues that while the contribution of Chinese telecom companies to the development of Africa's ICT sector holds socio-economic benefits for African countries, helps bridge the telecoms gap and contributes to connectivity, governments and civil society organizations should pay attention to risks surrounding data sovereignty, digital surveillance and censorship.[164]

Another research contribution focused on strategic framing and local perceptions of China's investments in large-scale infrastructure in Kenya. Eickhoff conducted empirical research on Chinese "mega projects" in Kenya.[165] She finds that while their economic viability remains to be seen, debates on the risks and benefits of Chinese investments and public debt are in full swing: Chinese mega projects are either portrayed as symbols of independence and modernity, manifestations of usurpation, or loss-making deals. In these controversies around Chinese investments, geopolitical competition with the West plays a prominent role, as different external actors aim to contrast their engagements with those of their competitors in order to influence public perceptions of risks and opportunities arising from investments made by the other side.

In a paper that is not a direct output of Megatrends Africa but reflects the exchange between the project and Africa-related research at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Becker et al. study attitudes towards immigrants, using survey experiments in Senegal and Uganda, with a focus on Chinese immigrants, whose presence in Africa is seen by many as the most significant contemporary geopolitical shift in the continent.[166] Becker et al. find that Chinese immigrants are perceived less positively and as economically more threatening than immigrants from other origins (e.g. fellow Africans, Europeans, or Indians

162 Oscar M. Otele, *What Explains African Perceptions of China as Model of Development?* Megatrends Working Paper (Berlin: Megatrends Afrika, forthcoming).

163 Daouda Cissé, *Chinese Telecommunications Companies in Africa: Alignment with African Countries' Interests in Developing their ICT Sector?* Megatrends Policy Brief 07 (Megatrends Afrika, Berlin, 2022).

164 Ibid.

165 Karoline Eickhoff, *Chinese Mega Projects in Kenya: Public Controversies around Infrastructure and Debt in East Africa's Regional Hub*, Megatrends Policy Brief 04, (Berlin: Megatrends Afrika, 2022).

166 Finja Krüger, Malte Becker, and Tobias Heidland, *Country, Culture or Competition – What Drives Attitudes Towards Immigrants in Sub-Saharan Africa?* Kiel Working Paper No. 2224 (Kiel: Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2022).

in the case of Uganda). Yet they also find that attitudes towards individual Chinese migrants are not strongly related to whether a respondent has a more negative or more positive view overall of Chinese involvement in the country.[167] This means that even those respondents who are critical of China's role in the country are not significantly more critical of individual migrants they are facing in the experiment.

167 Ibid.

Conclusions and Avenues for Future Research

Scholarly and policy interest in "non-Western" or "emerging" actors in Africa is picking up, as the actors' landscape on the continent is growing more diverse and multipolar. China remains a particularly prominent subject in the study of Africa's international relations. Analysts have investigated various tools of China's influence on the continent, the narratives conveyed, the effectiveness of different instruments in the "branding" of China and the reception by African societies of China in contrast to other external actors. Our review finds that while formal means of influence are comparatively well-researched and documented (e.g. FOCAC, trade figures, large-scale infrastructure investments), research on informal co-operation mechanisms and emerging topics in Africa–China relations (e.g. diplomacy in the context of Covid-19, implications of the Russia-Ukraine war on China's positioning towards the global South) is still scant. Moreover, the increasing interest in people's perceptions of the activities of China and other external actors in Africa also suggests that, as opposed to Cold War times, "hard" power – defence agreements, military capabilities, trade pacts – seems to be taking a back-seat to "softer" domains of influence, where actors compete over dominant narratives, good will and support in the international system. Reflecting this trend, next to more conventional means of influence such as economic incentives and development assistance, China's political and cultural diplomacy "with Chinese characteristics" moved to the forefront of scholarly and policy attention, for instance in the form of South–South solidarity narratives, scholarships and student exchanges, "win–win" models of capacity building, party-to-party relations, and media outreach programmes "telling the China story well". Overall, while the literature on China's influence on economies, politics and societies is highly diverse, with different knowledge communities emphasizing different aspects (i.e. Chinese vs. "Western" scholarship on media influence and cultural relations) we identified certain overarching themes that characterize the state of research.

First, there is (to varying degrees) a lack of empirically grounded data on Chinese activities on the continent. This is in part because Chinese activities are often government-to-government and bilateral deals are not made transparent. Beijing's lending practices are a prominent example that have often been described as "shrouded in secrecy". Analyses of Chinese economic and political influence through these deals are thus often characterized by a significant element of speculation. In other fields, for example military co-operation, researchers' access to the field is often restricted, limiting investigations of the extent to which Chinese co-operation approaches impact African states' security policies, institutional set-ups and positions on issues of global security.

This often-prevalent lack of robust data leads us to a second observation. There is a qualitative gap between descriptive accounts of Chinese co-operation practices and the connection that can plausibly be drawn to actual influence on the ground. Only a limited number of research contributions connect empirical data with broader theoretical debates on status, power and influence in international relations and foreign policy analysis. At the same time, an increasingly broad "toolbox" of Chinese foreign policy is considered as a potential means of furthering Chinese influence. Also, previously less contested policy fields such as development co-operation are increasingly "perceived by some as a soft power play

on China's part".[168] In some cases, for example regarding China's cultural influence on societies in Africa through the work of Confucius Institutes, as well as China's means of hard power projection through military co-operation agreements, the level of influence appears to be rather overestimated, assuming that mere exposure to activities conducted by Chinese-financed institutions directly translates into impact on people's behaviour or choices – thus neglecting, for instance, the pertinence of people's preferences and decision-making, which are more prominent in research that centres on African agency within the relationship (see section "FOCAC and African agency" (p.14). Domestic politics, the interests of the various stakeholder groups involved in Africa–China relations and the complexities of local perceptions remain comparatively under-reflected, as highlighted, for instance, in the field of migration and diaspora studies.

Recent index figures (November 2022) on China's global influence equally point to China's influence being weakest in the domains of military and society, while the country's influence in the domains of technology, foreign policy and domestic politics is much more pronounced.[169] However, in other domains, China's activities have only recently started to attract scholarly attention (e.g. Chinese media outreach in the digital space; the element of online censorship in media collaborations) and might constitute blind spots regarding China's evolving role on the continent. As a consequence, there are significant research gaps regarding the extent to which China's co-operation activities translate into meaningful effects in the sense of actual influence on economies, politics and societies.

Third, the comparison of China with other external actors, especially "traditional" partners or "the West" is a cross-cutting feature in the literature, highlighting the increasing prominence of rivalry between external actors over dominant narratives on the continent and support on issues of global contestation. While comparative analyses mostly focus on how external actors like China and the US or the EU are different from each other, they often do not sufficiently account for similarities in their co-operation approaches. Yet, research that explores these similarities would help to better situate China within the wider field of Africa's international relations, as one external actor amongst others. With these overarching research gaps in mind, we identify the following avenues for future research.

China's Economic Influence in Africa

China's steeply increasing economic weight in Africa over the last decades has given rise to a considerable literature that deals with the question of whether its engagement has been a force for local development despite the strong political motivations behind most of China's economic relations with countries on the African continent. A large share of the existing studies uses quantitative methods to estimate how Chinese trade, aid and investment affects African economies and populations. The evidence to date is far from conclusive, which is to a considerable extent driven by the limited availability of high-quality data. Even less is known on how Chinese companies affect local suppliers and the local economy in general.

With new and better macro data – longer time series, more geo-localized information and the detailed debt data that have recently been compiled – there is a strong potential for improving the evidence base through additional empirical research. This would include more precise estimates of China's investment in and aid to Africa and trade linkages on

168 Anthea Mulakala, "China's Global Development Initiative: Soft Power Play or Serious Commitment?" *DevPolicyBlog*, 18 October 2022.
169 "China Index 2022, Measuring PCR Influence Around the Globe", *DoublethinkLab*, 2022.

welfare outcomes in African countries. Furthermore, new debt data could be used in various ways, such as supporting analysis of debt sustainability or informing efforts by the international community to provide debt relief. Finally, from a policy perspective, it would be highly relevant to investigate empirically whether China's specific approach to engagement with Africa has repercussions for European policies towards Africa, for instance by rendering it more difficult to make development co-operation conditional on adherence to minimum human rights standards because African partners could turn to China instead. This kind of evidence would complement existing qualitative evidence from the social sciences (e.g. Carbone[170]).

Microeconomic research that looks more closely into the role of Chinese companies in African development could rely on data from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), which provides firm-level information on Chinese investments in Africa that were approved by the authority, including destination and main activities of the parent company in China and the subsidiaries in the host country.

China's Political Influence in Africa

A lot of research has focused on how China uses its political relations with African countries to promote economic interests and support Chinese companies. FOCAC, as one of the main platforms for discussions and dialogue between China and Africa, has been a topic of interest to many researchers. Studies have focused mainly on the establishment of FOCAC, its characteristics, agenda, mission and objectives. However, future studies are needed to unpack the complex FOCAC follow-up mechanisms, tasks and actions in order to understand assessment processes, the effectiveness and implementation of different action plans. Furthermore, there is only limited evidence on environmental sustainability under FOCAC.

China's increasing interest in fostering and strengthening ties between the CCP and African political parties suggests more research to study China's party diplomacy in Africa and party-to-party relations in Africa–China relations. Future studies on these topics can contribute to a better understanding of China's influence on political regimes in Africa.

Africa's agency in Africa–China relations has triggered interest and research among scholars following the debates and discussions around Africa's position, strategy and agenda vis-à-vis China. Future research needs to explore the potential role of African regional organizations in FOCAC in particular, and in Africa–China relations in general, and the contribution they could make to a more balanced engagement between China and African countries.

When it comes to the field of peace and security, our review found that rationales for China's security engagements range from normative and status-oriented motivations (China as a responsible great power contributing to international peace and security) to economic motivations (fostering of a stable business and investment environment, commercial arms sales) and security concerns for its people and assets on the continent. Analyses remain policy-oriented and influenced by geopolitical considerations at the global level though. Fine-grained, on-the-ground research is limited. Likewise, with respect to "softer" and informal aspects of security co-operation and interactions with local

170 Maurizio Carbone, "The European Union and China's rise in Africa: Competing Visions, External Coherence and Trilateral Co-operation", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29, no. 2 (2011): 203-221.

government security forces that could translate into Chinese political influence in African partner countries, empirical evidence remains scarce.

Against this backdrop, what is needed are empirically grounded investigations that not only spotlight Chinese activities in Africa in view of power rivalry and China's global ambitions as a "rising power" but situate and ground China's role as an external security actor, next to others, in its specific context and in view of longer-term dynamics. Furthermore, contributions are needed that shed light on recent policy developments, such as changes in Beijing's infrastructure investment practices, the Global Security Initiative and the changing security–development nexus, China's positioning vis-à-vis the UN security architecture and regional peace and security agendas, as well as implications of these trends for how China as an external actor is perceived among African decision-makers and citizens.

China's Influence on Societies in Africa

Much has been written on China's (assumed) influence on societies in Africa. Official co-operation mechanisms (e.g. public diplomacy and media co-operation) have received more attention than informal means of influence. For example, social media platforms mostly used by young people have received less attention than formalized citizen perception polls (e.g. Afrobarometer). What is most striking, however, is the weak evidence on the link between instruments and impact. For example, studies rarely investigate the extent to which an increased interest in Chinese language training translates into influence on societies (in terms of actual changes in behaviour or opinions); this link is often just suggested but not substantiated. In turn, perception surveys on China's influence rarely distinguish between different influencing factors (e.g. informal, personal experience vs. formalized narratives in the media). More robust, empirical evidence is thus needed on recent trends in the evolving relationship (including the longer-term social impact of student exchanges and the development of personal bonds between migrants from China in Africa and vice versa), and on the interplay of public diplomacy, media reporting and social interactions in shaping China's influence on societies in Africa.

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