

POLITICAL FRONT LINES

CHINA'S PURSUIT OF INFLUENCE IN AFRICA

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Edited by Nadège Rolland

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NBR SPECIAL REPORT #100 | JUNE 2022

POLITICAL FRONT LINES

China's Pursuit of Influence in Africa

Edited by Nadège Rolland

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POLITICAL FRONT LINES:

China's Pursuit of Influence in Africa

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— FOREWORD —

The two-year research project “Into Africa: China’s Emerging Strategy” was launched by the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) in early 2021. The present study, “Political Front Lines: China’s Pursuit of Influence in Africa,” is the third of a series of reports that began with the publication of “A New Great Game? Situating Africa in China’s Strategic Thinking” in June 2021, followed by “(In)Roads and Outposts: Critical Infrastructure in China’s Africa Strategy” in May 2022.

Although the project seeks to better understand China’s perspectives, motives, aspirations, and strategy for Africa in the context of Beijing’s newfound global vision, it does not presuppose a lack of African agency. The July 2022 issue of NBR’s *Asia Policy* journal will publish a roundtable of essays written by African experts who offer contrasting perspectives on how African actors perceive and respond to China’s presence on the continent.

The editor would like to extend her profound thanks to the Carnegie Corporation of New York for its generous financial support and overall encouragement; to Rachel Bernstein for her outstanding assistance in managing the project; to Kanghee Park, Eliot Roberts, and Olivia Truesdale for their expert research assistance; and to Dr. Joshua Eisenman, General Charles W. Hooper (Ret.), Dewardric L. McNeal, and Ambassador David H. Shinn for their invaluable input and guidance as senior advisers.

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Introduction

Nadège Rolland

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Over the past five years, China's overseas political influence activities have drawn increasing scrutiny in Western democracies in Oceania, North America, and Europe. Groundbreaking scholarly work by academics, media investigations by journalists, revelations of high-profile cases, and public warnings from intelligence agencies have led several governments to officially express concern over Chinese influence activities and to adopt measures to better defend themselves against unacceptable intrusions into their domestic social and political processes. This collective knowledge production has also allowed greater public awareness on what the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) calls "united front work," including its tactics, targets, objectives, proxies, and supporting bureaucracies. However, compared with the growing body of literature that is available on Chinese united front activities in advanced liberal democracies, very little attention has been devoted so far to understanding whether and how this sophisticated and sprawling system is deployed in the developing world. This report strives to fill this gap, by focusing specifically on China's influence efforts in Africa.

As observed in Western democracies, political influence activities can take many forms, from "routine cultural diplomacy to purchasing political favors and silencing critics."¹ Other noted activities include "securing access to strategic information and resources,"² "repurposing" democratic structures as tools serving the CCP's policies,³ and "increasing the CCP's political influence, interfering in the Chinese diaspora, suppressing dissident movements, building a permissive international environment for a takeover of Taiwan, intelligence gathering, encouraging investment in China, and facilitating technology transfer."⁴ The scope of united front work has evolved to keep up with the CCP's varying priorities, but its main task and basic framework remain unchanged. Put simply, it seeks to form tactical alliances to engineer an environment that is favorable to the advancement of the party-state's goals, while marginalizing and neutralizing those who may stand in its way. In Xi Jinping's words, united front is about drawing the broadest possible concentric circle around the party.⁵ Accordingly, the CCP "wants to expand united front work to make maximum use of all Chinese talent, both domestic and among the Chinese diaspora as well as from any others who might be willing to assist."⁶ Managing overseas Chinese communities, co-opting foreigners, and influencing the perception of wider audiences are equally important to achieve the broadening of the CCP's supporting circle.⁷ As Mareike Ohlberg explains in the opening essay of this report, the same basic framework is applied throughout Africa, where united front organizations and tactics are deployed to serve the CCP's strategic objectives both at the global and local levels. Her meticulous description of united front organizations active in Africa sheds a unique light on their characteristics, targets, tactics, and objectives.

As is true in other parts of the world, the CCP's efforts to influence African countries begins with local ethnic Chinese communities. According to some estimates, the number of Chinese living in

¹ John Fitzgerald, "China in Xi's 'New Era': Overstepping Down Under," *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2 (2018): 59–67.

² Anne-Marie Brady, "China in Xi's 'New Era': New Zealand and the CCP's 'Magic Weapons,'" *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2 (2018): 68–75.

³ Jichang Lulu, "Repurposing Democracy: The European Parliament China Friendship Cluster," Sinopsis, November 26, 2019, <https://sinopsis.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ep.pdf>.

⁴ Alex Joske, "The Party Speaks for You: Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party's United Front System," Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), Policy Brief, no. 23, June 2020.

⁵ "Tongyizhanxian wu xiao shi, Xi Jinping bai hua zuida tongxin yuan" [United Front Is No Small Matter, Xi Jinping Delineates Broadest Concentric Circle], China News, May 18, 2018, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2018/05-18/8516917.shtml>.

⁶ Gerry Groot, "The CCP's Grand United Front Abroad," Sinopsis, September 24, 2019.

⁷ Anne-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapons: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping," Wilson Center, September 2017.

African countries increased from 136,000 in 1996 to 1.1 million in 2012.⁸ Overseas Chinese are currently mainly concentrated in South Africa (approximately 300,000), Angola (approximately 260,000), and Nigeria (approximately 180,000), followed by Mauritius, Madagascar, Ghana, and Tanzania (between 30,000 and 50,000 in each country).⁹ Chinese communities now living in Africa are very diverse, whether in terms of their geographic origins (including Guangdong, Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangsu, Macau, and Taiwan), their settlement date, the duration of their stay, and their profession (miners, railway workers, and slave laborers before the twentieth century; construction workers, medical personnel, teachers, and agricultural technicians in the 1960s; and employees of state-owned enterprises and private entrepreneurs since the mid-1980s).¹⁰ This complexity collides with the CCP's attempts to create a single Chinese identity under the party's own authority,¹¹ as well as with its efforts to speak on behalf of all overseas ethnic Chinese groups.

To several Chinese scholars, overseas Chinese in Africa are important to the local projection of a positive image of China. They act as “spokespersons,” perception “shapers,” “friendship messengers,” and “loyal inheritors and promoters of Chinese traditional culture” in their host country.¹² They can also play the role of crucial “bridges” to facilitate the constructive development of China-Africa relations. They have useful political and business contacts and understand the local political and economic environment,¹³ while at the same time being “familiar with China’s political and economic system, policy preferences, and diplomatic style.”¹⁴ Therefore, their “advice and suggestions to local government departments can, to a certain extent, influence the behavior and policies of their host countries toward China.”¹⁵

These advantages are well known to the CCP’s united front bureaucracy, which actively uses some overseas Chinese as conduits and connectors between mothership organizations in China and local actors in Africa. In July 2015, 41 leaders from 30 united front associations present in 21 African countries participated in a week-long training seminar jointly organized by the State Council’s Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (absorbed by the United Front Work Department in 2018) and the Huaqiao (Overseas Chinese) University. Participants learned how to contribute to the China-Africa exchanges, “tell the China story well,” and become “ambassadors” of Sino-African friendship.¹⁶

In addition to ethnic Chinese living in African countries, China’s united front system also targets local political elites. To cultivate influence within these circles, the CCP relies partly on historical legacies, partly on a combination of economic leverage and structured programs directed

⁸ Li Anshan, “Zhanhou Feizhou Zhongguo yimin renkou zhuangkuang de dongtai fenxi” [A Dynamic Analysis of the Situation of Postwar Chinese Emigration to Africa], *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu*, no. 6 (2017): 24–25.

⁹ Ibid., 9–42; and Zhou Haijin, “Feizhou Huaqiao Huaren shengcun zhuangkuang ji qi yu dangdi zuqun guanxi” [Living Conditions of Overseas Chinese in Africa and Their Relationships with Local Ethnic Groups], *Dongnanya Yanjiu*, no. 1 (2014): 79–84.

¹⁰ Yoon Jung Park, “Chinese Migration in Africa,” South African Institute of International Affairs, Occasional Paper, no. 24, 2009; and Zhou, “Feizhou Huaqiao Huaren shengcun zhuangkuang ji qi yu dangdi zuqun guanxi.”

¹¹ Obert Hodzi, “Chinese in Africa: ‘Chineseness’ and the Complexities of Identities,” *Asian Ethnicity* 20, no. 1 (2019): 1–7.

¹² Zhang Mengying, “Feizhou Huaqiao Huaren xingxiang de lishi yanbian yu tisheng” [Historical Evolution and Upgrading of the Image of Overseas Chinese in Africa], *Journal of Shaanxi Normal University* 48, no. 6 (2019): 63–71; and Huang Zhichun, “Shi xi Feizhou Huaqiao Huaren zai ‘Yidai Yilu’ changyi tuijin zhong de zuoyong” [A Tentative Analysis of the Role of Overseas Chinese in Africa in Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative], *Journal of the Sichuan Institute of Socialism*, no. 3 (2020): 92–96.

¹³ Huang Rihan, “Feizhou Huaqiao Huaren zhuli ‘Yidai Yilu’ jianshe” [Overseas Chinese in Africa Help Belt and Road Construction], *People’s Daily*, March 9, 2017, <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0309/c14549-29134306.html>.

¹⁴ Huang, “Shi xi Feizhou Huaqiao Huaren zai ‘Yidai Yilu’ changyi tuijin zhong de zuoyong.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Di 33 qi Huaqiao Huaren shetuan fuzeren yanxiban jieye” [Completion of 33rd Study Session for Leaders of Overseas Chinese Associations], Huaqiao University, July 15, 2015, <https://cir.hqu.edu.cn/info/1074/1340.htm>.

at specific stakeholders strategically chosen within host countries. The deepening of party-to-party relations under the helm of the CCP's International Liaison Department offers a concrete illustration of how such programs are structured and deployed to achieve desired outcomes. The cumulated visits, study tours, seminars, and political training programs provide the CCP with a "convenient mechanism to reach out to the local political elites to influence and sometimes 'capture' them," notes Jean-Pierre Cabestan in his essay. The network the CCP is able to nurture through such activities has no equivalent in the world. Although party-to-party relations have not led to the triumph of the CCP's ideological influence over liberal democratic values in African countries, they have certainly helped China "neutralize any open criticism, let alone opposition, in Africa to its own rule." Paul Nantulya's contribution examines similar activities that target another specific group within local bureaucracies: African police and law enforcement. China's Ministry of Public Security is developing capacity-building and training programs that over time will help China in both protecting its security interests and positioning itself as a security partner of choice for African countries. Nantulya notes that China's cultivation of African public security actors has already been successful in "fostering a common language of security by promoting the uptake of shared norms and practices." The enduring nature of China's legal cooperation mechanisms in Africa, critically important for its law-enforcement activities, lays the foundation for deepened normative convergence and alignment with Beijing's security interests.

When nurturing political elites, China's united front system seeks to influence African policymakers' decisions in a direction that is favorable to Beijing's interests and preferences. Beijing hopes to obtain specific outcomes, which may include voting support in international institutions or the signing of agreements related to the Belt and Road Initiative. China's influence efforts do not stop at the door of local political personalities but also target African intellectual elites, and through them wider public opinion. Through increased engagement with African educational institutions, research centers, and media outlets, the CCP's propaganda and united front system seeks both to disseminate China's positive image and to counter what Chinese public relations officials often call the Western "demonization" of China.

Shaping African perceptions of China is key not only to gaining trust and enhancing moral prestige but also to projecting China's model as a source of "inspiration" for Africa.¹⁷ This is not an easy task, especially as Western media outlets still retain considerable influence over the diffusion of information in French and English. Some Chinese experts recommend strengthening China's presence in African mainstream media, because readers "tend to be more educated" and belong to political and economic elites that have "the ability to lead opinions." They also advise developing a presence in social media to specifically shape the perception of African youth.¹⁸ Emmanuel Dogbevi describes how these methods are deployed concretely in a well-planned, multipronged approach toward Ghana's media. Major Chinese state actors broadcast directly into the country, partner with existing local media organizations, sponsor training programs in China for media workers, and grant scholarships to study journalism at Chinese universities. The testimonies of Ghanaian journalists that Dogbevi collected for his essay illustrate the far-reaching impact of these programs on the recipients' perceptions, which is subsequently reflected in China-related news reports to Ghanaian audiences.

¹⁷ Yuan Wu, "Zhongguo dui Feizhou ruanshili waijiao chutan" [A Preliminary Study of China's Soft Power in Africa], *Xiya Feizhou*, no. 5 (2013): 147–60.

¹⁸ Li Hongfeng, "Zhongguo guojia xingxiang zai Feizhou de goujian yu chuanbo: Tiaozhan yu yingdui" [Construction and Dissemination of China's National Image in Africa: Challenges and Responses], *International Communications*, March 2021, 27–31.

In the final essay, Adam George identifies all the main strands discussed in the other contributions to this report as he examines the drivers of China's influence in Kenya and Tanzania. The consolidation of China's grip on both countries' political and social elites creates leverage that "facilitate[s] economic and political goals at the regional and national levels." In pursuit of its preferred policy outcomes, the party-state has deployed wide-ranging tactics to cultivate political influence and increase positive perceptions. Economic incentives and the proactive cultivation of leading figures of both countries' ruling parties, coinciding with an increased local dissatisfaction with the West's emphasis on democratic values, are shaping a local landscape that is more amenable to incorporating elements of the "China model" of governance. George suggests that China may use Kenya and Tanzania as templates for its pursuit of influence in other countries in Africa and the "global South."

This report constitutes a preliminary study of a complex phenomenon that deserves closer attention. There is a great deal of consistency between united front activities in Africa and in Western democracies. However, the five essays point to a possible significant difference, not in means but in ends. In developed countries, a sizeable portion of united front work is meant to gain access to scientific knowledge and advanced technologies, in particular to support China's military modernization needs.¹⁹ In Africa, China's united front work does not seem to be as much about extracting strategic knowledge transfers as it is about spreading Beijing's governance model. Over the long term, the cumulative effect of China's assiduous influence efforts, training programs, elite capture, and information control may not only translate into official African support for Beijing's policies but also enable the incremental transformation of Africa's political landscape in ways that reflect the principles and preferences of the CCP regime. Such an outcome is far from preordained, however—in part because African governments and societies are not idle bystanders waiting to be modeled according to the CCP's vision.

¹⁹ Alex Joske, "Picking Flowers, Making Honey," ASPI, October 30, 2018, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/picking-flowers-making-honey>.

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United Front Work and Political Influence Operations in Sub-Saharan Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay provides an overview of the goals, methods, and impact of the united front work and political influence operations conducted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in sub-Saharan Africa, including via overseas Chinese organizations, friendship groups, and business networks, as well as through media and universities.

MAIN ARGUMENT

The CCP's objectives in sub-Saharan Africa are intrinsically linked to its overall objectives of turning China into a global military, economic, and normative power and thereby buttressing the party's legitimacy by ensuring both continued economic growth and international respect for China. Africa, as part of the "global South," forms an important part of the CCP's goal of creating the impression of nearly universal international support for the People's Republic of China (PRC). The basics of united front work and political influence operations in sub-Saharan Africa follow a pattern that is very similar to how the CCP operates in other parts of the world. Yet, although the CCP has a certain playbook that it replicates wherever it goes, some room for local experimentation and individual initiative remains. To evaluate effectiveness, more data and in-depth studies are needed; however, a preliminary assessment suggests mixed results that vary depending on the local context. Overall, the CCP's focus on getting superficial statements of praise from elites rather than genuinely trying to win over the wider public or changing undesirable behavior may explain why China has lost in popularity in some countries over the past five years, despite arguably intensifying united front work over the same period.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- *Invest in research.* More research on united front activities and public perception of the PRC as well as its main narratives is needed to better understand the extent and limits of united front work.
- *Show up.* In large part, the PRC gains ground with African political elites simply by showing up and taking its counterparts seriously. One relatively easy way to counter united front activities at this level is for Western governments to meet with their African counterparts more often, especially in democratic countries and where this is possible without siding with an autocratic government against the local public.
- *Address economic needs.* When African political elites side with the PRC, this is rarely exclusively the outcome of united front work. Any attempt to counter united front work must go beyond the rhetorical level and address local economic and infrastructure needs.

United front work and political influence operations have accompanied Chinese engagement on the African continent to neutralize opposition to and produce support for the People's Republic of China (PRC), its concrete regional objectives, and its global ambitions. Africa, as part of the “global South,” forms an important part of the goal of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of creating the impression of nearly universal international support for the PRC.

The basic toolkit of united front work and political influence operations in sub-Saharan Africa follows a pattern that is similar to how the CCP operates in other parts of the world. However, although the party has a certain playbook that it replicates wherever it goes, some room for local experimentation and individual initiative remains.

This essay will first explain the goals the CCP pursues in sub-Saharan Africa and then outline the channels, tools, and tactics of united front work. It will conclude with a preliminary assessment of the effectiveness of such work as well as a discussion of policy implications. Overall, results are mixed and vary depending on the local context and factors other than united front work, including the goals and agency of local elites as well as the prospect of economic benefits.

CCP Objectives in Sub-Saharan Africa

The CCP's objectives in sub-Saharan Africa are intrinsically linked to its overall objectives of turning the PRC into a global military, economic, and normative power and thereby buttressing the party's legitimacy at home by ensuring both continued economic growth and international respect for the country. Sub-Saharan Africa is seen as a region where the West is weaker than in other regions, leaving considerable room for China to gain new markets as well as potential allies willing to voice their support for the PRC, its political system, and its policies.

Looking at the CCP's objectives in sub-Saharan Africa through the lens of united front principles, we can distinguish several layers. While some of the party's goals are global, it also pursues various interests on the ground in Africa. The two layers are interlinked due to the fact that both serve the CCP's broader goal of fulfilling its promise to restore China's status as an internationally respected great power.

In order to understand how the CCP pursues its objectives in sub-Saharan Africa through united front work and related political influence operations, it is important to understand what united front work is. The central idea behind it, both inside and outside China, is to co-opt any group of people outside the 90 million members of the CCP and organize them in a way that makes them more closely aligned with the party and results in maximum isolation of its enemies.¹ United front thinking distinguishes between three basic categories: friends, enemies, and the neutral. Its essence is about building the broadest possible coalition of friends and the previously neutral in order to isolate the principal enemy. At a global level, this principal enemy is the United States.

The CCP views the African continent, like much of the rest of the world, as a stage for great-power struggle between China and the United States and its Western allies. As part of the global

¹ For more on the CCP's united front work, see Alexander Bowe, “China's Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Staff Report, August 24, 2018, <https://www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-overseas-united-front-work-background-and-implications-united-states>; Anne-Marie Brady, “Magic Weapons: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping,” Wilson Center, September 18, 2017, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/magic-weapons-chinas-political-influence-activities-under-xi-jinping>; and Alex Joske, “The Party Speaks for You: Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party's United Front System,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Policy Brief, June 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/party-speaks-you>.

South, Africa forms an integral part of the CCP's strategy to "use the countryside to surround the city" or to "use the periphery to surround the center." These phrases refer to the CCP's strategy of beleaguering a center of power by allying with smaller actors around it, as well as of building power bases where the main enemy is weak. At the global level, the phrase "using the countryside to surround the city" can refer to mobilizing countries in the global South to encircle and isolate the West as a whole and the United States in particular.² In this context, China is regularly presented as a representative of developing countries at large, including, with limited success, during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.³ China has maintained that the United States and NATO are to blame, and that European countries should work with Russia to form new security mechanisms in Europe.⁴

One area where the CCP believes it is behind the United States and urgently needs to catch up is what it calls international "discourse power." This refers to the party's ability to shape global conversations; define the meaning of key terms such as democracy, rule of law, and human rights; and set the basic parameters by which a government is assessed.⁵ An article on the online portal of the *People's Daily* from 2014, for example, warned that China's discourse power in Africa was still lacking and that African debates were largely shaped by Western media, something which China needed to change.⁶

Beyond increasing China's discourse power on the African continent, African countries, like other countries in the global South, are seen as important partners for the PRC in international forums to demonstrate broad international support for its policies. This can be achieved through joint statements in the United Nations on issues such as Xinjiang and Hong Kong, the participation of African diplomats and leaders at PRC-organized events, and praise from local African leaders and other stakeholders for China's model and domestic or international policies.⁷ Such support from outside China is amplified and used as a source of legitimacy by the CCP.

At the local level, defending the CCP's interests means ensuring that individual countries accommodate the PRC. This includes on "core interests," such as forcing countries to cut ties with Taiwan, further isolating Taiwan in countries that do not recognize it,⁸ and preventing countries from recognizing or deepening ties with Taiwan.⁹ The CCP's local interests also include raising China's discourse power and promoting its model of governance in a particular country. This does not usually mean wholesale export of this model but more often training on specific

² Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: How the Communist Party of China Is Reshaping the World* (Richmond, Australia: Hardie Grant, 2020), 27.

³ See, for example, "Wang Yi: China Shares Similar Positions with Developing Countries on Ukraine Crisis," CGTN, March 20, 2022, <https://archive.ph/nmbBA>; and "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on March 18, 2022," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC), March 18, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202203/t20220318_10653105.html.

⁴ "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on March 18, 2022."

⁵ Mareike Ohlberg and Bonnie S. Glaser, "Why China Is Freaking Out Over Biden's Democracy Summit," *Foreign Policy*, December 10, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/10/china-response-biden-democracy-summit>.

⁶ Wang Mei, "Zhongguo zai Feizhou huayu de goujian yu chuanbo" [The Construction and Dissemination of Chinese Discourses in Africa], September 16, 2014, available at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0916/c68742-25671150.html>.

⁷ See, for example, "Joint Statement of 69 Countries at the Interactive Dialogue on High Commissioner's Annual Report at the 47th Session of the Human Rights Council," June 26, 2021, available at <http://www.china-un.ch/eng/dbdt/t1886467.htm>; and Liu Xin, "African Envoys Defend China on Xinjiang, Say 'No Visit, No Say,'" *Global Times*, July 6, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202107/1227994.shtml>.

⁸ One such example was when Nigeria forced the Taiwanese representation to move from Abuja to Lagos in 2017. See "Taiwan Says Nigeria Wants It to Move Its Trade Office from Abuja," Reuters, January 12, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-nigeria-idUSKBN14W0IX>.

⁹ One example is when Somaliland, the most stable part and a de facto independent region of Somalia, signed an agreement with Taiwan in 2020 to deepen bilateral exchanges. "Somaliland and Taiwan Establish Diplomatic Ties," *Economist*, October 3, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/10/03/somaliland-and-taiwan-establish-diplomatic-ties>.

aspects (e.g., journalism, party organization, special economic zones, poverty alleviation, and pandemic control). Aside from demonstrating that China has a political model worth emulating and is able to set global standards of governance, it is also in the CCP's interest to deal with governments on the ground that follow familiar patterns. Last but not least, local interests of course include ensuring that the PRC's concrete geopolitical economic interests in different countries and subregions of Africa are well-served. Sub-Saharan Africa consists of between 46 and 49 different countries, depending on the definition.¹⁰ While some broad goals apply to all of them, concrete goals cover a large range of different issues. Several countries, such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Zambia, are important sources of resources for China. China built its first overseas military base in Djibouti and also has a strong interest in the island nation of Mauritius due to its geostrategic location.¹¹

United front work and political influence operations may be used to try to ensure that political decisions that affect Chinese interests are made in China's favor. In 2017–18, there was a strong push to formally enlist more African countries in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and almost all have joined since then. While some of these memoranda of understanding (MOUs) have resulted in little concrete action beyond existing projects, they have some symbolic value in showing that the world is on China's side and supports its version of globalization as embodied in BRI. Africa is an important market for Chinese companies to continue to grow, and united front work or other influence operations may be used to defend or expand their position.

What links the CCP's goals at the global and local levels in individual sub-Saharan African countries is the idea that what happens outside China can either help support or endanger regime security at home. While the party is always the most concerned about its domestic standing, it has promised its population continued economic growth and a return of China to great-power status. Both are essential for its legitimacy at home, and neither can be achieved inside China alone. This is why the stakes for the party in Africa are high and why it invests heavily in united front work and political influence operations on the continent.

When looking at the CCP's united front and political influence work, it makes sense to distinguish broadly between operations targeted at political and business elites specifically and those targeted at the broader public. There is some overlap between the two. Whereas operations targeting the former group often appear successful in achieving at least superficial results, there are indications that China's popularity with the public in many African countries is on the decline.¹² When the PRC recruits local elites to endorse its goals, presumably part of the goal is to win over the local population and raise China's popularity on the ground. In fact, however, where political or business elites are seen as corrupt by large parts of the population, their endorsement of the PRC and its goals in Africa can have the opposite effect on how China is perceived than the one intended and may actually harm China's image. Examples of this paradox effect include Zambia and possibly Kenya.

Last, before analyzing the different channels of united front and influence work, a general word of caution is in order about the difficulty of clearly distinguishing united front efforts undertaken

¹⁰ Depending on the definition, Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia are sometimes included and sometimes excluded.

¹¹ Sankalp Gurjar, "Why the China-Mauritius FTA matters," *Deccan Herald*, February 18, 2021, <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/why-the-china-mauritius-fta-matters-952639.html>. Mauritius was also one of only four African countries that Xi Jinping visited in 2018. The other three were Senegal, Rwanda, and South Africa.

¹² Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny and Edem Selormey, "Africans Regard China's Influence as Significant and Positive, but Slipping," *Afrobarometer*, November 2020, https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ad407-chinas_perceived_influence_in_africa_decreases-afrobarometer_dispatch-14nov20.pdf.

by the CCP from favorable results for the party and the PRC on the ground in Africa. When local political elites in Africa side with the PRC on an issue, this is rarely ever exclusively the outcome of united front work in the narrow or even broader sense. Rather, this political work usually goes hand in hand with promises of much-needed grants and loans, infrastructure development, or other material benefits for a country or its elites. Political influence and other factors cannot be neatly separated in order to assess their impact independently of one another.

The Toolbox: CCP Organizations and Tactics

United front work in the narrow sense refers to the work of the united front system inside and outside China whose principal targets are Chinese nationals and people of Chinese descent, whereas other departments, such as the International Liaison Department and various friendship organizations, principally target people who are not perceived as Chinese by the CCP.¹³ However, as we will see, this distinction is not rigid. For example, a former leading cadre of the United Front Work Department may lead a network for liaising with African business elites. Diaspora groups are to be co-opted through mass organizations that look like civil society bodies but are guided by the party. United front work in the narrow sense also becomes mixed with broader influence work targeting local elites and the local populations, as overseas Chinese are expected to “tell China’s story well” and engage in friendship work between China and the host country. The CCP targets Africans through other means as well, including political influence operations conducted through the foreign affairs and propaganda system.

The basics of united front work and political influence operations in sub-Saharan Africa follow a familiar pattern for anyone who has studied them in other parts of the world, especially the developing world and the European periphery. Nonetheless, the intensity of efforts and number of organizations vary depending on interests in the country, specific political goals, the size of the diaspora, and the personal initiative of individual united front leaders.

United Front Work Targeting Chinese Diasporas in Sub-Saharan Africa

Only a small number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa have historical Chinese diasporas that include people who emigrated before the founding of the PRC (South Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius, and the Seychelles). Some other countries are home to fairly large numbers of first-generation migrants or Chinese citizens temporarily living in Africa (e.g., Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Ghana). South Africa has both a historical diaspora and large number of more recent migrants. Despite the lack of historical diasporas in most countries, united front work is extensive across the African continent primarily because the CCP wants to ensure that it has control over Chinese nationals living outside China and can enlist at least some of them in support of its political and economic goals in each country. Every country in sub-Saharan Africa has at least one united front organization, and most have many more.

Overall, united front work appears to be particularly extensive and developed in countries that are classified as full or flawed democracies (such as Botswana, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Mauritius, and

¹³ When the International Liaison Department was founded in 1951, it was given some of the responsibilities previously held by the United Front Department for liaising with foreigners. Internationally, the latter only kept the responsibility for Taiwanese and ethnic Chinese at the time. See David Shambaugh, “China’s ‘Quiet Diplomacy’: The International Department of the Chinese Communist Party,” *China: An International Journal* 5, no. 1 (2007): 35. Please also see Jean-Pierre Cabestan’s essay in this report.

South Africa).¹⁴ The CCP might consider this type of work more necessary in countries where it has less direct access to rulers. Generally, Beijing prefers to deal with autocracies and has viewed democracy on the continent as a threat to its own stable relations with African rulers.¹⁵ Yet regime type is not the only factor in the intensity of united front presence. For example, the large number of united front organizations in South Africa, Kenya, or Nigeria is more easily explained by the fact that they are important regional hubs with large Chinese diasporas.

Three basic types of united front organizations exist in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa: general Overseas Chinese Associations; local chapters of the Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China, which are officially focused on enforcing the official PRC line on Taiwan, but can also serve as broader community organizations; and Chinese chambers of commerce or business associations. These exist at various levels, including all-Africa organizations (such as the All-Africa Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China), region-specific organizations (such as the West Africa Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China or the East Africa Chinese General Chamber of Commerce), and country-specific organizations (such as the Tanzania Overseas Chinese Organization). Some countries, especially those with larger diasporas, also have united front organizations below the national level, such as the Cape Town Association for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China.

In addition to these three basic types of organizations, some African countries with large numbers of overseas Chinese have additional united front organizations based on geographic origin or function. The former type consists of hometown associations, such as the Botswana Jiangxi Hometown Association, the Cameroon Qingtian Association, and the Tanzania Guangdong (Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao) Hometown Association. Several countries in Africa host province-specific chambers of commerce and trade associations. One example is Tanzania, which has specific chambers of commerce for business people from Zhejiang, Fujian, Shandong, Jiangsu, Henan, and Hunan, among others.¹⁶ The latter type—functional organizations—consists of organizations such as the All-Africa Chinese Women’s Federation that mirror classic mass organizations in the PRC (e.g., professional associations, women’s associations, and youth associations). These can also exist at the continental, regional, or country level.

As is common in other countries, some of these organizations are double-plated and can act under different names in different circumstances, such as the Botswana Overseas Chinese Chamber of Commerce (also acting under the name China Help Center). In other cases, one organization simply combines two names, such as the East Africa Chinese General Chamber of Commerce and East Africa Council for the Peaceful Reunification of China. One individual often holds office in multiple organizations (and sometimes businesses) at the same time, tying them together and making it possible for PRC embassies and PRC-based organizations to liaise through a small number of trusted individuals. One example is Nan Gengxu (also known as Miles Nan), who runs several united front outfits in Botswana, including the Botswana Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China, the Botswana Chinese Charity and Cultural Exchange Foundation, the Botswana-China Friendship Association, and Global Max Media

¹⁴ Economist Intelligence Unit, “Democracy Index 2020: In Sickness and in Health?” February 2021, <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020>.

¹⁵ Nadège Rolland, “A New Great Game? Situating Africa in China’s Strategic Thinking,” National Bureau of Asian Research, NBR Special Report, no. 91, June 2021, 24, https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/sr91_rolland_june2021.pdf.

¹⁶ “Tansangniya qiaojie he quanqiu qiaoling yiqi shengyuan Yayi fan qishi huodong” [Tanzania’s Overseas Chinese Community and Global Overseas Chinese Leaders Stand Together to Support the Campaign of People of Asian Origin against Anti-Asian Racism], April 22, 2021, available at <https://www.qiaowang.org/m/view.php?aid=15586>.

Group.¹⁷ The latter, which is active in several neighboring countries in South and East Africa, will be discussed again below.

Another type of united front organization is art troupes, which also exist in other countries around the world. The initiative to establish these arts troupes was launched centrally by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office in 2014.¹⁸ The Kenya Chinese Art Troupe was founded in 2018 by the Kenya Chinese Women's Federation, "together with Chinese-funded enterprises, Chinese schools, Chinese media in Kenya, Confucius Institutes at universities such as the University of Nairobi, and various overseas Chinese groups in Kenya."¹⁹ Another example is the Nigeria Huaxing Art Troupe, which was established in 2017 and is headed by Ni Mengxiao, who runs a local Chinese paper (the *West African Chinese Voice*).²⁰

The PRC has also established community and police cooperation centers in some countries specifically for Chinese nationals based in Africa. The community and police cooperation center in Ghana was established under the Federation of Overseas Chinese and Chinese Associations in Ghana to protect the interests of and combat crime inside the Chinese community.²¹ South Africa has at least fourteen such centers whose purpose is to "guarantee the safety of overseas Chinese and jointly build a safe overseas Chinese community."²²

United front organizations on the continent are in frequent contact with Chinese embassies and consulates as well as with their parent organizations in the PRC. They also liaise with united front bodies at the provincial level in China.²³ United front work goes hand in hand with official government and diplomatic activities. Official channels often cannot be neatly separated from those that are supposed to look like civil society organizations but are in fact controlled by the party. This is the case, for example, when united front organizations hold joint events with a Chinese embassy.

While united front organizations coordinate their activities with Chinese embassies, they also exist in countries with which China does not have diplomatic relations. In Senegal, key united front operatives were active before the country recognized the PRC in 2005.²⁴ In fact, united front activities are possibly more intense in countries that do not recognize the PRC, as they stand in for regular diplomatic activities and may be seen as more urgently needed. However, this is no longer a major factor, given that Eswatini is the only country in Africa that does not recognize the PRC today. There is a Peaceful Reunification Council in Eswatini, but it is unclear how active the organization is.

Many united front organizations should be understood as what Martin Thorley has called "latent networks"—that is, organizations that engage in a number of ordinary activities of

¹⁷ "Nan Gengxu," November 27, 2018, available at <http://www.bjtz.org.cn/wwwroot/sjmh/publish/article/88/17380.shtml>.

¹⁸ "Qiu Yuanping wei xin yi pi 'Huaxing yishu tuan' jiepai" [Qiu Yuanping Unveils a New Batch of "Huaxing Arts Troupes"], September 28, 2016, available at <http://www.chinaqw.com/hqhr/2016/09-28/105792.shtml>.

¹⁹ "Kenniya Huaren yishutuan chengli" [Kenyan Chinese Art Troupe Established], March 5, 2018, available at <https://www.imsilkroad.com/news/p/86725.html>.

²⁰ "Wo de tuanzhang wo de tuan? Niriliya Huaxing yishu tuan shi ge shenme tuan?" [My Troupe Leader, My Troupe? What Is the Nigeria Huaxing Arts Troupes?], available at <http://www.chinaqw.com/136/2019/1225/645.html>.

²¹ "Hualian zonghui yanqing jingchaju fawubu xiangguan ren yuan zuotan xiangguan chengli 'Jing Min Zhongxin' xiangguan shiyi" [The Chinese Association Hosted a Banquet for the Personnel of the Police Department's Legal Department to Discuss Matters Related to the Establishment of the "Police and Citizen Center"], September 5, 2018, <http://www.jianahualianzonghui.com/archives/2908>.

²² See also Tendai Dube, "No, the Chinese Are Not Opening Police Stations in South Africa," November 23, 2018, <https://factcheck.afp.com/no-chinese-are-not-opening-police-stations-south-africa>. Within China, the term "safe" (平安) is often used in conjunction with urban surveillance and stability maintenance projects.

²³ "Feizhou Huaqiao zhoubao fu zong bianji Yan Fangao daofang sheng Qiaolian" [Yan Fangao, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Overseas Chinese Weekly in Africa, Visited the Provincial Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese], July 1, 2021, available at <https://archive.md/BPzBA>.

²⁴ "Li Jicai: Xifei Saineijia'er Huaren zhi xing" [Li Jicai: Star of the Overseas Chinese in Senegal, West Africa], July 18, 2012, http://www.taiwan.cn/fd/fc/201207/t20120718_2836327.htm.

community organization but can be mobilized to support the CCP at critical moments.²⁵ United front organizations in sub-Saharan Africa are mobilized regularly for political events to express support of the PRC and the CCP, such as for the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC or the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the CCP. They are also used to issue denunciations of groups or actions the CCP dislikes. For example, the chapters of the Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China in Ghana and Chad each issued a statement opposing “interference” related to Taiwan on the fifteenth anniversary of the Anti-Secession Law in 2020.²⁶ Similarly, the Overseas Chinese Association of Mali held a seminar on “upholding the rule of law in Hong Kong” in 2019,²⁷ and the Chinese community in Ghana also met to protest against “violence in Hong Kong.”²⁸ In another example, Chinese business people in Zimbabwe issued a statement denouncing the Philippines for its decision to seek arbitration on the South China Sea in The Hague.²⁹

There are some differences between united front work in African countries and in countries with much larger diasporas such as Australia. It is relatively rare for people of Chinese descent to hold political offices in African countries. Xiaomei Havard and her united front connections attracted some media attention when she became a member of parliament in the African National Congress.³⁰ Other people of Chinese heritage attaining political or other high offices in African countries are rare but exist. They usually have some ties to united front organizations, though of varying intensity. One example is Kee Chong Li Kwong Wing, a former nonexecutive chair of the State Bank of Mauritius and chair of the Mauritius-China Friendship and Cultural Association. Another example is Jean Ping, the former foreign minister of Gabon and former chair of the African Union Commission. Ping has a Chinese father and took part in a “seeking roots” tour to China. Large parts of united front work in Gabon now run through his nephew, Xu Gongde, whose company has been accused of illegal logging in Gabon and Congo (Brazzaville).³¹

Friendship Networks

Aside from united front organizations in the narrower sense (whose primary targets are Chinese diasporas), there are also united front organizations in the broader sense. One notable example is the large number of friendship organizations that liaise with local elites, including current and former politicians, business elites, journalists, academics, and others. Although the

²⁵ Martin Thorley, “Huawei, the CSSA and Beyond: ‘Latent Networks’ and Party Influence within Chinese Institutions,” *Asia Dialogue*, July 5, 2019, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2019/07/05/huawei-the-cssa-and-beyond-latent-networks-and-party-influence-within-chinese-institutions>.

²⁶ “Declaration on the 15th Anniversary of China’s Anti-Secession Law,” Ghana Association of Chinese Societies, July 25, 2020, <http://www.jianahualianzonghui.com/archives/3329>; and “Zhade qiaojie guanyu jianjue yonghu ‘Fan Fenlie Guojia Fa,’ jianing jianchi zuguo tongyi de shengming” [Statement by the Overseas Chinese Community in Chad on Firmly Supporting the “Anti-Secession Law” and the Reunification of the Motherland], June 1, 2020, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cetd/chn/news/t1784869.htm>.

²⁷ “Mali Huaqiao Huaren zhao kai ‘jianchi yi guo liang zhi, wei hu Xianggang fazhi’ zuotanhui bing fabiao lianhe shengming” [Overseas Chinese in Mali Held a Symposium on “Adhering to One Country, Two Systems and Safeguarding the Rule of Law in Hong Kong” and Issued a Joint Statement], August 18, 2019, available at http://ml.china-embassy.org/zxxx/201908/t20190818_5900814.htm.

²⁸ “Chinese Community in Ghana Gathers against Violence in Hong Kong,” Ghana Association of Chinese Societies, July 24, 2020, <http://www.jianahualianzonghui.com/archives/3239>.

²⁹ The statement is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hp0lqSbDnKg>.

³⁰ Jane Flanagan, “South African MP Xiaomei Havard Named as ‘Suspected Chinese Spy,’” *Times* (UK), September 3, 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/south-african-mp-xiaomei-havard-named-as-suspected-chinese-spy-czw8ptt7r>.

³¹ “Jiapeng de ‘Wenzhou dashi’—Jiade Muye Youxian Gongsi gongshizhang Xu Gongde” [Gabon’s “Wenzhou ambassador”—the Chair of Jiade Wood Industry Co., Ltd. Xu Gongde], February 22, 2017, available at http://www.wzzx.gov.cn/art/2017/2/22/art_1297309_5774251.html. For investigations of illegal logging, see “Report Finds Chinese Firms Linked to Illegal Logging in Gabon, Congo,” *Africa Times*, March 26, 2019, <https://africatimes.com/2019/03/26/report-finds-chinese-firms-linked-to-illegal-logging-in-gabon-congo>.

CCP refers to friendship work as “people-to-people” ties, indicating that it is done by civil society, this work is organized by strictly party-controlled organizations on the Chinese side.

Friendship organizations are primarily coordinated through the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) based in Beijing. The CPAFFC has equivalents at the provincial level, which are also often in touch with friendship associations or other actors in Africa. Some of the donations of medical equipment to African countries, for example, are made through provincial friendship associations.³² Sometimes, the CPAFFC also links up with provincial governments in China for joint formats such as the Forum on China-Africa Local Government Cooperation and the 21st-Century Maritime Cooperation Committee, which is a joint initiative of the CPAFFC and Fuzhou.³³ In addition, the Chinese African People’s Friendship Association was founded as a sub-organization in 1960 by the CPAFFC in cooperation with seventeen other united front mass organizations, specifically to build people-to-people ties with Africa. The importance of Africa in the PRC’s friendship work may be reflected in the fact that the former ambassador to South Africa, Lin Songtian, became the head of the CPAFFC in 2020.

In addition to the CPAFFC, the CCP has a number of other friendship organizations that do similar and sometimes overlapping work. For example, the Chinese Association for International Understanding (CAFIU), a front organization of the International Liaison Department, is also active on the continent. In Botswana, the CAFIU signed an MOU with the House of Chiefs and organized several trips for members to China.³⁴ The CAFIU has also signed an agreement with the Tanzania China Friendship Promotion Association.³⁵ The China Association for International Friendly Contact, run by the People’s Liberation Army’s Political Work Department’s Liaison Bureau, has also liaised with friendship associations on the continent in the past.³⁶

Africa-based friendship organizations are often (though not always) headed by people who also hold some form of political office in their country. For example, the Botswana-China Friendship Association is chaired by Puso Gaborone, who is chair of the House of Chiefs of Botswana, an advisory body to the parliament.³⁷ The Association for Cooperation and Friendship between the People of Cameroon and China is chaired by Komba Gaston, the secretary general of the National Assembly of Cameroon.³⁸ The Ethiopia-China People’s Friendship Association Steering Committee is chaired by the former Ethiopian ambassador to China, Haile Kiros Gessesse.³⁹ The Gambia-China Friendship Group is chaired by Mariam Jack-Denton, the speaker of the National

³² “Sheng duiwai youxie xiang Saineijiaer yuanzhu yiliao fanghu wuzi” [Provincial Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries Donates Medical Protective Materials to Senegal], February 9, 2021, available at http://wsb.guizhou.gov.cn/xwzx/yxgz/yxgz_72839/202102/t20210209_66738491.html.

³³ “21 shiji haishang hezuo weiyuanhui jianjie” [Introduction to the 21st Century Maritime Cooperation Committee], October 16, 2020, available at https://www.21cmcc.org.cn/wyh/wyhjs/202010/t20201016_284.htm.

³⁴ Katlego Motsamai, “China-Botswana Relations Continue to Blossom,” Mmegi, January 27, 2017, <https://www.mmegi.bw/news/china-botswana-relations-continue-to-blossom/news>.

³⁵ “Full Text of the Program for China-Africa People-to-People Friendship and Partnership (2018–2020),” July 24, 2018, available at http://www.china.org.cn/china/2018-07/24/content_57817899.htm.

³⁶ Joske, “The Party Speaks for You”; and “Chairman Lu Yongxiang Heads a Delegation of CAIFC to Africa,” China Association for International Friendly Contact, May 24, 2013, <http://www.caifc.org.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=41&id=798>.

³⁷ “CPAFFC Vice President Lin Yi Meets with Puso Gaborone, the Chairman of Botswana-China Friendship Association,” CPAFFC, August 31, 2018, <https://cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/5851/lang/2.html>.

³⁸ “Cameroon-China Cooperation: Association Created,” Ambassade de la République Populaire de Chine en République du Cameroun, November 28, 2017, <http://cm.china-embassy.org/fra/zxxx/t1514618.htm>.

³⁹ “China, Africa Eye Deeper People-to-People Exchanges to Boost Ties,” Xinhua, February 2, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/03/c_136945413.htm.

Assembly of Gambia.⁴⁰ The Ghana-China Friendship Association is chaired by Kojo Amoo-Gottfried, a former diplomat and the nephew of Kofi Annan.⁴¹

Such high-profile representatives help organize events with local elites and amplify positive messages about China in their countries, such as when Amoo-Gottfried argued that “millions have been lifted out of poverty, as a result of the cooperation between Ghana and China.”⁴² Other former and current politicians considered “old friends of China” are also often featured in Chinese media praising the CCP and its achievements. For instance, Namibia’s founding president Sam Nujoma has promoted Xi Jinping’s *Governance of China* in Namibia and was featured prominently in China’s official media praising the CCP for its one-hundredth anniversary in July 2021.⁴³ Similarly, CGTN featured former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan praising China’s model of development as a model for African countries.⁴⁴

In addition to these more general friendship groups, there are also parliamentary friendship groups such as the Kenya-China Parliamentary Friendship Group, Tanzania-China Parliamentary Friendship Group, and the Zambia-China Parliamentary Friendship Group, which organize exchanges between the National People’s Congress and local parliaments. The recent Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Dakar Action Plan (2022–2024) included language on further deepening of exchange between African parliaments and the National People’s Congress as well as the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.⁴⁵ Party-to-party diplomacy and the work of the CCP’s International Liaison Department, covered in detail in another chapter in this collection, also play a role in winning over local elites, most importantly ruling parties.⁴⁶

Just like united front organizations, friendship groups can also become politically active in their home countries and even engage in acts that could be considered political interference. For instance, the Liberia-China Friendship Association issued calls to voters in Liberia “to elect individuals who will support and uphold the One-China Policy.”⁴⁷ In addition, they can be used to show global support for the CCP and its points of view. In 2021, 22 Africa-based friendship organizations signed a letter to the World Health Organization to praise China’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and condemn U.S. calls for origin tracing.⁴⁸ The South African Chinese Friendship Association sent a video message for the one-hundredth anniversary of the CCP, congratulating the party and Xi personally.⁴⁹

⁴⁰ “Chinese Embassy Hosts Symposium with the Gambia-China Friendship Group of the National Assembly of the Gambia,” Embassy of the PRC in Gambia, April 4, 2021, <http://gm.china-embassy.org/eng/sgxw/t1866816.htm>.

⁴¹ “Ambassador Sun Baohong Met with Leading Officials of Ghana-China Friendship Association,” Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Ghana, April 29, 2014, <http://gh.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/t1160062.htm>.

⁴² “China-Ghana Cooperation Lifts Millions from Poverty,” Ghana News Agency, September 1, 2016, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/716677/china-ghana-cooperation-lifts-millions-from-povert.html>.

⁴³ “China’s Growth Is Example to Developing Countries: Namibian Founding President,” Xinhua, June 27, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/27/c_1310030590.htm.

⁴⁴ Video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgDdj2vFOZw>.

⁴⁵ “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Dakar Action Plan (2022–2024),” Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PRC), November 30, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/202112/t20211202_10461183.html.

⁴⁶ For some recent activities of the International Liaison Department in sub-Saharan Africa, see International Department Central Committee of CPC, “The Fourth China-Africa Political Parties Theoretic Seminar Held,” September 24, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/news/202109/t20210926_147206.html.

⁴⁷ Fredrick P.W. Gaye, “Liberia-China Friendship Organization Urges Liberians to Elect Leaders That Will Protect One-China Policy,” *People’s Daily*, May 23, 2017, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/0523/c90000-9219210.html>.

⁴⁸ “Zhong Fei minjian zuzhi fuzeren lianshu zhixin Shiwei zuzhi zongganshi Tan Desai jianjue fandui jiang xinguan bingdu suyuan wenti zhengzhihua” [The Heads of Chinese and African Nongovernmental Organizations Jointly Signed a Letter to WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus Firmly Opposing the Politicization of Origin Tracing of the New Coronavirus], August 26, 2021, <https://archive.md/Snlhe>.

⁴⁹ Video is available at <https://cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/7331/lang/1.html>.

The PRC hands out official “friendship medals” for foreigners who have made “outstanding contributions” to the promotion of friendship with China. Salim Ahmed Salim, a retired diplomat, former prime minister of Tanzania (1984–85), and chair of the Tanzania China Friendship Promotion Association, also received this medal in 2019.⁵⁰ He is considered an “old friend of China” not just for performing these roles but also for strongly supporting China’s bid to gain a seat on the UN Security Council in 1971 when he was an envoy at the United Nations right after having served as the Tanzanian ambassador to China. In addition to offering the relatively rare friendship medal, the Chinese-African People’s Friendship Association established a special China-Africa Friendship Award in 2006. The award can be granted to Chinese or Africans, as well as to Chinese companies in Africa, for their contributions to promoting friendship.

Business and Trade Networks

Due to the large number of Chinese businesses and businesses people in Africa, as well as due to the importance of promoting BRI in Africa and persuading more Chinese businesses to consider expanding to Africa, various Chinese chambers of commerce, enterprise associations, trade promotion associations, and other types of China-led business networks play a key role in united front and political influence work on the continent. Two basic types can be distinguished: associations for Chinese businesses (discussed briefly above) and associations where both Chinese and Africans are members, such as a business-focused friendship network.

The China Council for the Promotion of Investment and Trade (CCPIT) works with local embassies in Africa and is usually involved with Africa-based chambers of commerce, just like the CPAFFC is involved with Africa-based friendship organizations. Despite these official ties, the websites of some chambers of commerce stress their “unofficial” nature. For instance, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Cameroon claims it is a “civil society organization *spontaneously* established by overseas Chinese, Chinese, Chinese-funded enterprises and Chinese groups” (*italics added*).⁵¹ Other chambers are open about their ties to the party-state. This may also serve as reassurance to Chinese businesses in Africa that a chamber is a legitimate organization. The China General Chamber of Commerce in Nigeria states on its website that it was approved by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and that its members include all large Chinese enterprises in Nigeria.⁵²

Multiple China-Africa business networks with both Chinese and African members also exist. One is the China-Africa Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry, jointly established by the CCPIT and the Union of African Chambers. Another is the Association Generale Chine-Afrique based in Antananarivo, Madagascar. Its honorary chairs are Didier Ratsiraka, former president of Madagascar, and Hu Deping, a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference who formerly served as vice chair of the All-China General Chamber of Industry and Commerce and as deputy head of the United Front Work Department. He is also the son of Hu Yaobang.

There are several additional China-based organizations that specialize in promoting business ties between China and Africa. One is the Beijing-based China-Africa Business Council, which had been chaired by Hu Deping as well. It was initiated by the United Front Work Department,

⁵⁰ “Ambassador Wang Ke Met With Members of the New TCFPA Board,” Embassy of the PRC in the United Republic of Tanzania, January 22, 2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cetz/eng/sgdt/t1735007.htm>. Other recipients include Vladimir Putin, Raul Castro, and Jean-Pierre Raffarin.

⁵¹ “Shanghai gaikuang” [Chamber of Commerce Profile], available at <http://www.cmrccc.com/about.html>. In the party’s political lingo, the insertion of the word “spontaneous” is meant to convey that the group was established independently of and without any CCP involvement to boost its credentials as an independent civil society organization. This is likely not true.

⁵² “Shanghai jianjie” [Introduction to the Chamber of Commerce], available at <http://www.cgccnig.com/About.aspx?ClassID=56>.

the Ministry of Commerce, and the UN Development Programme. The council is now headed by Wang Licheng, the chair of Holley Group, who is also a representative of the Zhejiang People's Congress and a member of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce.⁵³ Holley is a Hangzhou-based conglomerate whose main business in Africa is artemisinin anti-malarial drugs, which it sells in over 40 countries.⁵⁴

Another organization is the Beijing-based China-Africa Friendly Economic and Trade Development Foundation. It was founded in 2014 by China-Africa Friendly International Trade (Beijing), a company directly under the China-Africa Countries Trade Promotion Association, which is in turn managed by the PRC Ministry of Commerce.⁵⁵ The foundation liaises with African embassies in Beijing, among other activities.⁵⁶

There is also the China-Africa Economic, Trade, and Investment Promotion Association, with offices around China and in Nairobi, Kenya. Its establishment was approved by the Hong Kong special administrative region government. Its honorary chairs include Wang Zhiguo, the vice chair of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, and Victor Sikonina, the long-time former ambassador of Madagascar to China.

Lusophone African countries are often part of a wider network of Portuguese-speaking countries, where Chinese-sponsored initiatives frequently run through Macau. The most important example is the Forum Macau, which promotes economic and trade cooperation between Portuguese-speaking countries, including all African Portuguese-speaking countries.

Last but not least, African countries and Africa-based organizations are members in China's countless Belt and Road networks. The Silk Road Association Alliance, which is part of the Hong Kong-headquartered Silk Road International Chamber of Commerce and serves as a platform for non-state level chambers of commerce, has several member organizations (mainly chambers of commerce and friendship associations) in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in Nigeria.⁵⁷ China has also appointed several Africans, including Uganda's former chief justice, Bart Magunda Katureebe, and Nigeria's former attorney general and minister of justice, Christopher Adebayo Ojo, to the international expert committee of the China International Commercial Court, which was set up as a special court for BRI disputes in China.⁵⁸

Media Networks

One important aspect of China's influence in Africa is its media expansion on the continent, which is discussed in more detail in Emmanuel Dogbevi's essay for this report. Much of the focus has been on official party-state media's growing presence on the continent, including CGTN, Xinhua, and China Radio International. Studies by Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales have found that this growing presence has not resulted in growing influence for China, and that

⁵³ China-Africa Business Council, http://www.cabc.org.cn/dan.php?cid=27&category_id=28.

⁵⁴ "Holley in Africa," Holley, https://www.holley.cn/en/global_362.html.

⁵⁵ "Zhongguo Feizhou Guojia Maoyi Cujinhui" [China-African Countries Trade Promotion Association], <http://news.afrindex.com/xiehuijigou/4/introduce.html>.

⁵⁶ "Zhong Fei Youhao Maoyi Fazhan Jijinhui jianjie" [Introduction to the China-Africa Friendly Economic and Trade Development Foundation], September 28, 2014, available at <http://www.cnafrica.org/cn/gywm/1.html>.

⁵⁷ These include the Abuja Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Chinese Business Chamber Mauritius; East African Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture; Kwara Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture; Lusaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Nnewi Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture; Onitsha Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture; Somalia-China Friendship Association; and China-Africa Entrepreneurs Chamber of Commerce.

⁵⁸ Mildred Europa Taylor, "Uganda's Former Chief Justice, Other African Legal Giants Hired by China's Supreme Court," Face2Face Africa, December 10, 2020, <https://face2faceafrica.com/article/ugandas-former-chief-justice-other-african-legal-giants-hired-by-chinas-supreme-court>.

consumption of official Chinese media remains marginal compared with Western media such as the BBC.⁵⁹ A study commissioned by a research center affiliated with the CCP's Foreign Languages Bureau in 2012 came to a similar conclusion. As a result, some Chinese researchers have suggested more media cooperation with local media and better use of online media as possible remedies.⁶⁰

However, aside from official party-state media, ostensibly private media companies have also expanded on the continent. The most important example is StarTimes, which has built large parts of the media infrastructure in Africa and regularly cooperates with local actors to expand its reach.⁶¹ Although StarTimes is officially a private company, it has been designated as a “key national cultural export company” (*guojia wenhua chukou zhongdian qiye*) by the Ministry of Commerce, and many of its projects in Africa show up on lists of “key national cultural export projects” (*guojia wenhua chukou zhongdian xiangmu*), indicating state subsidies.⁶² Other Chinese media organizations, including those at the provincial level, are also teaming up with African media in order to deliver content more directly and effectively. For example, the party-state-owned Chongqing Broadcasting Group formed a partnership with the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation to provide technical assistance and exchange content.⁶³

Individual local formats have been set up by Chinese nationals in Africa. One example is the Dreamstar Zimbabwe Talent Show. The talent show was established in 2014 by Chinese national Zhao Ke through two organizations run by him: the China Africa Economic and Culture Exchange Research Center and the Jacaranda Culture and Media Corporation. As is usually the case, there is official involvement. The show is supported not only by Chinese businesses in Zimbabwe but also by the Chinese embassy.⁶⁴

Media principally targeted at the Chinese diaspora are usually integrated into wider united front networks in the narrower sense and run by affiliated organizations or key individuals on the continent. Often, these media groups cooperate with local media on the ground to reach a wider audience. Examples include the China-Africa News Agency of Nigeria, which belongs to the Chinese Investors Association for Development and Promotion in Nigeria, cooperates with the *People's Daily*, and also publishes the *Nigeria China Times* in English. Another example is the Global Max Media Group, which is headed by Nan Gengxu and is active across large parts of East and Southeast Africa, where it publishes in eight different languages and partners with local media. Nan's media enterprise received the blessing of Xi Jinping when he visited Botswana in 2010 as vice president.⁶⁵

The Chinese state also has a network of “borrowed mouths,” or local journalists and others who publish pieces that convey the messages of the Chinese party-state. One example is Gerald Mbanda in Rwanda, who was previously in charge of media on Rwanda's Governance Board

⁵⁹ Dani Madrid-Morales, “China's Media Presence in Africa Is Growing Fast: Is Its Influence Growing at the Same Pace?” *Asia Dialogue*, August 29, 2018, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2019/08/29/chinas-media-presence-in-africa-is-growing-fast-is-its-influence-growing-at-the-same-pace>.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Wang, “Zhongguo zai Feizhou huayu de goujian yu chuanbo.”

⁶¹ See, for example, “StarTimes Unveils New Investment to Boost Local Content in Kenya,” CGTN, August 5, 2019, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2019/08/05/startimes-unveils-new-investment-to-boost-local-content-in-kenya>.

⁶² “Rang wenhua ‘zou chuqu’! Beijing jingkaiku 5 jia qiye huoping guojia wenhua chukou zhongdian qiye” [Let Culture “Go Out”! Five Enterprises in the Beijing Economic and Technological Development Zone Were Rated as Key National Cultural Export Enterprises], August 16, 2021, available at <https://www.investgo.cn/article/yw/dfzcq/202108/555626.html>.

⁶³ “A Leading Chinese Broadcasting Firm to Forge Working Ties with ZNBC,” *Lusaka Times*, December 1, 2018, <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2018/12/01/a-leading-chinese-broadcasting-firm-to-forge-working-ties-with-znbc>.

⁶⁴ Gretinah Machingura and Zhang Yuliang, “Chinese Expatriate Dreams to Propel Zimbabwean Arts, Culture on International Stage,” *Xinhua*, December 2, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-12/02/c_139558517.htm.

⁶⁵ “Nan Gengxu,” November 27, 2018, <https://archive.md/m5SiK>.

and now publishes titles such as *China and Rwanda: Effective Leadership, Transformational Governance* (2019). Other examples include Brian Sokutu in South Africa, Stephen Ndegwa in Kenya, and Patrick Lungu in Zambia.⁶⁶

As in other countries, Chinese official media collect statements from political and business elites in Africa praising China's political system or aspects of it to demonstrate that the system is internationally recognized. For example, for the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the CCP, a former Nigerian ambassador to China explained that the party "represents the sum total for the aspirations of the Chinese people."⁶⁷ The Tanzanian ambassador to China praised China's "democracy" for being "unique" and "deliver(ing) the results."⁶⁸

Universities and Think Tanks

Numerous initiatives exist at the university level in order to improve China's image, increase its normative power, and provide a basis for smoother China-Africa relations. These include the Confucius Institutes, which have attracted the most attention as a channel of CCP influence, but go far beyond them. Other relevant academic initiatives include scholarships, funding for research on China-Africa relations, cooperation between Chinese and African researchers, and funding to build whole campuses.

According to official Chinese sources, there are 61 Confucius Institutes and 48 Confucius Classrooms in Africa.⁶⁹ Only a small number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa have more than one Confucius Institute, including Madagascar, Nigeria, and Tanzania with two each and South Africa with six. Compared with most Western countries, therefore, African countries have very few institutes. However, the impact of those that do exist on the continent is arguably larger due to the lack of alternative China expertise in most countries. The fact that almost every country in Africa (with the exception of Niger, Somalia, and South Sudan) has at least one Confucius Institute shows that the CCP went systematically about establishing them.⁷⁰

China has helped build or has financed universities and colleges in Africa's poorer countries such as in Eritrea and Malawi.⁷¹ In Kenya, the Chinese Academy of Sciences has established the Sino-Africa Joint Research Center at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. The Chinese government also awards scholarships for African students to study in China and tries to keep in touch with returnees through its embassies. The Chinese embassy in Sierra Leone has set up an alumni organization for Sierra Leonean students who have returned from China.⁷² Luban Workshops, which provide vocational training, exist in multiple African countries, including Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, and Djibouti. While university cooperation and aid also

⁶⁶ See, for example, Brian Sokutu, "Experts Shoot Down Claims of China Detaining Uyghurs," *Citizen*, December 31, 2019, <https://www.citizen.co.za/news/news-world/2223188/experts-shoot-down-claims-of-china-detaining-uyghurs>; and Stephen Ndegwa, "Kenya Joins in Marking CPC's Centenary," *Star* (Kenya), June 25, 2021, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/world/2021-06-25-kenya-joins-in-marking-cpcs-centenary>.

⁶⁷ Ikenna Emewu, "Amb. Aminu Wali Lauds CPC for China's Advancement," Africa China Press Centre, April 14, 2021, <https://africachinapresscentre.org/2021/04/14/amb-aminu-wali-lauds-cpc-for-chinas-advancement>.

⁶⁸ See <https://twitter.com/TZEmbassyCN/status/1470355845263228928>.

⁶⁹ See, for example, State Council Information Office (PRC), *China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals* (Beijing, November 2021), http://www.news.cn/english/2021-11/26/c_1310333813.htm.

⁷⁰ A list of Confucius Institutes around the world is available from DigMandarin, "Confucius Institutes Around the World—2021," <https://www.digmandarin.com/confucius-institutes-around-the-world.html>.

⁷¹ See, for example, "China to Build USD 33m Science College to Eritrea," *TesfaNews*, July 1, 2014, <https://tesfanews.net/china-to-build-usd-33m-science-college-to-eritrea>.

⁷² "Sierra Leone News: Ambassador Kuang Launches SISLAA," *Awoko*, August 22, 2013, <https://awokonewspaper.sl/sierra-leone-news-ambassador-kuang-launches-sislaa>.

serve other purposes, they are viewed as an important aspect of international liaison work and of efforts to cultivate the next generation of foreign friends.

As part of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the Sino-Africa Joint Research and Exchange Program was established in 2010 “to consolidate the foundation of public support for China-Africa friendship and deepen the new type of China-Africa strategic partnership under the new situation.”⁷³ The China-Africa Think Tank Forum, another forum under the FOCAC umbrella, was launched in 2011 and has been meeting annually.⁷⁴

Aside from these initiatives, the Chinese government also funds or otherwise supports centers for studying China-Africa relations in a positive light. One such example is the China-Africa Center at the Africa Policy Institute in Nairobi. While its website does not state the source, the center features the logos of the Chinese embassy, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies.⁷⁵ The University of Johannesburg also hosts a Center for Africa-China Studies in cooperation with Nanjing Tech University, in addition to a Confucius Institute.

The Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania describes its mission as “to deepen knowledge on socio-economic development processes in Africa and China *as a basis for a mutually beneficial relationship*” (italics added).⁷⁶ The center lists as one of its objectives “to promote Chinese advisory services to Tanzania’s key Ministries as a way of influencing development policies and strategies.”⁷⁷ The website links to the Chinese embassy, and the Chinese ambassador to Tanzania was present when the center was established in 2018 and also serves as an adviser. Although funding sources are not disclosed on the website, pictures from the launch ceremony suggest that the center is at least partially funded by Chinese company Lenovo.⁷⁸

The Centre for China Studies in Abuja, Nigeria, introduces itself as “an independent research think tank focused on the study of China, her phenomenal rise and important engagement with Africa.”⁷⁹ Its director, Charles Onunaiju, published a piece on the center’s website that closely accompanied China’s campaign against the Biden administration’s Summit for Democracy.⁸⁰ He is also often cited in official Chinese party-state media as a Nigerian expert praising China’s “whole-process democracy” and the CCP’s “landmark and unprecedented achievements.”⁸¹

⁷³ “China-Africa Joint Research and Exchange Program Officially Launched,” Embassy of the PRC in Montenegro, March 31, 2010, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceme//mon/xwdt/t676919.htm>.

⁷⁴ “Think Tanks Forum Calls for Closer China-Africa Cooperation,” Xinhua, October 22, 2021, http://www.news.cn/english/2021-10/22/c_1310262037.htm.

⁷⁵ See the official website at <http://china-africa.africapi.org/about-us>.

⁷⁶ See the official website at <https://www.udsm.ac.tz/web/index.php/centres/chinese>.

⁷⁷ See the official website at <https://www.udsm.ac.tz/web/index.php/centres/chinese/objectives>.

⁷⁸ See the official website at <https://www.udsm.ac.tz/web/index.php/centres/chinese/launching-of-ccs3>.

⁷⁹ See the official website at <https://ccs-ng.org>.

⁸⁰ Charles Onunaiju, “Democracy: Substance, Rhetoric and Abstractions,” Centre for China Studies (Nigeria), <https://ccs-ng.org/democracy-substance-rhetoric-and-abstractions-by-charles-onunaiju>.

⁸¹ See, for example, “Interview: China’s Whole-Process Democracy a Major Achievement of Global Governance—Nigerian Expert,” Xinhua, August 10, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2021-08/10/c_1310119269.htm.

Conclusion: Are United Front Activities Working?

Assessing the effectiveness of united front work is tricky. Most analysts in China conclude that the PRC has increased its discourse power and influence in Africa and elsewhere.⁸² In part, this proclamation of success may be due to the general assessment that the world is undergoing “great changes unseen in a century” and that China is rising while the West is declining.⁸³ The effectiveness of united front and related work may sometimes be exaggerated in Chinese sources, as both PRC-based and Africa-based organizations need to show that their work has an impact. Similarly, it is difficult to gauge how much influence on actual political decisions united front or other organizations have (or do not have) behind closed doors. As explained earlier, united front and related political influence work goes hand in hand with concrete or promised economic benefits offered by the PRC. Disentangling these incentives from the effects of such work is next to impossible. Nonetheless, it is indisputable that united front work plays a central part in the CCP’s strategy for the continent and that it has delivered on some fronts. Rather than provide a definitive assessment of whether united front work is succeeding in sub-Saharan Africa, this concluding section will consider different ways to assess impact and how to best approach this question in future studies.

One way to assess impact could be by looking at how successful the CCP has been in bringing key African elites into its network of friends and persuading them to make statements praising China. In this regard, the CCP has arguably been quite successful in most, and perhaps all, African countries. It has built solid networks in many countries between local elites and both Africa-based and PRC-based Chinese citizens, businesses, and organizations. The CCP regularly receives verbal support from African countries in its initiatives in international forums and has cultivated friends in almost all African countries at fairly high levels on whom it can lean. One could also try to assess to what extent these friendships influence political decision-making in African countries. However, such information about the role of behind-the-scenes lobbying in the decision-making process, as well as potential cases of corruption (which is often alleged), rarely becomes publicly available and would require in-depth interviews with reliable government insiders.

Another way to evaluate the success of united front work, and especially the broader attempts to create narratives favorable to China and the CCP, would be to look at survey data for how people in sub-Saharan Africa view China, its political model, and the impact of China’s presence in their country. Yet, compared with other regions of the world, relatively little data is available on China’s popularity in Africa.

One source of information is survey research conducted by Afrobarometer in a number of African countries in 2014–15 and 2019–20. Polling included questions about whether China’s political and economic influence was viewed positively or negatively, whether China offered a good model of development, and whether people believed that their country had borrowed too much money from China. For most of the countries polled, China’s influence was still seen as positive but declining.⁸⁴ For instance, in Botswana, the percentage of people who viewed China’s influence as positive declined from 75% in 2015 to 57% in 2020; in Namibia, it declined from 66% to 48%;

⁸² See, for example, Yuan Wu, “Shenhua Zhong Fei guanxi xu jiaqiang huayuquan jianshe” [Deepening China-Africa Ties Requires Strengthening the Construction of Discourse Power], December 4, 2017, https://www.sohu.com/a/208318340_618422. To compare these assessments with the more critical assessments a few years prior, see Wang, “Zhongguo zai Feizhou huayu de goujian yu chuanbo.”

⁸³ Rush Doshi, “The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order,” Brookings Institution, August 2, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-long-game-chinas-grand-strategy-to-displace-american-order>.

⁸⁴ Sanny and Selormey, “Africans Regard China’s Influence as Significant and Positive, but Slipping.”

and in Kenya, it declined from 76% to 65%. In three countries polled, China's influence was seen as very positive and rising: 80% in Burkina Faso, 85% in Cabo Verde, and 80% in Guinea.⁸⁵ However, data only exists for eighteen African countries, and there is no data that could establish a causal link between how people view China and the quality or quantity of the CCP's united front work in a country.

In several countries where China has (or until recently had) elite support, it faces regular popular backlash, such as in the DRC, Ghana, and Zambia.⁸⁶ Labor conflicts, incidents of racism, interventions of top politicians on behalf of Chinese companies, and perceived corruption have caused protests. In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni's intervention in a public bidding contest to award a project to a Chinese company caused concern.⁸⁷ In Kenya, there have been protests against a mandate to move cargo by rail on the China-financed railway line between Mombasa and Nairobi.⁸⁸

Some of the activities pursued through united front groups are geared toward getting Chinese businesses to adhere to local laws and regulations and thereby preventing scandals that give China and Chinese businesses a bad reputation in Africa. Overall, however, efforts to improve China's image with the general population do not seem to be very successful in countries where China is unpopular. In part, this may be because the CCP's focus is on winning top-level support in international forums and high-level approval for Chinese projects in the country, as well as because popular opposition has not impeded many of the political and economic goals pursued by the CCP in Africa. In part, it could be because dealing with general popular discontent is difficult without changing actions, and the CCP simply does not have a good playbook for addressing genuine popular concerns. The party is more likely to claim that local prejudice against China is the outcome of negative reporting by the Western press.

Future studies of united front work are thus needed to better understand how elite networks translate into concrete policy results as well as how particular united front activities and the narratives that the CCP tries to create are received across the continent.

The United States and its allies should invest in research on united front activities as well as in the public perception of the PRC and the key narratives it promotes on the African continent. Any such research should account for the different circumstances by country and region. The need and means to counter united front activities and political influence operations will vary according to local circumstances. At the local elite level, the PRC often gains credit simply for showing up. Accordingly, one relatively easy way to counter united front activities at this level is to meet with African counterparts, especially in democratic countries and where this is possible without siding with an autocratic government against the local population. At the same time, any attempt to counter united front work and political influence operations needs to address economic and infrastructure needs of countries in sub-Saharan Africa that are currently met by the PRC.

⁸⁵ Sanny and Selormey, "Africans Regard China's Influence as Significant and Positive, but Slipping."

⁸⁶ Under the previous government, China enjoyed strong support; it is still uncertain how the new government under Hakainde Hichilema will position itself.

⁸⁷ Rodney Muhumuza, "As China Builds Up Africa, Some in Uganda Warn of Trouble," Associated Press, October 24, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/uganda-financial-markets-global-trade-international-news-hong-kong-62ab13badad04dd7b38a69b69eac61d1>.

⁸⁸ Duncan Miriri, "Kenya Forcing Importers to Use Costly New Chinese Railway, Businessmen Say," Reuters, December 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-railways-idUSKBN1Y70LT>.

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Party-to-Party Relations and Political Training

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay examines the party-to-party relations that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has established with African political groupings in sub-Saharan Africa and shows how these relations have allowed the CCP to enhance its political influence there.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Although under Mao Zedong the CCP developed relations with other Communist parties or left-wing liberation movements, since the beginning of the reform era, and especially the 1990s, it has embarked on a catch-all strategy. As elsewhere, in sub-Saharan Africa the CCP has focused on ruling rather than opposition parties and countries that matter for the Chinese economy. For that purpose, the CCP International Liaison Department (CCP-ILD), the bureaucracy in charge of this task, has intensified its relations with sub-Saharan African political parties, inviting local party officials to make “study tours,” attend seminars, or follow training sessions in China more often. The CCP-ILD’s mission and objectives are to play a role complementary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, facilitating the access of the Chinese government (or party-state) to the political elites and giving it more opportunities to influence and eventually “capture” them. Officially, the CCP-ILD’s aim is not to export the “China model” as such, but rather to promote the Chinese “form” of governance, economic organization, and “democracy.” It is thus part of China’s ambition to enhance its soft power and neutralize as much as possible what it perceives as “hostile forces.” The CCP-ILD’s objective is also to convince more African countries to support its approach to the international order and international norms.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Leveraging its growing economic and diplomatic influence in sub-Saharan Africa, China has developed party-to-party relations in the region without much difficulty.
- While local parties are unlikely to import the China model as a whole, their officials are often inclined to borrow some of China’s governance formula, particularly regarding the CCP’s own organization and the management of public companies, and to refrain from criticizing China.
- There are limits to Chinese influence as African political parties are open to other countries, such as the U.S. or European nations, and ideologies, particularly Islam and liberalism (i.e., political liberties, checks and balances, fair elections, and multiparty democracy).

While the literature on China-Africa relations has grown rapidly, the study of party-to-party relations between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and African political groupings has for a long time been neglected.¹ Yet these relations are more and more important. They have steadily developed since the beginning of the reform era, and especially since the early 2000s. The CCP's party-to-party relations are managed by the CCP International Liaison Department (CCP-ILD).²

This essay argues that these relations have allowed China to be equipped not only with an additional channel of communication with African governments but also with a convenient mechanism to reach out to the local political elites to influence and sometimes “capture” them—in other words, make them highly dependent on China and the Chinese government's interests. Party-to-party relations have also facilitated the CCP's plan to promote, if not its “model,” at least its governance methods and own approach to “democracy.” Yet there are limits to the CCP's political influence in Africa. Despite the large variety of polities that it includes, the continent is ideologically closer to the West.

The first section will draw a general map of the CCP's party-to-party relations in Africa. The essay will then present the major methods used by the CCP-ILD to strengthen these links, such as visits, study tours, seminars, and training sessions. Finally, it will evaluate the impact of party-to-party relations on China-Africa relations. The scope of this analysis is limited to sub-Saharan Africa.

The CCP and Sub-Saharan Africa: A General Map

A Brief History

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, China was keen to develop relations with as many newly independent African countries as possible, provided that they cut diplomatic links with Taiwan. In contrast, until Mao Zedong's death in 1976, the CCP established party-to-party relations only with African Communist parties and left-leaning (often violent) liberation movements, sometimes even arming them. While in some cases these early party-to-party relations paved the way to diplomatic normalization, after the outbreak of the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute the CCP kept or established relations solely with the organizations that were not openly aligned with Moscow.³ For instance, in Angola's civil war that took place before and after this country's independence in 1975, the CCP supported the two liberation movements—the National Liberation Front of Angola (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola, or FNLA) backed by Zairean president Mobutu Sese Seko and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola, or UNITA) backed by white South Africa—that were fighting

¹ There are a few exceptions: see, for example, David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa. A Century of Engagement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), chap. 3; 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): 723–33; and Lina Benabdallah, “Power or Influence? Making Sense of China's Evolving Party-to-Party Diplomacy in Africa,” *African Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3/4 (2020): 94–114. In addition, Christine Hackenesch and Julia Bader presented at a China-Africa conference held in Brussels in June 2018 a paper that has not yet been published titled “Birds of a Feather Flock Together: The Chinese Communist Party Meets African Political Parties.”

² Since 1995, the official English translation of “Zhonggong zhongyang duiwai lianluo bu” has been “International Department, Central Committee of the CCP.” However, I think that it is more accurate to stick to the previous translation, which is closer to the Chinese version. See the official website of the CCP-ILD, <https://www.idcpc.org.cn>.

³ Joshua Eisenman, “Comrades-in-Arms: The Chinese Communist Party's Relations with African Political Organizations in the Mao Era, 1949–76,” *Cold War History* 18, no. 4 (2018): 429–45.

against the pro-Soviet and Cuba-supported People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, or MPLA).

Since the beginning of the reform era and the subsequent mending of the Sino-Soviet rift, the CCP has gradually changed its strategy, trying to develop contacts with all the political parties that are ready to set up relations with it. Of course, the CCP has privileged establishing relations with ruling parties and has been cautious in setting up links with opposition parties in order not to disrupt its relations with the former. But there has been an obvious change of strategy. In sub-Saharan Africa, this new strategy has become much stronger and more visible since the late 1990s when China embarked on a more active African policy aimed at sidelining Taiwan, better securing oil and mineral resources, and enhancing its overall influence on the continent.

Since 1951, the CCP's party-to-party relations have been managed by the CCP-ILD. The department is a vast bureaucracy that not only complements the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' diplomatic work, particularly in difficult countries (such as North Korea) or on sensitive issues (such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), but also plays a specific role in strengthening China's political influence around the globe.⁴ The CCP-ILD includes eight bureaus (*ju*), among them Bureau III in charge of West Asia and North Africa and Bureau IV in charge of sub-Saharan Africa.⁵

A Catch-all Strategy

In the last 30 years, the CCP has adopted a catch-all strategy aimed at reaching out to every meaningful political force. Today, the CCP-ILD has established relations with more than 600 political parties and organizations around the world in over 160 countries and territories.⁶ It is most active in Asia, followed by Europe and Africa.⁷ In Africa as a whole (including North Africa), it has set up relations with 110 political parties in 51 countries (out of 54), according to the white paper issued by the Chinese government at the end of the 8th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) held in Dakar in November 2021.⁸ This means that only 3 African countries' political parties (5, if one includes Western Sahara and Somaliland) have remained out of the reach of the CCP.

This white paper underscores four important features of the CCP-ILD's current strategy. First, it shows that today the CCP is totally agnostic in terms of a party's political inclinations and political regime, establishing relations with political parties both in authoritarian countries and in democracies. Second, while for a long time the CCP concentrated on establishing relations with ruling parties, this sheer number indicates a willingness to reach out to both smaller members of governing coalitions and opposition parties. Third, this number also highlights how much Africa is a priority target of the CCP: 18% of the political parties and 32% of the territories with which the CCP entertains relations are located on the continent. Fourth, the number of African political parties with which the CCP has set up relations has rapidly increased. In 2018 (as in 2012), the

⁴ David Shambaugh, "China's 'Quiet Diplomacy': The International Department of the Chinese Communist Party," *China: An International Journal* 5, no. 1 (2007): 26–54; and David Gitter and Julia Bowie, "The Chinese Communist Party International Department: Advancing 'One China' Behind the Scenes," Global Taiwan Institute, Global Taiwan Brief, September 28, 2016, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2016/09/28-gtb-1-2>.

⁵ "Office Lineup," CCP-ILD, <https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/Profile/lineup/index.html>.

⁶ "Zhonglianbu jianjie" [Brief Presentation of the Department], CCP-ILD, <https://www.idcpc.org.cn/zbj/wbjj>.

⁷ Hackenesch and Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence," 724.

⁸ "Full Text: China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals," Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), November 29, 2021, http://focac.org.cn/focacdakar/eng/pthd_1/202111/t20211129_10458125.htm.

number was 81 (out of a total of 400), compared to 40 in 1988.⁹ The CCP-ILD's activism has also contributed to the success of FOCAC meetings since the forum was launched in 2000, particularly in poaching African countries that had diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

Of course, the CCP remains inclined in sub-Saharan Africa to develop closer relations with groupings that share a similar approach to power and politics, such as the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa (despite its closer ties with Moscow during the Cold War), the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia, the Liberation Front of Mozambique (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, or FRELIMO) in Mozambique, the Party of the Revolution (Chama Cha Mapinduzi, or CCM) in Tanzania, the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in Zimbabwe, the MPLA (after China normalized relations with Angola in 1983), the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in Ethiopia, and the EPRDF's successor, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party since 2019.¹⁰ While all these countries regularly organize multiparty elections, these parties have been dominant since independence, or in the case of South Africa, since the end of apartheid.

The CCP also continues to entertain relations with African Communist parties, whatever their size and their relationship with their country's government. But this can lead to delicate situations, especially in countries where the CCP has set up relations with the ruling party (as in Benin or Burkina Faso). Managing such situations is easier in countries where both parties are part of the government coalition, as in South Africa—although there the ANC is now clearly more important for Beijing than the smaller South African Communist Party.

Overall, the CCP-ILD still appears to be giving priority to developing relations with ruling parties. Studies that have attempted to calculate the frequency of both Chinese CCP-ILD visits to Africa and African political parties' visits to China have confirmed this propensity.¹¹ For example, in 2021 alone, according to its website, the CCP-ILD held online seminars or video talks with the ruling party leaders of Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Angola, South Sudan, Madagascar, Benin, and Gabon.¹²

Studies have also shown that the CCP-ILD focuses on developing party-to-party relations in countries that are useful for China's economic development, including South Africa (ores, iron, copper, diamonds, and nickel), Angola (oil), Congo (oil), Mozambique (timber), Sudan (oil) and after 2011 South Sudan (where 80% of the oil is concentrated), and Zambia (copper).¹³ Concentrating on its priority interests, the CCP has not been shy to set up relations with Islamic parties. The best example was probably Omar al-Bashir's National Congress Party, a grouping established by former Muslim Brotherhood student activists that was Sudan's ruling party from

⁹ "Zhonggong yu Feizhou zhengdang jiaowang tuidong Zhong Fei wushi hezuo" [The Exchanges between the CCP and African Political Parties Promote China-Africa Pragmatic Cooperation], China News Service, July 19, 2012, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2012/07-19/4045462.shtml>; and Benabdallah, "Power or Influence?" 99. In 2012 the CCP also maintained relations with 69 political parties in 42 sub-Saharan African countries. See "Zhonglianbu: Zhong Fei dangji jiaowang zheng jinru yige xin de fazhan jieduan" [Liaison Department of the CCP Central Committee: China-Africa Party-to-Party Exchanges Are Entering a New Stage of Development], CCP-ILD, November 5, 2012, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/18/n/2012/1105/c350833-19504227.html>.

¹⁰ Hackenesch and Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence," 727–28.

¹¹ Hackenesch and Bader, "Birds of a Feather Flock Together."

¹² See CCP-ILD, January 14, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202101/t20210114_141197.html; CCP-ILD, April 12, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202104/t20210413_145587.html; CCP-ILD, January 26, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202101/t20210128_141296.html; CCP-ILD, April 27, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202104/t20210428_145757.html; CCP-ILD, April 27, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202104/t20210427_145750.html; CCP-ILD, June 3, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202106/t20210604_146119.html; and CCP-ILD, June 8, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202106/t20210609_146134.html.

¹³ Hackenesch and Bader, "Birds of a Feather Flock Together."

1998 to the 2018–19 revolution and institutionalized *sharia* (Islamic law) in the country.¹⁴ But developing party-to-party relations is not always a priority or even possible since in some African countries political parties are weak and undergoing constant metamorphosis. This is the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where Beijing has established a strong partnership with Joseph Kabila and then Félix Tshisekedi without investing much time and energy in establishing relations with the country's main political parties.

Nonetheless, in the last two decades, particularly since Xi Jinping came to power, the CCP has been much keener to diversify and expand its network of party relations. For example, in November 2017 the CCP-ILD organized a four-day high-level dialogue in Beijing with representatives from three hundred foreign political parties, showing how many resources Chinese authorities are ready to invest to cultivate such relations. In his opening speech to the conference, using Marxist language, Xi first declared: “We will draw on our own practices to explore the law governing the evolution of human society, and share with other countries what we have learned. We do not want to ‘import’ models from other countries, nor do we want to ‘export’ the Chinese model, still less will we ask other countries to copy the Chinese practice.” Then, he added: “Over the next five years, the CPC [Communist Party of China] will invite political parties from around the world to send to China exchange visitors totaling 15,000 for more interactions. We propose that the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting be institutionalized as a platform for high-level political dialogue with broad representation and international influence.”¹⁵

While the CCP has repeatedly insisted that it does not have the intention to export its model, the party clearly wants to increase its influence. Since Xi's speech, developing party-to-party relations has become even a higher priority. Swiftly, the whole CCP system and its ILD have implemented this new plan, giving a lot of attention to Africa. A year after this massive meeting, in July 2018 the CCP-ILD organized in Tanzania the Africa session of this conference. Around 40 parties from 40 African countries took part. Song Tao, CCP-ILD director, insisted on the importance for each party and country, even while cooperating with one another, to follow its own path. This is a recurrent Chinese theme.¹⁶

While the Covid-19 pandemic has suspended all African political party delegations to China, it has not stopped the CCP-ILD's activities, most of which have moved online. In early July 2021, in the immediate aftermath of the celebrations surrounding the one-hundredth anniversary of the CCP, China organized another CCP and World Political Parties Summit. Although virtual, it gathered five hundred leaders and ten thousand representatives from over 160 countries and territories. Titled “For the People's Wellbeing: The Responsibility of Political Parties,” the summit was opened by Xi, who delivered a speech elaborating on this theme as well as the “common destiny of mankind.” The African leaders who hailed this event included South African president

¹⁴ The CCP set up relations with al-Bashir's Sudan National Congress Party in 2002 and developed strong links with it until the party was banned in November 2019. See “Zhengdang tiaoliu” [Political Parties Exchanges], Embassy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Sudan, http://sd.china-embassy.org/chn/zsgx/jmhzt/201202/t20120222_7274789.htm.

¹⁵ Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Build a Better World” (keynote address, Beijing, December 1, 2017), available at <https://yizhiyoudao.kuaizhan.com/58/64/p6855270875a5bb>.

¹⁶ The Africa session was held in Tanzania in July 2018. See “Zhongguo Gongchandang yu shejie zhengdang gaoceng duihua hui Feizhou zhuanli hui zai Tansangniya kaimu Song Tao chuxi bing jianghua” [The African Symposium of the High-Level Dialogue between the Chinese Communist Party and the World Political Parties Opens in Tanzania: Song Tao Attended and Delivered a Speech], Xinhua, July 18, 2018, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2018/0718/c117005-30154178.html>.

Cyril Ramaphosa, Namibian president Hage Geingob, and Congolese president Denis Sassou Nguesso, three heads of state who also chair their country's ruling party.¹⁷

Occasionally, the CCP needs to adapt to changing situations. It developed a close relationship with Ethiopia's ruling EPRDF after it took power in 1991, training many of its cadres.¹⁸ However, after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed dissolved the EPRDF in December 2019 and merged it with three other parties to form the Prosperity Party, the CCP established relations with the new party. Choosing its camp in the looming Ethiopian civil war, the CCP went even further by elevating its relations with the Prosperity Party into a strategic partnership.¹⁹

The CCP-ILD's activities, moreover, are not just limited to political parties. It also reaches out to other types of African organizations, such as media, think tanks, and NGOs. For example, in November 2021, it held a virtual seminar with representatives from 30 media, think tanks, and NGOs from six African countries, including South Africa and Zimbabwe. Opening this seminar, the CCP-ILD assistant director, Li Mingxiang, asked African media to act as a bridge between African public opinion and China and, echoing Xi's well-known slogan, help both sides build a "Sino-African community of shared future" (*ZhongFei mingyun gongtongti*).²⁰ Building a Sino-African community with a shared future is a strategic objective that was established as early as 2018 and presented just before the 8th FOCAC in Dakar. It is "characterized by joint responsibility, win-win cooperation, happiness for all, cultural prosperity, common security, and harmony between humanity and nature."²¹

Finally, it appears that the CCP does not leave any stone unturned. For instance, in June 2021, Li Mingxiang held a video call with Gambia's National People's Party chairman Dembo Bojang to establish relations. Although holding only four seats in the country's National Assembly, the party was created by current president Adama Barrow in 2019.²²

To put the preceding overview of the CCP's activities in a comparative context, no other political party, let alone party-state, has established such a dense network of party-to-party relations in Africa (and probably the world). What does this mean for the CCP and China? How have these relations been fleshed out? What is their purpose? The next section will address these questions.

The CCP-ILD's Objectives and *Modus Operandi* in Africa

In Africa, as in the rest of the world, in developing party-to-party relations with other political parties, the CCP-ILD is pursuing several key objectives: (1) establishing an additional channel of communication with African political elites, (2) reaching out and better influencing African political elites, (3) contributing to taking control of or at least dominating African

¹⁷ "Special Issue on CPC and World Political Parties Summit," *China Insight*, July 2021, <https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/chinainsight/202107/P020210726574927826141.pdf>.

¹⁸ Benabdallah, "Power or Influence?" 101.

¹⁹ "Ruling Parties of Ethiopia, China Vow Stronger Cooperation," Fana Broadcasting Corporation, November 17, 2021, <https://www.fanabc.com/english/ruling-parties-of-ethiopia-china-vow-stronger-cooperation>.

²⁰ "Li Mingxiang chuxi Feizhou guojia meiti zhiku yu mingjian zuzhi wangluo yantao bankai banshi" [Li Mingxiang Attends the Opening Ceremony of the Network Seminar of African Countries' Media Think Tanks and Civil Organizations], CCP-ILD, November 25, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202111/t20211126_147776.html.

²¹ State Council Information Office (PRC), *China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals* (Beijing, November 2021), <http://www.scio.gov.cn/m/zfbps/32832/Document/1716800/1716800.htm>. See also "Dakar Declaration of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation," December 3, 2021, http://www.fmccprc.gov.hk/eng/Topics/gjtz/202112/t20211203_10461779.htm.

²² CCP-ILD, April 15, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202104/t20210416_145629.html.

countries' narrative on China in rectifying "incorrect ideas" on the CCP and China,²³ and (4) leveraging Chinese economic development's "success story" to export the CCP's governance and administrative management systems.

Building on previous studies, this essay shows that the Chinese government and the CCP are not trying to export Communism or their polity as such. Instead, they use party-to-party relations to promote their own economic development strategy and governance methods, especially in terms of ruling party structures, administrative organization, public policies, management of public companies, market regulations, and social and public opinion control, as well as their own approach to international relations and international law (including on the law of the sea and Taiwan). They also propagate an anticolonial and often anti-Western discourse aimed at emphasizing South-South relations and legitimizing the Chinese one-party system. And in a more discreet and insidious way, while officially open to all forms of democracy, the Chinese government and CCP promote their own political system and criticize the weaknesses of "Western" democracy.

In order to reach these goals, the CCP-ILD has adopted the following *modus operandi*: (1) regularly send delegations to Africa to keep alive party-to-party relations, (2) invite African political parties' representatives, including young politicians, to make "study tours" in China, (3) organize seminars on various topics of common interest, (4) organize training sessions in Africa or China, particularly in CCP party schools, for African party officials on the same themes, and (5) provide supplies and equipment for African political parties. The following discussion examines each method.

Visits

Since the late 1990s, the CCP-ILD has regularly sent delegations to Africa. Its long-time director Wang Jiarui (2003–15) and his successor Song Tao have usually concentrated on the most important political parties, while the ILD deputy directors (four) and assistant directors (two) have taken turns following up on those visits or reaching out to smaller groupings in less meaningful countries. Already by 2012, ten provincial or ministerial CCP delegations visited Africa every year, while twenty African political party delegations traveled to China.²⁴ But the number of party-to-party contacts has rapidly increased since then, especially the meetings taking place in China, as CCP-ILD trips to Africa decreased between 2012 and 2015.²⁵ This means that the CCP and its ILD have invested many more resources in offering political parties around the world, and especially in Africa, free trips to China.

Nonetheless, other CCP officials do play a role in developing party-to-party relations, including the Chinese ambassadors based in Africa and senior CCP leaders. For instance, Chen Min'er—a Politburo member, the Chongqing party secretary, and the possible successor to Xi Jinping—visited Chad, Egypt, and Tunisia in June–July 2018.²⁶

²³ Gitter and Bowie, "The Chinese Communist Party International Department."

²⁴ "Zhonggong yu Feizhou zhengdang jiaowang tuidong Zhong Fei wushi hezuo."

²⁵ Hackenesch and Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence," 725–26; and Hackenesch and Bader, "Birds of a Feather Flock Together," 6–7. The decrease in trips to Africa was probably due to the anticorruption campaign in China.

²⁶ "Chen Min'er Leads CPC Delegation to Visit Chad, Egypt and Tunisia," CCP-ILD, June 21, 2018, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201806/t20180625_96923.html

Study Tours

Study tours are common and are usually free of charge for the African participants. The visit of 23 party cadres from several African countries, including Ghana, Rwanda, Namibia, and South Africa, to China in October 2019 was quite representative. Organized by the CCP-ILD and Renmin University of China, this visit included a meeting with CCP-ILD deputy director Qian Hongshan, lectures at Renmin University in Beijing, and a fieldtrip to Xin County in Henan Province, which President Xi had inspected a month earlier. The objective was to show China's poverty alleviation and economic development strategies and achievements. The ultimate goal was also to prove that China, in spite of its modernization, was still a developing country and, as a result, a natural ally of Africa.²⁷

Seminars

As discussed earlier, seminars have become one of the most convenient ways for the CCP-ILD to promote the party's top-down organization and strict discipline as well as China's methods of government. Some have even argued that the seminars are used to "export the authoritarian governance model of the CCP."²⁸ Here again, recent developments confirm the CCP's inclination to organize events with like-minded political parties, although it keeps trying to reach larger audiences.

For example, in September 2020 the CCP-ILD organized a virtual seminar with 50 mid- to senior-level officials of the Congolese Party of Labour on how "the ruling party can play a leadership role."²⁹ A year later, in June 2021, the CCP-ILD held an online seminar with an unspecified number of FRELIMO high-level cadres aimed at, among other things, "exchanging experience in governance."³⁰ And in October 2021, the CCP-ILD organized an online seminar with 80 cadres of the SWAPO, ANC, CCM, and ZANU-PF. Chaired by Qian Hongshan, the seminar was titled "Shaping the Future Together: Poverty Reduction and Development."³¹

The CCP-ILD holds seminars with a large variety of African political parties, adapting to their needs and priorities. Since 2015, it has more or less regularly organized a China-Africa "political theory" seminar. While the first seminar took place in Addis Ababa and was co-organized by the EPRDF, the second and third were held in China—in Chongqing (2016) and Beijing (2017).³² After a four-year suspension for unspecified reasons, the fourth seminar was held online in September 2021 around the theme "A Development Path That Meets National Conditions: The Exploration and Practice of Political Parties in China and Africa." Three hundred party officials from fourteen

²⁷ "Zongshuji shicha zhihou, Henan Xinxian ying laile Feizhou pengyou" [After the General Secretary's Inspection, Henan Xinxian Welcomed African Friends], CCP-ILD, December 4, 2019, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/wdzs/fhgg/201912/t20191216_113034.html.

²⁸ Jianli Yang, "Chinese Communist Party Trains African Leaders, Expanding Its Influence," *Providence*, July 30, 2021, <https://providencemag.com/2021/07/chinese-communist-party-trains-african-leaders-expanding-influence>.

²⁹ Eric Olander, "CCP 'Training Class' with Congo's Ruling Party Highlights Deepening Chinese Party-to-Party Engagement in Africa," China Africa Project, September 16, 2020, <https://chinaafricaproject.com/2020/09/16/ccp-training-class-with-congos-ruling-party-highlights-deepening-chinese-party-to-party-engagement-in-africa>.

³⁰ "Li Mingxiang chuxi Mosangbike jiefang zhenxian dang gaoji ganbu wangluo yantao bankai banshi" [Li Mingxiang Attended the Opening Ceremony of the Online Seminar for Senior Officials of the FRELIMO], CCP-ILD, June 11, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202106/t20210615_146183.html.

³¹ "Qian Hongshan shepin huijian 'Gongsu weilai: Jianpin yu fazhan—Feizhou zhengdang ganbu zhuanli yantaoban'" [Qian Hongshan Holds a Video Meeting Titled "Shaping the Future Together: Poverty Reduction and Development—Seminar for African Political Party Cadres"], CCP-ILD, October 28, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/lldt/202110/t20211029_147328.html.

³² "Dierjie Zhong Fei Zhengdang Lilun Yantaohui kaimu 15 ge Feizhou zhengdang canhui" [The 2nd China-Africa Political Party Theory Symposium Opens with the Participation of 15 African Political Parties], China News Service, October 14, 2016, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2016/10-14/8032249.shtml>.

countries, including Uganda, South Sudan, and South Africa, participated in the event.³³ Openly stating China's objective on this occasion, Song Tao declared: "In the spirit of seeking common ground while reserving differences, mutual respect, and mutual learning, the two sides should support each other on their respective development paths, continuously enhance their ability to seek happiness for the people, and promote the building of a China-Africa community with a shared future."³⁴

In general, these seminars tend to focus on one or several of the following themes: governance, poverty alleviation, Marxist thought, civil-military relations, organizational leadership, party organization, capacity building, bureaucracy management, government-media relations, internet censorship, and surveillance of opposition parties on social media platforms. In every case, the CCP-ILD officials or the invited Chinese experts communicate their own approach and methods. Speakers can give advice but stick to the principle of "noninterference," refraining from openly selling Chinese solutions (*fang'an*) even as they promote them.³⁵ In addition, CCP-ILD leaders have repeatedly claimed that their approach to capacity building and other issues is more democratic and less intrusive than the Western approach, be it American or European.³⁶

Training

Since the late 2000s and even more so since 2017, training has become the key feature of CCP-ILD outreach activities in Africa, as in the rest of the world. The training of African officials and party cadres has taken various forms. Usually, it includes a one- or two-week stay in a Chinese party school—the Central Party School in Beijing for the most senior officials and a provincial party school for the others. As for seminars, the content of the training is adapted to the needs of the trainees, depending on whether they come from a one-party polity or a democratic country.³⁷

Nevertheless, according to published information, the training sessions tend to concentrate on the same topics as the seminars, with more time to go into details and, as a result, influence the trainees. They also include subjects related to international relations, mainly aimed at justifying China's foreign policy, role in the United Nations, claims in the South China Sea or over Taiwan, and the human rights situation in Tibet, Xinjiang, and, more recently, Hong Kong.

The priority training targets of the CCP-ILD in Africa are well-known and are strategically chosen. They include, above all, the ANC.³⁸ Other priority targets have been the EPRDF in Ethiopia (or the new Prosperity Party since 2019) as well as the ruling parties of smaller countries that are important economic partners and oil suppliers, such as South Sudan.

What is striking about the relationship with the ANC is the density of training. Between 2008 and 2012, for instance, the party sent four batches of 56 members of its National Executive Committee to China to study "theories and practice of the ruling parties in China and in

³³ "Disijie Zhong Fei Zhengdang Lilun Yantaohui juxing" [The 4th China-Africa Party Theory Seminar Held], CCP-ILD, September 24, 2021, https://www.idcpc.org.cn/bzhd/wshd/202109/t20210924_147203.html.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Benabdallah, "Power or Influence?" 104.

³⁶ Yun Sun, "Political Party Training: China's Ideological Push in Africa?" Brookings Institution, July 5, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/07/05/political-party-training-chinas-ideological-push-in-africa>.

³⁷ Benabdallah, "Power or Influence?" 102.

³⁸ Ibid., 100.

South Africa.” Later, in 2015, another ANC delegation went to China to better understand how CCP grassroots and local party organs implement central party decisions and policies.³⁹

It appears that some of these training sessions have been initiated by the African side. For example, as early as 1994, the EPRDF sent senior delegations to Beijing to ask China for advice on Ethiopia’s development. The party later borrowed its cadre training system from the CCP after some of its officials had attended a training program at the Central Party School in Beijing in 2011. This program included topics such as party organization, ideology and propaganda, cadre education, and intraparty central-local relations. In another training program held in 2015, a group of EPRDF senior officials was familiarized with the methods used by the CCP to monitor, guide, and manage public opinion, from both technical and legal points of view. As a result, according to Yun Sun, the EPRDF then became the CCP’s “most eager students.”⁴⁰ Given that China has clearly sided with Abiy Ahmed in the Ethiopian civil war, it is likely that the CCP’s relation with the Prosperity Party will continue to deepen and include training programs.

Among the other African parties involved in CCP training programs since the late 2000s are South Sudan’s Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the SWAPO. Sudan’s National Congress Party was also among the parties targeted until it was banned in 2019.

Young African political leaders are an increasingly important target of CCP training. Between 2011 and 2015, China trained over 200 of them through the African Political Party Leaders training program under the China-Africa Young Leaders Forum.⁴¹ Another 1,000 young African leaders were invited to China for training between 2015 and 2018.⁴² Launched in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2011, the China-Africa Young Leaders Forum held its fourth session in Shenzhen in May 2018, gathering 70 young African politicians from 40 countries.⁴³ Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the fifth forum took place online on November 24, 2021, just after the Sixth Plenum of the CCP Central Committee. Including 200 representatives of 50 parties from 40 African countries and also attended by 30 African students studying at Beijing University, this meeting had the objective of listening to African participants’ views on the outcome of the recent Central Committee plenum, especially its resolution on the CCP’s history and achievements. The meeting also more broadly discussed China’s development experience and its relevance to Africa.⁴⁴ This illustrates how much the Chinese government is keen to influence young African elites’ views of the CCP’s most recent evolution and hopefully redress their possible misconceptions.

Some of the training programs are co-organized in China with the Council of African Political Parties (CAPP), a multilateral NGO gathering 47 African political parties based in Khartoum, Sudan.⁴⁵ Although it is unclear whether this type of cooperation has carried on after the political

³⁹ Sun, “Political Party Training.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Zhong Fei Qingnian Lingdaoren Luntao zhaokai: Zhonggong tuichu Sannian Qianren Jihua 1000 Feizhou qingnian zhengzhijia jiang huoyao fuhua (Tu)” [The China-Africa Youth Leaders Forum Was Held. The CCP Launched the Three-Year Thousand Talents Program and 1,000 Young African Politicians Will Be Invited to China (Photos)], FOCAC, March 30, 2015, http://www.focac.org/ljhy/dwjbjzzjh_1/hycb/201503/t20150330_8079670.htm.

⁴³ “Africa-China Young Leaders Forum Concludes in Shenzhen,” Xinhua, May 27, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/27/c_137210314.htm. The forum’s second session took place in Beijing in 2012 and the third in Tanzania in 2015. A three-year rhythm seems to have been adopted since then.

⁴⁴ “Feizhou zhengdang lingdaoren: Zhongguo Gongchandang shi women zhiguo lizheng linggan zhi yuan” [African Political Party Leaders: Chinese Communist Party Is the Source of Inspiration for Our Governance], *Nanfang Dushi Bao*, November 25, 2021, <https://m.mp.oeeee.com/a/BAAFRD000020211125627836.html>.

⁴⁵ “African Parties Leaders in a Training Program in China,” Council of African Political Parties, <http://africappc.net/en/?p=454>.

changes that have occurred in Sudan since December 2018, the relationship between the CAPP and the CCP has remained close.

Equipment

The CCP's inspired training of African party officials does not only take place in China. The party has more recently tried to influence official training programs in Africa itself. In July 2018, with the financial support of the CCP-ILD (\$40 million), six ruling parties of Southern Africa (the CCM, ANC, FRELIMO, MPLA, SWAPO, and ZANU-PF) laid the foundation for the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School in Kibaha, 40 kilometers outside Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's capital. In his congratulatory message sent on this occasion, Xi Jinping declared: "The CPC is willing to take this opportunity to enhance exchanges with political parties in Africa including the six parties and learn from each other, *so as to jointly promote the construction of a closer community with a shared future for China and Africa* and make contributions to advancing the lofty cause of peace and development for mankind" (italics added).⁴⁶ The school's construction was completed in February 2022, and then an inauguration ceremony took place. Tanzania's president and CCM chair Samia Suluhu Hassan and Chinese ambassador to Tanzania Chen Minjian presided over the event, and the chairs of the five other parties were also present.⁴⁷ On this occasion, Hassan declared: "We want our parties to have well-organised leaders, strong leaders who know their discipline and values, who will understand, manage and educate the community about our ideology."⁴⁸

While providing an additional occasion for the CCP to influence African political elites, this new school is also expected to consolidate China's influence in this part of the continent.⁴⁹ The larger question is, of course, whether all these efforts have borne fruit—whether through the CCP-ILD's activism, China has managed to enhance its political influence in sub-Saharan Africa.

The CCP in Africa: A Balance Sheet

It is clear that the CCP-ILD's various activities have all contributed to densifying China's relations with African political parties' elites and, as a result, governments and countries as a whole. The multiplication of interactions between CCP cadres, experts, and academics, on the one hand, and African political elites, on the other, has increased the opportunities for networking. This has particularly been the case for African party officials attending training sessions in the CCP's various party schools.⁵⁰ These interactions have also helped Beijing disseminate its own narrative about China and its history, political system, and economic success story.

Privileging African ruling and dominant parties and highlighting convergences with like-minded regimes, the CCP-ILD's activities in Africa have also contributed to "reinforcing the

⁴⁶ "Xi Congratulates Groundbreaking Ceremony of Julius Nyerere Leadership School," *China Daily*, July 16, 2018, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201807/16/WS5b4caf84a310796df4df6c01.html>.

⁴⁷ Jacob Mosenda, "Africa's Leadership Academy Inaugurated in Tanzania," *Citizen*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/africa-s-leadership-academy-inaugurated-in-tanzania-3727716>; and Bai Ziwei and Shi Yuanhao, "Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School Holds Inauguration Ceremony," *People's Daily*, March 4, 2022, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0304/c90000-9965681.html>.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Jevans Nyabiage, "China Opens Party School in Africa to Teach Its Model to Continent's Officials," *South China Morning Post*, February 26, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3168462/china-opens-party-school-africa-teach-its-model-continents>.

⁴⁹ "Leadership School for Six African Countries Launched in Tanzania," *Xinhua*, July 17, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-07/17/c_137329281.htm.

⁵⁰ Benabdallah, "Power or Influence?" 102.

authoritarian tendencies of some African political parties.”⁵¹ Yet, as discussed earlier, the CCP-ILD has embarked on a catch-all, inclusive strategy that has demonstrated enough flexibility to adapt to very different political environments. While the Chinese government has been concerned by the expansion of democracy in Africa,⁵² as well as by the recent political changes in some countries, such as Sudan and Ethiopia, it has adapted, instructing the CCP-ILD to adjust its actions to the new circumstances. For example, it established relations with the new ruling party in Ghana after the December 2020 election.⁵³ This is not the case everywhere, however. In Zambia, where China has a close relationship with ex-president Edgar Lungu’s Patriotic Front, the CCP has not yet set up relations with new president Haikainde Hichilema (elected in August 2021) and his United Party for National Development.⁵⁴

As a result, more (but not all) African countries side with China when it asks for support. For example, 25 out of the 53 countries supporting China’s crackdown in Hong Kong in 2020 are in Africa.⁵⁵ Similarly, in June 2021, 35 African governments (among 69 countries altogether) signed a joint statement initiated by Beijing opposing interference in China’s domestic affairs in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong.⁵⁶ The Covid-19 pandemic has further consolidated such support for China. The white paper issued at the 8th FOCAC in Dakar in November 2021 indicated that 69 political parties from 42 African countries had issued a joint statement that year with the CCP “calling on political parties across the world to join together in fighting COVID-19.” It added that 80 African state and political party leaders delivered 220 telegrams and letters of congratulation to the CCP on the occasion of its one-hundredth anniversary.⁵⁷ And in December 2021, just after Beijing had issued a new white paper titled *China: Democracy That Works*,⁵⁸ the CCP claimed that 355 political parties and social organizations from more than 140 countries had contacted the CCP-ILD to issue a “joint statement on independently exploring the road to democracy and working together to promote common development.”⁵⁹ It states in particular that democracy and development models are diverse; no model is applicable to all countries, and interference in other countries’ internal affairs in the name of democracy should be opposed. Although how many African political parties have signed this statement has not been reported, many of them have a good reason to endorse it.

⁵¹ Will Green, Leyton Nelson, and Brittney Washington, “China’s Engagement with Africa: Foundations for an Alternative Governance Regime,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, May 1, 2020, 5–7, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Chinas_Engagement_Africa.pdf.

⁵² This was especially the case in the late 1990s and early 2000s. See Zhong Weiyun, “Zhong Fei zhengdang guanxi zhuli Zhong Fei zhanlue huoban guanxi” [Sino-African Party Relations Support China-Africa Strategic Partnership], State Council Information Office (PRC), October 11, 2012, trans. available at http://news.china.com.cn/18da/2012-10/11/content_26757730.htm, quoted in Green et al., “China’s Engagement in Africa,” 5.

⁵³ For relations between the CCP and Ghana’s ruling New Patriotic Party, see “Chinese Ambassador to Ghana Underscores the Importance of Party Exchanges in Bilateral Relations,” *Beijing Review*, June 7, 2021, https://www.bjreview.com/World/202106/t20210608_800248939.html.

⁵⁴ The Chinese ambassador Li Jie has taken note of this important change. See “Li Jie dashi chuxi zai Zan Zhongzi qiye he jigou xianshang zuotanhui” [Ambassador Li Jie Attends Online Symposium for Chinese-Funded Enterprises and Institutions in Zambia], Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Zambia, October 15, 2021, http://zm.chineseembassy.org/sgzdxthxx/202110/t20211018_9588078.htm.

⁵⁵ Eric Olander, “The UN Human Rights Council Statement on Hong Kong Highlights Why African Countries Are Becoming Increasingly Important to China,” China Africa Project, July 6, 2020, <https://chinaafricaproject.com/2020/07/06/the-un-human-rights-council-statement-on-hong-kong-highlights-why-african-countries-are-becoming-increasingly-important-to-china>.

⁵⁶ “Joint Statement of 69 Countries at the Interactive Dialogue on High Commissioner’s Annual Report at the 47th Session of the Human Rights Council,” Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN Office in Geneva, June 22, 2021, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cegv/eng/dbdt/t1886467.htm>.

⁵⁷ “Full Text: China and Africa in the New Era.”

⁵⁸ The white paper is available at Xinhua, December 4, 2021, http://www.news.cn/english/2021-12/04/c_1310351231.htm.

⁵⁹ “Zhonggong Zhongyang Duiwai Lianluobu fabu ‘guanyu zizhu tansuo minzhu daolu, xieshou tuidong gongtong fazhan de lianhe shengming’” [The International Liaison Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Issued the “Joint Statement on Independently Exploring the Path of Democracy and Jointly Promoting Common Development”], *Lilun Zhongguo*, December 14, 2021, <http://www.theorychina.org/c/2021-12-14/1427392.shtml>.

All in all, in developing party-to-party relations, the CCP-ILD has helped the CCP neutralize any open criticism, let alone opposition, in Africa to its own rule. Today, it is unthinkable that any African country would dare join a resolution denouncing the human rights situation in China.

The CCP-ILD has also made China's development strategy, in which the Chinese government plays a crucial role, more attractive in many countries. It has done so by creating the impression among African elites that China has succeeded where they have failed or not yet achieved much. China's development and governance recipes have thus clearly become more popular and, as a result, more influential in Africa. More broadly, party-to-party relations have enhanced China's diplomatic influence.

Nonetheless, behind these public statements of support, the CCP's ideological and political influence in Africa is not without limits. First, it can be argued that the CCP-ILD's strategy has been successful mainly because of China's increasing economic and diplomatic footprint in Africa as well as the CCP's ability to mobilize sums of money to deepen its own political influence. Free study tours and trainings in China are part of this elite-capture strategy. In other words, money and largesse rather than ideology have brought Chinese and African elites closer to each other.

Second, the CCP has been able to stimulate relations and highlight convergences with like-minded regimes or parties. Nonetheless, in Africa, the CCP is competing with other ideological influences, such as Islam, as well as with political cultures inherited from both local traditions and long interaction with Europe. As a result of the latter, many countries still have democratic values. China may be popular among African elites, but so are the United States and other Western partners such as the European Union.⁶⁰ Moreover, by and large, African civil societies tend to prefer Western values to the CCP's Leninist principles and authoritarian political culture.

Finally, to date, the CCP has not even tried to persuade, let alone convinced, any African democracy, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Niger, Senegal, or even Tanzania or Zambia, which have always been close to China, to adopt a one-party system. On this issue, the CCP has remained flexible, precisely because of its catch-all strategy.

In sum, party-to-party relations have played their role in strengthening China's political influence in African countries and training their political elites, leading to a genuine elite capture in some countries (such as South Africa and South Sudan). Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether the CCP has succeeded in meeting all of its political objectives in Africa: sidelining the West, capturing the local political elites, influencing civil societies, and imposing its view of democracy.

⁶⁰ Edem Selormey, "Africans' Perceptions about China: A Sneak Peek from 18 Countries," Afrobarometer, September 3, 2020, https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/africa-china_relations-3sept20.pdf.

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China's Growing Police and Law-Enforcement Cooperation in Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay examines Sino-African cooperation on police, public security, and law enforcement as a growing area of Chinese political influence in Africa.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Most media reports about Sino-African police, public security, and law-enforcement cooperation focus on sensational stories like the public uproar that forced Zambia's police to decommission eight Chinese nationals it had recruited in December 2017. This led to rumors that China was opening police stations in Zambia, which were not true. Such stories fit into a wider pattern of commentary that lacks empirical evidence and undermines the quality of policy debates. Another issue is that most scholarly work on China's overseas security focuses on the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) while largely ignoring China's police and law-enforcement activities, which occur with much greater frequency. The empirical evidence suggests that China's external police and law-enforcement work occurs within the larger framework of its evolving security strategy as well as its overseas influence operations. They have grown sequentially with laws and policies permitting the overseas deployment of the Chinese armed forces. As far as actual tactics go, Sino-African activities in these areas form part of a "blended security" approach. Evidently, China is much more comfortable working with former national liberation movements, but it also cultivates countries that have traditionally been closer to the West or are politically neutral. In all these efforts, China focuses heavily on fostering a common language of security by promoting the uptake of shared norms and practices. China takes advantage of the fact that the structure and values of its policing systems share many characteristics with African police, law-enforcement, and intelligence organizations. These differ fundamentally from Western police models in many areas. As China's strategic engagement in Africa continues to increase, so too will its security activities, in which police and law enforcement can be expected to play a prominent, albeit less publicly visible, role.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- As China expands its security reach, more Chinese firms will respond positively to state incentives to relocate to Africa.
- China's desired position as a partner of choice will be strengthened as its influence in African security sectors becomes more impactful. This will likely intensify "strategic competition," particularly with the U.S., which is concerned about ceding its position as a preferred partner for Africa.
- China has a long history of legal cooperation in Africa, particularly on immigration, extradition, customs, investments, and trade disputes, and its influence in African legal sectors will increase alongside its law-enforcement engagement.

African countries offer China a friendly environment with significant room to maneuver to pursue its global ambitions. This is not the case in many parts of Asia, Europe, and North America, where negative sentiments toward China are more enduring. During the 8th Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit in Dakar, Senegal, in November 2021, Senegalese foreign minister Aïssata Tall Sall encouraged China to join the fight against terrorism in the Sahel.¹ This raised eyebrows amid reporting in the U.S. media claiming that China was eyeing a military facility on Africa's Atlantic coastline in addition to its current base in Djibouti.² African leaders have taken great care not to publicly welcome more foreign military engagement due to popular sensibilities. However, the Dakar summit plainly wanted to send a strong message that China was considered a serious security partner and player.

China, on the other hand, has security considerations of its own, which help explain its growing interest in police and law-enforcement work. Data provided by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences shows that 84% of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments are located in unstable countries.³ Indeed, the protection of overseas citizens and interests is an important foreign policy priority for China.

At the same time, executives of China's powerful state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are pushing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to adopt a more robust overseas posture. Over 35,000 Chinese SOEs operate overseas, holding assets worth around \$37 trillion.⁴ Africa plays host to over 10,000 Chinese firms, including around 2,000 SOEs.⁵ While the PLA is being pressed for a stronger role, its own internal critiques highlight several gaps that constrain it from accomplishing China's expanding foreign policy goals. In an essay on China's 2015 military strategy, Zhou Bo, an honorary fellow at the Academy of Military Science, notes that the Chinese military lacks the capabilities and experience to protect its overseas interests.⁶ China's only choice, in his view, is to enhance its interoperability through international cooperation.

Likewise, Yue Gang, former senior staffer of the PLA's Joint Staff Department, explains that China's military logistics are ill-suited to large-scale overseas operations, and its forward military presence is weak compared with that of the U.S. Navy, which is "deployed worldwide and capable of engaging in peacekeeping missions or wars in coastal regions."⁷

At the start of the latest phase of military reforms in 2014, General Secretary (and President) Xi Jinping ordered the PLA to conduct extensive self-assessments.⁸ Several concepts were coined

¹ David Coffey, "Senegal Calls on China to Intervene in Sahel Anti-Jihadist Operations," Radio France Internationale, November 29, 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20211129-senegal-calls-on-china-to-intervene-in-sahel-anti-jihadist-operations>.

² Joel Gehrke, "'They Want to Become a Superpower': African Port Links Could Make Chinese Access to Atlantic Inevitable," *Washington Examiner*, December 14, 2021, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/they-want-to-become-a-superpower-african-port-links-could-make-chinese-access-to-atlantic-inevitable>.

³ Chris Devonshire-Ellis, "84% of China's BRI Investments Are in Medium-High Risk Countries," Silk Road Briefing, July 2, 2020, <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2020/07/02/84-chinas-bri-investments-medium-high-risk-countries>.

⁴ Zhang Yuzhe and Tang Ziyi, "In Depth: Managing China's \$37 Trillion of Financial SOE Assets Easier Said Than Done," *Caixin Global*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2020-05-15/in-depth-managing-chinas-37-trillion-of-financial-soe-assets-easier-said-than-done-101554671.html>.

⁵ Phillip Carter III, Raymond Gilpin, and Paul Nantulya, "China in Africa: Opportunities, Challenges, and Options," in *China's Global Influence: Perspectives and Recommendations*, ed. Scott D. McDonald and Michael C. Burgoyne (Honolulu: Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2019), 105–12.

⁶ Zhou Bo, "Safeguarding China's Overseas Interests through Military Cooperation," *China-U.S. Focus*, June 26, 2015, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/safeguarding-chinas-overseas-interests-through-military-cooperation>.

⁷ Yue Gang, "PLA Must Protect China's Overseas Interests," *China Internet Information Center*, April 24, 2013, http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2013-04/24/content_28642897.htm.

⁸ Phillip C. Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 31–35.

to guide debates about the PLA's vulnerabilities and mitigation strategies, including the "Two Big Gaps" and "Two Inabilities," which refer to the discrepancy between (1) the level of China's military modernization compared with the requirements for national security and (2) the level of the world's advanced militaries, in terms of doctrine, organization, logistics, and training under realistic conditions.⁹ In other words, China must balance its ambitious and increasingly assertive national security strategy with caution, incremental engagements, a light military footprint, and a low profile.

Accordingly, since around 2013 when BRI was launched, China's leaders have turned to their police and law enforcement to fulfill external security demands, in part due to their aversion to putting military boots on the ground. This has corresponded with the expansion of Chinese security firms, which, according to law, operate within the Ministry of Public Security (MPS). This explains the larger context in which China's public security agencies are coming to the fore of China's security strategy in Africa. They relieve pressure to deploy the PLA more robustly, thereby also appeasing domestic constituencies, assist in securing complex interests, and help position China as a partner of choice.

This essay offers an analytic framework to better understand Sino-African police and law-enforcement interactions and their policy implications. First, it situates these engagements within China's security strategy and highlights the legal and policy frameworks governing China's overseas public security initiatives while identifying key Chinese motivations. The next section examines the typologies of engagement using South Africa and Kenya as primary case studies. These countries offer a reasonably solid picture of the tactics China uses to cultivate countries that share its revolutionary traditions, those that traditionally align with the West, or those that remain politically neutral. An overall assessment is then provided, along with African perspectives and future trends.

Main Findings

The Externalization of China's Public Security Has Evolved in Tandem with Its Law and Policy

In December 2015, China passed a counterterrorism law permitting the overseas deployment of both the PLA and People's Armed Police (PAP) with the express approval of the Central Military Commission (CMC).¹⁰ This was foreshadowed by a series of events, including attacks on Chinese along the \$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a major BRI node in South Asia. The PAP first appeared in Chinese defense white papers as early as 2002. Its roles were elaborated in the 2006 paper and fleshed out further in 2019.¹¹ That year it was brought under the CMC as part of the PLA, ending nearly three decades of dual leadership by the CMC and State Council.

China's Ministry of Public Security "supervises" all overseas police and law-enforcement cooperation initiatives. Media reports suggest that MPS staff are stationed at some Chinese missions. However, it remains unclear whether these deployments are on the scale of the FBI, which

⁹ Dennis J. Blasko, "The New PLA Joint Headquarters and Internal Assessments of PLA Capabilities," Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, June 21, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-new-pla-joint-headquarters-and-internal-assessments-of-pla-capabilities>.

¹⁰ "Unofficial Translation of the Counter-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China," U.S.-China Business Council, <https://www.uschina.org/china-hub/unofficial-translation-counter-terrorism-law-peoples-republic-china>.

¹¹ State Council Information Office (PRC), *China's National Defense in the New Era* (Beijing, July 2019), http://english.scio.gov.cn/2019-07/24/content_75026800.htm.

maintains 63 legal attaché offices internationally under its International Operations Division (6 in Africa). With MPS oversight, Chinese embassies monitor the day-to-day engagements, including police liaison, in-country training and capacity building, language training for local partners, and coordination with Chinese stakeholders.

The tactics China uses to cultivate law-enforcement partners go a step further than those it uses to build military relationships. By definition, law enforcement is much more intrusive and closely linked to internal security and domestic politics. Mindful of these sensitivities, China has focused all its social capital on fostering a “common language” on security with its partner agencies. This is part of what is called “security with Chinese characteristics”—sometimes described as “comprehensive national power with Chinese characteristics”—which is partly built around the idea of forging aligned partnerships in place of formal alliances. This concept also advances the proposition that pursuing Chinese interests can be a shared endeavor, not merely a Chinese imposition. In other words, if China can foster shared convictions, ideals, values, and practices and work toward building a “shared future” with its friends, then it can cultivate and nurture partners more easily.

China Pursues a “Blended Security” Approach and Prefers to Work with Former Liberation Movements but Also Cultivates Politically Neutral Countries

China sequences its public security activities with political and ideological work, building shared governance norms and trade, economic, and diplomatic activities.¹² This is consistent with the CCP’s long-standing principle of party supremacy over the state, the government, and armed forces. In terms of priorities, China shows a strong preference for partners that meet four basic criteria: (1) strong ideological affinities and social capital, (2) robust ranking in China’s “partnership diplomacy,” (3) regional clout in the African Union and United Nations, and (4) economic importance in terms of location, high-value Chinese investments, and size and political influence of resident Chinese communities.

However, China shows a strong bias toward working with former liberation movements, as they provide the familiarity, predictability, and dependability it needs to build comprehensive relations.¹³ Indeed, CCP-influenced-operations tend to be concentrated in such countries. The Former Liberation Movements (FLM) of Southern Africa, a regional grouping of the ruling parties of Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Tanzania, has hosted more high-level exchanges with China than has any other region.¹⁴ Between 2016 and 2018, there were 48 China-FLM political exchanges, compared with West, East, Central, and North Africa hosting 25, 11, 8, and 3 exchanges, respectively.¹⁵

Between 2000 and 2017, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe received more than 90% of their weaponry and police and paramilitary equipment from China.¹⁶

¹² Paul Nantulya, “China’s Blended Approach to Security in Africa,” Italian Institute for International Political Studies, July 29, 2021, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/chinas-blended-approach-security-africa-31216>.

¹³ Paul Nantulya, testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission hearing on “China’s Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests,” Washington, D.C., February 20, 2020.

¹⁴ Paul Nantulya, “Strategic Application of the Tao 道 of Soft Power: The Key to Understanding China’s Expanding Influence in Africa,” *African Review* 47 (2020): 481–529.

¹⁵ Lina Benabdallah, *Shaping the Future of Power: Knowledge Production and Network-Building in China-Africa Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 33–39.

¹⁶ Meia Nouwens, “The Evolving Nature of China’s Military Diplomacy: From Visits to Vaccines,” International Institute for Strategic Studies, May 10, 2021, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2021/05/china-military-diplomacy>.

All but one (Seychelles) have a strategic partnership with China. The Southern African Development Community (SADC), a grouping of the 14 Southern African countries, hosted 161 interactions with the PLA over the same period, consisting of naval visits, military drills, and senior leader meetings.¹⁷

SADC countries are also among the 21 African states that rank highly in China's five-tier partnership system. Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe enjoy "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" relations—the highest level China has with any country. South Africa (along with Algeria, Egypt, and Nigeria) is in the second-highest category, "strategic cooperative partnership" relations. At the third level ("strategic partnerships") are Angola, Botswana, and Zambia.¹⁸

In 2019, four of the top five destinations of Chinese FDI in Africa were in the SADC: Angola, the Congo, Mauritius, and South Africa.¹⁹ Angola and Zambia were among the top five countries for Chinese worker employment, while South Africa hosts the largest number of Chinese nationals in Africa. There are also major BRI projects in the SADC countries, including port developments in Angola, Mozambique, Madagascar, Namibia, South Africa, and Tanzania. The MPS has built multifaceted ties across the region, including with the SADC Secretariat in Gaborone, where its interests are overseen by a specially accredited ambassador, Wang Xuefeng, who is also China's ambassador to Botswana.

Chinese police cooperation with the SADC mainly covers the Southern African Standby Force Mechanism and Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Co-operation Organisation. Similar patterns of prioritization are evident outside the SADC in countries like Algeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda. Algeria and Egypt—China's oldest liberation movement partners in Africa—accounted for 54% of all Chinese weaponry and police supplies in North Africa between 2000 and 2017. In Algeria's case, these deliveries increased 46-fold during 2008–12 and 2013–17.²⁰ The creation of the Algeria-China Governance Capacity-Building Forum in 2015 brought together Algeria's Interior Ministry and China's Academy of Governance. Between 2015 and 2018 alone, it trained four hundred Algerian civil servants and public security officials to implement local government reforms, including within Algeria's national police force.²¹ Algeria's ruling National Liberation Front party has consistently ranked in the top five of the six hundred political parties with which the CCP maintains "fraternal exchanges."²²

China also cultivates those aspiring to style themselves as liberation movements like Kenya's ruling Jubilee Party, which has one of the most consequential partnerships with the MPS in Africa. Small Indian Ocean states like Comoros, Mauritius, Madagascar, and Seychelles have also seen heightened levels of Chinese police and law-enforcement engagement alongside strengthened party exchanges. So too have a growing number of countries in West Africa, like Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Senegal. Not to be left out are those facing international sanctions like

¹⁷ Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," Institute for National Strategic Studies, China Strategic Perspectives, no. 11, July 17, 2017.

¹⁸ Nantulya, testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.

¹⁹ All comparative data on Chinese FDI and other statistics in this section can be accessed on the China Africa Research Initiative website at <http://www.sais-cari.org/other-data>.

²⁰ Cullen S. Hendrix, "Arms and Influence? Chinese Arms Transfers to Africa in Context," Peterson Institute for International Economics, July 15, 2020, <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/arms-and-influence-chinese-arms-transfers-africa-context>.

²¹ "Algeria, China Hail Fruitful Cooperation in Governance Capacity Building," Xinhua, December 5, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2018-12/05/c_137651070.htm.

²² 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): 723–33.

Burundi, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and, more recently, Ethiopia. China offers these countries relief from international isolation, diplomatic legitimacy, and continued access to weaponry and police equipment. More broadly, this sends a message to countries with strained relations with the West that they can find a strong security partner in China.

China Focuses on Forging a “Common Language” on Public Security

African police and public security institutions are receptive to CCP political influence as their basic structures, ideas, and methods of work have similarities with their Chinese counterparts. First, they are centrally controlled under the executive branch and form part of the national security machinery, as is the case in China. Second, they borrow heavily from the military in terms of organization, ranks, leadership, and operations. Police jurisdictions are called “commands” and led by commanders. It is also common for police agencies to be supervised by military personnel and for soldiers and police officers to deploy into each other’s structures. Third, police agencies often have formal and informal links to elite politics and constitute part of the regime’s enforcement machinery. Many exhibit party loyalties and are usually implicated in situations of widespread human rights violations, making them some of the most feared, unaccountable, and distrusted institutions in Africa.

All of this is contrasted with decentralized models of policing where the national government has no control over police forces. The United States is a case in point. The idea of a “national police force” is technically prohibited in the constitution and antithetical to prevailing American norms. Police departments are controlled by state, local, and city authorities, all with their own rules, and are not part of the national security architecture.

Typologies of Engagement

South Africa

Like its peers around Africa, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) received some of its political and military training from the CCP during its armed struggle for independence. The two parties conducted regular exchanges on political theory and practice, participated in each other’s party congresses, and championed common ideological positions on international questions. Since 1998, cadres of the ANC’s 86-member National Executive Committee have been sent to China for exchanges in policy implementation, organizational development, and ideological work. This committee brings together South Africa’s top decision-makers.²³ An early outcome of these intensive exchanges was the establishment of the permanent South Africa–China Binational Commission in 2000.²⁴ In 2003, the cabinet-level South Africa–China Defense Committee was formed to handle defense cooperation. A mechanism for law-enforcement and police cooperation was added in 2010, bringing together South Africa’s Ministry of Police and China’s MPS.²⁵

²³ Martin Plaut, “Why Is the ANC Following the Example of the Chinese Communist Party?” *New Statesman*, January 6, 2015, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/01/why-anc-following-example-chinese-communist-party>.

²⁴ Bob Wekesa, “South Africa–China Relations at 20 Years, Part II: Retracing Economic Engagements,” Africa-China Reporting Project, November 22, 2017, <https://africachinareporting.com/south-africa-china-relations-at-20-years-part-ii-retracing-economic-engagements>.

²⁵ “South Africa and China Strengthen Police Cooperation,” South African Government, Press Release, May 30, 2011, <https://www.gov.za/south-africa-and-china-strengthen-police-cooperation>.

The binational commission is mirrored on the legislative side by a regional exchange mechanism established by South Africa's National Assembly and China's National People's Congress. Under this mechanism, South Africa's parliamentary committee on police regularly visits Chinese police schools and stations to study their police environment, and the Chinese side conducts reciprocal visits for similar purposes.²⁶ The record of hearings shows that ANC deputies have a deep admiration for China's policing operational practices, application of technology, and education and training.²⁷

Indeed, South Africa's Police Strategic Plan 2020–2025 draws heavily on Chinese models, including for community policing.²⁸ However, debates also show that South African lawmakers believe that the South African and Chinese political systems are worlds apart in terms of separation of powers, oversight, and human rights, values that are firmly embedded in South Africa's governance institutions. Lawmakers across the political divide blame South Africa's endemic crime on woefully low levels of professionalism, education, and tactical proficiency in the South African Police Service (SAPS). ANC parliamentarians believe that China offers the best model to curb these problems. China, for its part, has used its influence with the ANC to ensure that South Africa's security agenda includes protection of its interests.²⁹ This resonates with South African politicians given their country's position as the largest destination of Chinese FDI and their desire to position their party as a reliable friend of the CCP. Political pressure has also been exerted by South Africa's highly organized Chinese community, which engages directly with parliament, police agencies, and the ANC itself.³⁰

In 2014, Chinese language was introduced into the South African school curriculum. This training was extended to police recruits in 2015, starting with a pilot program for the elite Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (the Hawks) before expanding to other SAPS units in 2017.³¹

By 2020, SAPS departments around South Africa were participating in the program. The funding and logistics are provided by China's MPS, the Chinese embassy, Confucius Institutes, and Chinese community associations.³² However, the extent to which SAPS personnel now speak and understand Chinese is questionable, given the time it takes to learn the language, much less the culture. The initiative to broaden Chinese training has also encountered pushback, with the ANC-affiliated South African Democratic Teachers Union calling it “another form of colonialism.”³³

²⁶ Inter-South African and Chinese exchanges on policing can be found in the Parliamentary Monitoring Group database at <https://pmg.org.za>.

²⁷ Zakhele Mbhele, “What South Africa Can Learn from Policing in China,” *Daily Maverick*, October 20, 2017, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2017-10-20-what-south-africa-can-learn-from-policing-in-china>.

²⁸ South African Police Service, “Strategic Plan: South African Police Service 2020 to 2025,” March 2020, https://www.saps.gov.za/about/stratframework/strategic_plan/2020_2021/saps_strategic_plan_2020to2025.pdf.

²⁹ “Xi Says China Will Continue to Support Africa in Covid-19 Battle, Capacity Building,” *China Daily*, April 8, 2020, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/08/WS5e8ddea0a310e232631a4cda.html>.

³⁰ “Police Committee Meets Chinese Community Centre in Port Elizabeth to Discuss Safety Issues,” Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, Press Release, December 3, 2018, <https://www.parliament.gov.za/press-releases/police-committee-meets-chinese-community-centre-port-elizabeth-discuss-safety-issues>.

³¹ Sissy Cheung, “SA Hawks Picking Up Mandarin and Chinese Police Techniques,” *People's Daily*, March 23, 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0323/c98649-9034300.html>.

³² Deji Badmus, “South Africa Police Force Learns Mandarin,” CGTN, October 14, 2015, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2015/10/14/south-africa-police-force-learns-mandarin>.

³³ Bongani Nkosi, “Like It or Not, SA Schools Set to Teach Mandarin,” *Mail & Guardian*, August 12, 2015, <https://mg.co.za/article/2015-08-12-like-it-or-not-sa-schools-set-to-teach-mandarin>.

This reflects a growing sentiment among some Black South Africans who view ethnic Chinese South Africans and Chinese nationals as a new privileged class. One commentator called it “another slap in the face for African languages.”³⁴ Another wondered why the security of Chinese should be prioritized over other nationalities. “How many foreign nationals do we have that struggle with speaking English?” asked another. However, the government said the decision would equip security agencies to better respond to Chinese nationals who are perennially the targets of crime.

According to the police counselor Wang Zhigang, the public security attaché at the Chinese embassy, “South Africa’s security situation is very complicated and more Chinese are living and studying here and state-owned companies investing here. This is a big challenge for our SAPS colleagues, and a major reason why we host the Chinese language training.”³⁵ In October 2018, Counselor Wang and South African security leaders officiated at the opening of the 13th Chinese Community Policing Forum (CCPF) in Port Elizabeth.³⁶ This triggered a backlash, with some warning (incorrectly) that South Africa had “sold itself to the highest bidder” by setting up Chinese police stations in the country.³⁷ The Chinese embassy hit back, explaining that these forums were nongovernmental and conformed to SAPS procedures that allow the police and communities to establish such forums.³⁸ However, the Chinese government does support the CCPFs, which “facilitate cooperation with police through various services including language training” and are described in Chinese state-owned media as “overseas Chinese assistance centers”—a network of organizations in 39 countries around the world, including in Africa.³⁹ They fall under the State Council’s Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, supervised by the United Front Work Department.

More broadly, the close ties between South African policing and Chinese interests have reignited a long-running and highly explosive debate on the status of ethnic Chinese in South Africa’s complicated politics of race, class, and identity that are closely linked to perceptions of safety and security.

In 2008 a high court ruled that Chinese South Africans fell within the definition of “Black people,” who include Blacks, Indians, and others subject to discrimination during apartheid.⁴⁰ As a result of this landmark ruling, ethnic Chinese can benefit from state affirmative action policies aimed at undoing the effects of discrimination. The ruling unleashed an alarming level of anti-Chinese hostility that resurfaces whenever suspicions mount over Chinese people receiving preferential treatment.

However, relations remain strong at the official level. Chinese and South African security leaders conduct exchanges at least twice a year, with the most recent occurring before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019. In July, Chinese vice minister of public security Xu Ganlu led a team to South Africa to hold working meetings with the ANC secretary general, minister of police, and

³⁴ Russell H. Kaschula et al., “Teaching Mandarin in Schools Is Another Slap in the Face for African Languages,” *Conversation*, November 11, 2015, <https://theconversation.com/teaching-mandarin-in-schools-is-another-slap-in-the-face-for-african-languages-48505>.

³⁵ “Cape Town Officers Embark on Chinese Language Course,” CGTN Africa, YouTube video, April 20, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yX3hY1-N6WQ>.

³⁶ Matt Schrader, “Chinese Assistance Centers’ Grow United Front Work Department Global Presence,” Jamestown Foundation, January 5, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinese-assistance-centers-grow-united-front-work-department-global-presence>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Yu Yong, “The So-Called ‘13 Chinese Police Stations in South Africa’ Is Totally Fake News,” Consulate-General of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in Cape Town, November 15, 2018, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cgct/eng/gdxw/t1613745.htm>.

³⁹ A complete list of all overseas Chinese assistance centers can be found at <http://channel.chinaqw.com/cns/c/hzzx-zxj.shtml>.

⁴⁰ “Chinese Qualify for BEE,” *News24*, June 18, 2008, <https://www.news24.com/News24/Chinese-qualify-for-BEE-20080618>.

deputy minister of home affairs. They also toured South African police stations and met CCPF representatives.⁴¹ In November, Vice Minister Xu hosted a return visit by the South African deputy director general for home affairs, Thulani Mavuso. They discussed fresh training opportunities for South African personnel, study exchanges for Chinese and South African security officers, border inspections, immigration, extradition, and the protection of their respective nationals.⁴² They also agreed to negotiate a new memorandum of understanding as part of the China–South Africa Strategic Plan 2020–2030.

Kenya

For much of the Cold War, Kenya-China relations were hostile. China cultivated the country's leaders during periods of uncertainty when Kenya sought to balance its relations with the West. This occurred in two phases: the early 1990s under President Daniel arap Moi and, more recently, under current president Uhuru Kenyatta. The Moi administration lost Western support when the clamor for multiparty democracy began in earnest. It incurred sanctions from the United States, United Kingdom, and others over widespread repression and human rights violations, culminating in the International Monetary Fund canceling all foreign aid.⁴³ In response, the then-ruling Kenya African National Union party adopted a stance of *Tuungalie upande wa Mashariki*, or “let us all intently cast our gaze in the direction of the East.”

By 1992, the Kenya African National Union and the CCP were conducting exchanges at all levels of their party structures for the first time since independence. Contacts among the military, police, and intelligence agencies came much later after party-to-party ties had been institutionalized. Chief-of-defense exchanges started in 1997. By 2000, Kenya was sending regular batches of senior military officers to Chinese military schools.⁴⁴ Engagements at the police and law-enforcement levels developed alongside party-to-party exchanges and military sales. Between 2000 and 2017, more than 50% of Kenya's arsenal was supplied by China.⁴⁵ Kenya-China relations continued their upward trajectory under President Mwai Kibaki and escalated to greater heights under President Uhuru Kenyatta.

Both Kenyatta and his running mate, William Ruto, were indicted by the International Criminal Court ahead of the 2012 elections for allegedly inciting violence during the post-election crisis in 2007.⁴⁶ Western countries threatened to review relations if the pair were elected, something that they saw as an effort to thwart their campaign. In response, they vowed to “look East”—a stance that continued long after charges against them were dropped.

The launch of the reconfigured Jubilee Party on September 10, 2016, featured a high-powered delegation from the CCP Central Committee that addressed the crowds. Two weeks later, 50

⁴¹ “Vice Minister Xu Ganlu Leads Delegation to Visit South Africa, Namibia and Egypt,” National Immigration Administration (PRC), July 1, 2019, <https://en.nia.gov.cn/n108/c48630/content.html>.

⁴² “Vice Minister Xu Ganlu Meets with Thulani Mavuso, Acting Director General of Home Affairs of South Africa,” National Immigration Administration (PRC), November 13, 2021, <https://en.nia.gov.cn/n108/c48435/content.html>.

⁴³ Korwa G. Adar, “The Internal and External Contexts of Human Rights Practice in Kenya: Daniel Arap Moi's Operational Code,” *African Sociological Review* 4, no. 1 (2000): 74–96.

⁴⁴ “Bilateral Relations between China and Kenya,” Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Kenya, <http://ke.china-embassy.org/eng/sbgx/t169682.htm>.

⁴⁵ Hendrix, “Arms and Influence?”

⁴⁶ Teddy Ng, “Kenya Looks East to ‘Sincere Friend’ in China,” *South China Morning Post*, August 19, 2013, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1297869/facing-icc-trial-kenyan-president-uhuru-kenyatta-welcomed-china-visit>.

Jubilee leaders left for China for foundational training on party building.⁴⁷ A team of 300 CCP cadres was then dispatched to work alongside the Jubilee Party to build party structures from the ground up—one of China’s most systematic party-building programs in Africa and an anchor for other areas of cooperation.⁴⁸ A consultative mechanism on law enforcement was established in 2016, bringing together judicial, law-enforcement, and prosecutorial authorities.⁴⁹ Judges, state attorneys, and regular and administrative police were included in a revamped training and capacity-building program that saw several thousand Kenyan professionals receive medium- and long-term training in China.⁵⁰

In 2017, Kenya and China upgraded their relations to a “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership,” the latter’s highest level of relations.⁵¹ In December 2016, work began on the \$3.6 billion Mombasa-Nairobi-Naivasha Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), a key segment of the BRI corridor in East Africa and a template for experimentation that China is using in other countries. It consists of three elements: training for Kenya’s Railway Police Unit, managerial training for the Kenya Railway Corporation, and technical assistance at the Kenya Railway College.

The novelty of this approach is that it attaches infrastructure to public security cooperation. The police component began in 2016 when several cohorts from a pool of one thousand railway police were dispatched to Chinese schools like the Railway Police College, Beijing Police College, and People’s Public Security University.⁵² A top Chinese security firm, DeWe Security, provided training while also protecting sections of the SGR.⁵³ The railway management component is a partnership between China Roads and Bridges Corporation (the main SGR contractor) and Beijing Jiaotong University, China’s foremost railway academy. Selected Kenyans are offered fully funded degrees in rail engineering and other disciplines tailored to Kenya’s industrial sector.⁵⁴

Beyond this, China has become one of Kenya’s core security partners. Since 2014, it has been the principal partner of Kenya’s paramilitary National Youth Service, whose mission is to empower young people with paramilitary skills, including security and counterterrorism, as well as to instill patriotism and provide vocational training. This service requires all high school graduates to serve for two years prior to joining university.⁵⁵ As the primary partner of the National Youth Service, China has access to a powerful institution that backstops and provides surge capacity for Kenya’s security sector, propagates the Kenyan ruling party ideology, and supports directives from the president’s office.

⁴⁷ Justus Wanga, “Jubilee Looks to the Communist Party for Lessons,” *Daily Nation* (Kenya), September 17, 2016, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/politics/jubilee-looks-to-the-communist-party-for-lessons-1239712>.

⁴⁸ Benabdallah, *Shaping the Future of Power*, 33–39.

⁴⁹ “China and Kenya Hold Consultation on Judicial and Law Enforcement Cooperation,” Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Botswana, July 26, 2016, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cebwl/eng/zfgx/t1385209.htm>.

⁵⁰ Adhere Cavinche, “Chinese Link Bears Fruit as Kenyans Return with Skills,” *Daily Nation* (Kenya), July 16, 2021, <https://nation.africa/kenya/blogs-opinion/blogs/chinese-link-bears-fruit-as-kenyans-return-with-skills-3474706?msclkid=b0f05d77c43e11ecb993c54531bbe5b7>.

⁵¹ “China, Kenya Agree to Step Up Cooperation, Promote Bilateral Ties,” Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Kenya, June 20, 2018, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceke/eng/zkgx/sbjw/t1570302.htm>.

⁵² Edith Mutethya, “Kenya Railway Police to Train in Beijing,” *China Daily*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201805/23/WS5b057655a3103f6866eea2ec.html>.

⁵³ Uwe Wissenbach and Yuan Wang, “African Politics Meets Chinese Engineers: The Chinese-Built Standard Gauge Railway Project in Kenya and East Africa,” China Africa Research Initiative, Working Paper, no. 13, June 2017.

⁵⁴ “Delegation from University of Nairobi, Kenya, Visited BJTU,” Beijing Jiaotong University, September 5, 2018, http://en.bjtu.edu.cn/news_20161201183223846124/157027.htm.

⁵⁵ Bosire Boniface, “Kenya Makes National Youth Service Compulsory,” *TesfaNews*, July 24, 2013, <https://www.tesfanews.net/kenya-makes-national-youth-service-compulsory>.

Kenya also chose China to develop its expansive public security surveillance infrastructure—constructed by Huawei and modeled on the wireless security system in Nanjing. It consists of thousands of high-definition cameras linking several hundred police stations and 7,600 officers—nearly 10% of the entire police force—to a single, integrated command center.⁵⁶ Chinese security providers have also gained a foothold in Kenya's security industry, which has been dominated by British firms since independence. Kenyan procurement officers explain that they need to diversify their suppliers in case relations with “traditional partners” deteriorate.⁵⁷

Kenya was among four African countries that increased their total share of Chinese security imports from 2010 to 2020.⁵⁸ China's growing influence in Kenyan security was further displayed in July 2021 when the Ministry of State Security announced an expanded program to train four hundred police officers annually in China, with priority going to the Presidential Guard, Directorate of Criminal Investigation, and the General Service Unit, Kenya's elite counterterrorism and national security force.⁵⁹ Some cohorts will have the option to advance their training by pursuing bachelor's and master's degrees in schools like the People's Armed Police Command College and People's Public Security University. Personnel from the Kenya Police Airwing (a special unit within the Kenya Defense Force) will train at the Civil Aviation University of China.

In part, Kenya seems intent on positioning itself as a reliable partner to China to gain preferential treatment such as increased infrastructure funding and favorable trade arrangements. The Kenyan political establishment also has political and economic incentives for stronger partnerships with China, given access to Chinese finance, multifaceted ties to Chinese elites, and a desire to play Western partners off Beijing. Indeed, even as Kenya works with China, it is cooperating with the UK to develop police leaders through a partnership between the National Police Service, Kenyatta University, and the Bramshill College of Policing.⁶⁰

China played the long game by assiduously cultivating intricate relationships at all levels of Kenya's political leadership through intensive people-to-people and party-to-party engagements, as well as through its role in mentoring and building the Jubilee Party. Kenya has been receptive to China's security needs partly due to the strength of these ties. For example, in July 2016 the Kenyan police handed over 85 people to Chinese counterparts, including 44 from Taiwan, after they were acquitted of cybercrime by a Nairobi court.⁶¹ In China, they each received sentences up to fifteen years. This drew swift condemnation from Taiwan, which accused Kenya of “kidnapping,” but Kenya defended its actions by saying the suspects “were taken back to where they came from,” as the government recognizes only one China.

⁵⁶ “Safe Cities: Using Smart Tech for Public Security,” BBC, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/future/bspoke/specials/connected-world/government.html>.

⁵⁷ Elijah N. Munyi, “The Growing Preference for Chinese Arms in Africa: A Case Study of Uganda and Kenya,” China Africa Research Initiative, Policy Brief, no. 49, 2020.

⁵⁸ Nan Tian and Fei Su, “Estimating the Arms Sales of Chinese Companies,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Insights on Peace and Security, January 2020, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/sipriinsight2002_1.pdf. The others are Sudan, Nigeria, and Tanzania.

⁵⁹ Gitonga Njeru, “Kenyan Police Seek to Increase Number of Officers Receiving Training in China,” *Beijing Review*, July 5, 2021, https://www.bjreview.com/World/202107/t20210705_800252181.html.

⁶⁰ “UK Welcomes New Strategic Leadership Programme for Kenyan Police,” Government of the United Kingdom, January 15, 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-welcomes-new-strategic-leadership-programme-for-kenyan-police>.

⁶¹ Ben Blanchard and Jess Macy Yu, “China Jails 44 Taiwanese for Fraud in Case Denounced by Taipei,” Reuters, December 20, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-taiwan-crime/china-jails-44-taiwanese-for-fraud-in-case-denounced-by-taipei-idUSKBN1EF078>.

Assessment of African Security Cooperation with China

China is quickly emerging as the first choice for African countries to send their police officers for further training. At least 2,000 African law-enforcement personnel were trained in China between 2018 and 2021. China accomplished this partly through its generous scholarship scheme for African professionals, which rose from less than 2,000 grants to 50,000 between 2000 and 2018.⁶² When academic scholarships are included, this number rises to 100,000 every three years—more than any other industrialized country.

African countries access training opportunities through China's International Law Enforcement Program, an association of 25 academic, service, and functional police schools.⁶³ Students attend three types of schools. First are the degree-conferring academies like the People's Public Security University, Shandong Police College, and Zhejiang Police College. Next are the tactical schools like the Special Police Academy and People's Armed Police Command College. The third level includes specialized schools like the Railway Police College and the China Peacekeeping Police Center that prepares police units for peacekeeping missions.⁶⁴

Shandong Police College has trained African counterterrorism police officers since 2009 through an agreement with the African Union.⁶⁵ Since 2018, Fujian Police College has trained the Central African Republic's Police and Presidential Guard.⁶⁶ In 2019, it launched a training and mentoring partnership with the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department, a program it plans to extend to other metros.⁶⁷ Notably, the initiative was started by a Chinese South African, Yao-Heng Michael Sun, who sits on Johannesburg's mayoral committee. In November 2019, Rwanda became the latest African country to launch a cooperation program with a Chinese police school when it sent 25 law-enforcement professionals to Shandong Police College on a three-week exchange.⁶⁸ Kenya is looking to establish a similar program with Beijing Police College.⁶⁹

Chinese Policing and Public Security Equipment Is Cheaper and More Accessible on Favorable Terms

Besides emerging as a popular training destination for African police and law enforcement, China is also viewed as a viable source of affordable national security equipment with flexible loans and export controls. Between 2003 and 2017, China loaned African borrowers \$3.5 billion for security purposes to purchase communications systems, patrol ships, closed-circuit television systems, and police vehicles.⁷⁰ By 2020, China had also built at least 186 sensitive government

⁶² Nantulya, "Strategic Application of the Tao 道 of Soft Power."

⁶³ The association of 25 Chinese police schools can be accessed at <http://www.lecamps.org.cn/f>.

⁶⁴ Data is from the author's unpublished database of Chinese police training programs for African countries from 2012 to 2021.

⁶⁵ African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, "Seminar on Anti-Terrorism for English Speaking African Countries Organized by Shandong Police College in Jinan, Shandong Province from 6–26 May 2014," May 28, 2014, <https://caert.org.dz/seminar-on-anti-terrorism-for-english-speaking-african-countries-organized-by-shandong-police-college-in-jinan-shandong-province-from-6-26-may-2014>.

⁶⁶ "C.A.R. President Says Initiatives Unveiled at FOCAC Will Help Africa Develop," CGTN, September 27, 2018, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2018/09/27/c-a-r-president-says-initiatives-unveiled-at-focac-will-help-africa-develop>.

⁶⁷ Chris Erasmus, "Chinese Experts Train Crime-Hardened Police of South Africa's Biggest City," *South China Morning Post*, September 3, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/africa/article/3025494/chinese-experts-train-crime-hardened-police-south-africas-biggest>.

⁶⁸ "Rwanda Sends Delegation to China for Law Enforcement Training," Taarifa, November 28, 2019, <https://taarifa.rw/rwanda-sends-delegation-to-china-for-law-enforcement-training>.

⁶⁹ Njeru, "Kenyan Police Seek to Increase Number of Officers Receiving Training in China."

⁷⁰ Jordan Link, "Chinese Lending to Africa for Military and Domestic Security Purposes," China Africa Research Initiative, April 9, 2019, <http://www.chinaafricarealistory.com/2019/04/chinese-lending-to-africa-for-military.html>.

facilities, including at 32 police and military posts through loans and grants.⁷¹ Thirteen African countries had also acquired Chinese security surveillance systems—nine of which were implementing Huawei’s “Safe City” security solutions.⁷² Recent Chinese deliveries include 100 patrol cars for the Ghanaian police in 2019, 30 armored vehicles for the Kenyan police and military in 2019, 24 Wing Loong II unarmed aerial vehicles for Algeria’s security services in 2020, and two police surveillance centers in Angola in 2020, with plans to build sixteen more.⁷³ Huawei has meanwhile built more than 70% of Africa’s 4G networks and signed agreements to roll out 5G networks.⁷⁴

The Agenda of Protecting Chinese Security Interests Has Been Heavily Socialized and Normalized

Arguably, China’s greatest success in cultivating public security partners has been in shaping norms. To begin with, the protection of Chinese security interests has been progressively normalized, included as an action item in every FOCAC strategic plan since 2012, and is a standard talking point for Chinese diplomats when meeting African police chiefs. African countries’ receptiveness to Chinese security concerns is also reflected in their policies. Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania all have Chinese community assistance centers.⁷⁵

Members of the Lesotho Mounted Police Service receive annual forensics training in Chinese academies.⁷⁶ The Confucius Institute at Machabeng College provides in-service training in Chinese language and culture at all levels—a model adapted from South Africa. China, likewise, has a long-standing security relationship with Mauritius that includes protecting Chinese nationals. Like South Africa, Mauritius has population segments with Chinese ancestry. It is the only African country with a free trade agreement with China and officially markets itself as “China’s gateway to Africa.”⁷⁷ Beyond this, the Mauritius Police Force sends officers to China for training annually and also receives a committed capacity-building package for its national coast guard, special mobile force, and helicopter squadron.

In Ethiopia, China took the model it developed in Kenya to a higher level. In 2021 the two sides signed a landmark agreement establishing a security mechanism to protect all major BRI infrastructure projects in Ethiopia, including the \$3.2 billion Addis Ababa–Djibouti SGR and the \$4 billion Ethiopia–Djibouti natural gas pipeline, which has hitherto been guarded

⁷¹ Joshua Meservey, “Government Buildings in Africa Are a Likely Vector for Chinese Spying,” Heritage Foundation, May 20, 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/government-buildings-africa-are-likely-vector-chinese-spying>.

⁷² Steven Feldstein, testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on “China’s Strategic Aims in Africa,” Washington, D.C., May 8, 2020.

⁷³ “China Donates 100 Police Vehicles to Ghana,” *People’s Daily*, December 35, 2019, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1225/c90000-9643525.html>; Cyrus Ombati, “Armoured Personnel Carriers Acquired from China Cannot Withstand RPGs,” *Standard* (Kenya), September 18, 2019, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/nairobi/article/2001342372/armoured-personnel-carriers-acquired-from-china-cannot-withstand-rpgs>; Dalila Henache, “Algeria to Receive a New Squadron of Advanced Drones,” *Echoroukonline*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.echoroukonline.com/algeria-to-receive-a-new-squadron-of-advanced-drones>; and “Chinese-Built Police Surveillance Centre Opens in Luanda,” Permanent Secretariat of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao), December 31, 2019, <https://www.forumchinapl.org.mo/chinese-built-police-surveillance-centre-opens-in-luanda>.

⁷⁴ Jie Xi, “Analysts: China Expanding Influence in Africa via Telecom Network Deals,” *Voice of America*, August 14, 2021, https://www.voanews.com/a/economy-business_analysts-china-expanding-influence-africa-telecom-network-deals/6209516.html.

⁷⁵ Schrader, “Chinese Assistance Centers’ Grow United Front Work Department Global Presence.”

⁷⁶ “Chinese Embassy Held Reception for Lesotho Police and Immigration Officers to Conclude Chinese Language Training and for Seeing Off Officers to Attend Forensic Science Training in China,” Embassy of the PRC in the Kingdom of Lesotho, June 21, 2018, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cels/eng/sgdt/t1570687.htm>.

⁷⁷ Hilary Clarke, “In ‘Asia’s Gateway to Africa’ Mauritius, Rivals China and India Compete for the Upper Hand,” *South China Morning Post*, December 8, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/africa/article/2176883/asias-gateway-africa-mauritius-rivals-china-and-india-compete>.

by DeWe Security.⁷⁸ China also provided technical assistance and funding to construct the African Railway Center of Excellence. As part of this effort, several hundred Ethiopians received managerial and technical training in China and Ethiopia.⁷⁹ The two countries have some of the most frequent and systematic party-to-party exchanges in the developing world, dating back to 1994. Ethiopia is often called “China’s most eager student,” as it has insistently and thoroughly implemented China’s economic governance model and political system and combined them with local conditions.⁸⁰

African receptiveness to Chinese political and security norms is also reflected in the growing trend of joint security operations between Chinese and African police and law-enforcement agencies in recent years. In January 2022, details emerged of a sophisticated joint operation by Chinese and Ugandan police commandos leading to the capture and deportation of four wanted Chinese-designated terrorists.⁸¹ This activity was approved at the highest level by Presidents Yoweri Museveni and Xi Jinping—signifying the strength of the relationship. Similarly, in late January 2012, former law-enforcement and military personnel employed by an unknown Chinese security firm conducted a joint operation with the Sudanese military that rescued 29 kidnapped Chinese oil workers in South Kordofan.⁸²

Since 2016, China has trained different units of Uganda’s police, including the directorates for crime intelligence, criminal investigations, and forensics.⁸³ China has also built Uganda’s wireless police surveillance architecture as well as its internal government communications system.⁸⁴ In 2018, Uganda deployed troops for an unspecified period to protect China’s sprawling industrial parks following an upsurge of robberies,⁸⁵ an order given shortly after 121 Chinese business leaders met with President Yoweri Museveni to press their concerns. In 2019 the two sides elevated their relations to a “comprehensive strategic partnership.”

In August 2012, 400 Angolan police commandos aided by Chinese special police units conducted an operation leading to the capture and repatriation of 37 Chinese gang leaders. They also dismantled 12 Chinese gangs, solved 48 cases, and rescued 14 Chinese victims.⁸⁶ On July 8, 2016, in Juba, South Sudan, DeWe Security worked with local forces to evacuate three hundred Chinese oil workers trapped between fighting rival forces.⁸⁷ In 2019, a Chinese national of Uighur descent told a French newspaper that he was questioned by three Chinese agents in a Cairo

⁷⁸ “China, Ethiopia Ink Accord on Establishing Security Safeguarding Mechanism for Major Projects under BRI,” Xinhua, March 7, 2021, http://www.china.org.cn/world/2021-03/07/content_77280556.htm.

⁷⁹ “Ethiopians Learn How to Manage Chinese-Built Railway,” CGTN Africa, YouTube video, August 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zCf0A9uoas>.

⁸⁰ Yun Sun, “Political Party Training: China’s Ideological Push in Africa?” Brookings Institution, July 5, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/07/05/political-party-training-chinas-ideological-push-in-africa>.

⁸¹ Eric Olander, “Armed Chinese and Ugandan Commandos Conduct Rare Joint Operation,” China Africa Project, January 11, 2022, <https://chinaafricaproject.com/2022/01/11/armed-chinese-and-ugandan-commandos-conduct-rare-joint-operation>.

⁸² Helena Legarda and Meia Nouwens, “Guardians of the Belt and Road: The Internationalization of China’s Private Security Companies,” Mercator Institute for China Studies, August 16, 2018, <https://merics.org/en/report/guardians-belt-and-road>.

⁸³ Mary Nankina, “China to Train Uganda Police in Criminal Investigations,” Uganda Police Force, December 20, 2017, <https://www.upf.go.ug/china-train-uganda-police-criminal-investigations>.

⁸⁴ Interview by the author with Stephen Othieno Jr., a special assistant to President Yoweri Museveni, November 15, 2020.

⁸⁵ Elias Biryabarema, “Ugandan Soldiers to Guard Chinese Businesses after Rash of Robberies,” Reuters, November 24, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uganda-crime/ugandan-soldiers-to-guard-chinese-businesses-after-rash-of-robberies-idUSKCN1NJ2JN>.

⁸⁶ “37 Criminal Suspects in Angola Sent Back to China,” *China Daily*, August 25, 2012, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-08/25/content_15705688.htm.

⁸⁷ Paul Nantulya, “Chinese Security Contractors in Africa,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 8, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/08/chinese-security-contractors-in-africa-pub-82916>.

police station after being detained by Egyptian police on suspected terror charges.⁸⁸ The Chinese government has not commented on this allegation.

More broadly, this case demonstrates the growing international legal reach of China's public security agencies. By 2021, thirteen African countries had extradition treaties with China—up from just one in 2018.⁸⁹ Between 1997 and 2022, Egypt and Morocco were among 27 Muslim-majority countries that extradited ethnic Uighurs to China in close coordination with Chinese security. In all, 1,546 extraditions occurred in the Middle East and North Africa over the same period, suggesting that a growing number of African countries have become risky destinations for those wanted under Chinese laws.⁹⁰

On the diplomatic side, African countries have consistently backed China's counterterrorism policies in Xinjiang. Some regularly dispatch their Beijing-based envoys to the region on fact-finding tours, who tend to praise China's efforts at "poverty alleviation."⁹¹ In 2020–21, African members on the UN Human Rights Commission formed majority coalitions that shot down successive Western-backed resolutions critical of China.⁹² In a separate session on July 2, 2019, they joined a 53-member coalition to quash a resolution sponsored by 27 mostly Western countries against China's new national security law in Hong Kong. This diplomatic backing is a partial indicator that Chinese national security norms are increasingly being advanced by African diplomats, despite Western opposition.

China Has Capitalized on a Generally Permissive Environment in Africa for Legal Cooperation and Security Contracting

Less noticeable, but no less important, is the enduring nature of China's legal cooperation mechanisms in Africa, which are crucial for its law-enforcement activities. The links between African and Chinese legal institutions are older, more structured, and more formalized than other areas of Sino-African cooperation. Established in 2006, the Center for African Law and Society at Xiangtan University focuses on legal integration in business law and investment. The University of Macau works with African and Chinese law bodies to harmonize commercial law. Likewise, the China-Africa Legal Cooperation Forum focuses on judicial cooperation on law enforcement, crime prevention, extradition, and prosecution. Since 2007, over 40,000 young African lawyers have attended legal training in China through numerous government schemes such as the annual three-week course on legal integration and dispute resolution offered by the China-Asian-African Legal Consultative Forum.⁹³

These institutional structures have grown out of a long history of legal cooperation. Since 1956, the New Delhi-based Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization has provided a venue for

⁸⁸ "'Nightmare' as Egypt Aided China to Detain Uighurs," France 24, August 18, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190818-nightmare-as-egypt-aided-china-to-detain-uighurs>.

⁸⁹ A summary of extradition treaties between the PRC and other nations can be found at http://www.gd.jcy.gov.cn/jcyw/sfzx/flfgtyxd/201812/t20181212_2440091.shtml.

⁹⁰ Jonathan Hoffman, "Why Do Some Muslim-Majority Countries Support China's Crackdown on Muslims?" *Washington Post*, May 4, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/05/04/why-do-some-muslim-majority-countries-support-chinas-crackdown-muslims>.

⁹¹ Liu Xin, "African Envoys Defend China on Xinjiang, Say 'No Visit, No Say,'" *Global Times*, July 6, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202107/1227994.shtml>.

⁹² Eric Olander, "China's Xinjiang Coalition Holds as Not a Single African or Muslim Majority Country Signs New Human Rights Statement," China Africa Project, June 23, 2021, <https://chinaafricaproject.com/analysis/chinas-xinjiang-coalition-holds-as-not-a-single-african-or-muslim-majority-country-signs-new-human-rights-statement>.

⁹³ Samuli Seppänen, "Chinese Legal Development Assistance: Which Rule of Law? Whose Pragmatism?" *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 51, no. 1 (2018): 102–57.

African and Chinese law-enforcement officials, state attorneys, and legal professionals to discuss legal issues of mutual concern.⁹⁴ Such ties take on renewed significance in light of the key role that legal instruments will play in enabling an environment for China to pursue multifaceted security goals. Indeed, in December 2020, China's Supreme Court appointed four senior African justices from Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, and Uganda to a 24-member panel that will deal with legal issues arising from BRI.⁹⁵

Also less noticeable are China's security contractors, who have established themselves in some of China's most important countries of engagement, such as Algeria, Angola, Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. They are mostly hired by SOEs to provide security in a range of settings, including oil and gas installations, mines, railways, major construction sites, shipping fleets, and Chinese embassies.⁹⁶

China has roughly 4,000 registered security firms that hire around 4.3 million mostly demobilized PAP and PLA personnel.⁹⁷ Around nine major contractors are licensed to operate in Africa and have done so since around 1994.⁹⁸ These entities serve the security interests of the Chinese government, as they are almost exclusively recruited from the ranks of its security services, managed by SOEs, and fall under the legal purview of the MPS, which permits a select few to carry weapons.⁹⁹ Many have adopted discreet business models that establish local subsidiaries or provide intelligence, early warning, technical assets, supplementary pay, and training to local police, intelligence, and military forces.¹⁰⁰

Given that security contracting is generally a controversial issue in Africa, many observers assess that China might use its influence in the legal sector to create a more robust legal architecture for its security contractors, as well as law enforcement more generally. The overlaps between the two areas, coupled with the growing demand for more security, will likely move China in this direction.

Conclusion: Looking Over the Horizon

African countries offer China a conducive environment to create a palette of security arrangements suited to each context. African engagements with China's police, public security, and law-enforcement sectors have been regular and multifaceted in training, capacity building, legal development, integration, and even operations. This is reinforced by shared organizational structures, cultures, and political outlooks, which make the process of building influence easier.

However, some interlocking dynamics in the African political environment will likely create headwinds for China. Trust between citizens and governments is at an all-time low as shown by declining political space, growing antigovernment protests, and an uptick in human

⁹⁴ Xu Jie, "The Asian African Legal Consultative Organization and Its Relations with the People's Republic of China," *AALCO Journal of International Law* 15, no. 1 (2012): 15–60.

⁹⁵ Jevans Nyabiage, "China's Top Court Appoints Four Africans to Legal Team for Handling Belt and Road Disputes," *South China Morning Post*, December 14, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3113694/chinas-top-court-appoints-four-africans-legal-team-handling>.

⁹⁶ Nantulya, "Chinese Security Contractors in Africa."

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Paul Nantulya, "Chinese Security Firms Spread along the African Belt and Road," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, June 15, 2021, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/chinese-security-firms-spread-african-belt-road>.

⁹⁹ Nantulya, "Chinese Security Contractors in Africa."

¹⁰⁰ Nantulya, "Chinese Security Firms Spread along the African Belt and Road."

rights violations. Police, intelligence, and law-enforcement agencies are commonly used against protestors and pro-democracy movements, thereby increasing the trust deficit. They are widely viewed as among the most corrupt, unaccountable, abusive, and partisan institutions in Africa, with four out of ten citizens across 34 countries saying that “most” or “all” the police are corrupt.¹⁰¹

This could magnify negative sentiments toward China, especially from young people who constantly clash with police, intelligence, paramilitary forces, and state-sponsored militias in their push for political change. It should be recalled that 60% of Africa’s 1.2 billion people are below 25 years old. This is a critically important majority that China hopes to strategically influence, yet finds difficult due to the sustained demand for democracy, which seven out of ten Africans prefer.¹⁰² China is therefore at an inflection point: although the majority of Africans see its influence as positive, the country is not perceived as a partner in democratization and political change. Indeed, pro-democracy movements frequently accuse Beijing of enabling unpopular regimes and strengthening enforcement machinery. This is a risk that China’s security assistance programs will continue to confront. However, it is also a warning to other foreign partners who are increasingly criticized by African stakeholders for prioritizing short-term stability over long-term democratic development and human rights.

The other challenge China faces is tied to the social implications of its expanded security engagements, particularly in terms of protecting Chinese assets and nationals. In recent years, African print and social media have been awash with claims that Chinese actors receive preferential treatment and that their security is more important than that of ordinary citizens. These complaints are reinforced by grievances that fuel hostility against Chinese companies and nationals, such as poor labor practices, cheap imports that kill local livelihoods, and a perception that Chinese are “above the law” given their influence over ruling elites. China may need to reassess its security strategy in light of such misgivings. Achieving comprehensive security is next to impossible, even in the most permissive environments under the best circumstances. There is also a trade-off to be made in terms of how much loss of public trust China can tolerate while strengthening ties with regime elites and the security forces that keep them in office, even when they undermine constitutional rules.

The grievances that trigger negative sentiments toward China and Chinese nationals, communities, and companies are not rooted in factors that require a securitized response. They might instead require policy adjustments and more innovative interventions that enhance social cohesion, cross-cultural understanding, and nonviolent resolution of disputes. Above all, they must respect African Union conventions on democracy, good governance, and human rights, which are obviously at odds with China’s political system.

¹⁰¹ Christiaan Keulder and Robert Mattes, “Why Are Africans Dissatisfied with Democracy? Think Corruption,” *Washington Post*, November 19, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/11/19/why-are-africans-dissatisfied-with-democracy-think-corruption>.

¹⁰² Joseph Asunka and E. Gyimah-Boadi, “Do Africans Want Democracy—and Do They Think They’re Getting It?” *Washington Post*, October 22, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/10/22/do-africans-want-democracy-do-they-think-theyre-getting-it>.

China in Africa's Media: A Case Study of Ghana

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay considers Ghana as a case study of China's strategy to influence media in Africa and thereby strengthen its foothold on the continent.

MAIN ARGUMENT

China's ambition to be a major player in global geopolitics is no secret. It has also not lost sight of the fact that the media and information management and control are important tools in the achievement of that endeavor. Ghana presents an interesting case study of China's well-laid strategy in not only influencing the media in Africa but also controlling what the media publishes about China. To achieve this, Beijing has launched a multipronged approach, including engaging the media directly by sponsoring African journalists' visits to China to cultivate how the media should function from China's perspective. In exerting its soft power, China has also used control mechanisms, such as speaking directly to governments and journalists, and has demanded what it regards as positive news coverage of its activities and citizens in Africa. It has also invested in existing media organizations to ensure positive coverage of news about China, as well as established replicas of state-owned Chinese media in African countries. Further, China has in some cases openly expressed displeasure over news coverage it deems "unfair" and "defamatory."

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Given China's enormous soft power, governments in Africa could clamp down on media coverage that is critical of China to appease the Chinese government. The occasion of the Chinese ambassador to Ghana calling on the Ghanaian government to tell journalists how to report about China is a good example of the use of soft power to get favorable news coverage.
- Considering the fact that media organizations in Africa have limited resources and most are faced with sustainability challenges, a wealthy country like China, which has shown considerable interest in investing in media, could be seen as a potential ally and possible source of funding. Thus, there is the temptation for media organizations to attempt to woo China by publishing uncritical news stories about the country as well as carrying Chinese propaganda.
- The training of Ghanaian journalists in China and visits to that country to attend conferences and seminars on media and interact with Chinese journalists could be viewed as a calculated attempt by Chinese leaders to influence the perspectives of African journalists.

The importance of Ghana to China dates back to the early post-independence era when the first Ghanaian president, Kwame Nkrumah, followed a policy of nonalignment, which led to Chinese entrepreneurs setting up businesses in the country as early as the 1950s.¹ Soon after independence, Accra's ideology was appealing to Beijing—one of the main forces shaping its overall interest in Africa. Countries like Ghana were seen as a training ground from which to launch a socialist revolution in Africa.² This relationship has only grown.

China intends to establish a presence in African countries, including Ghana, for the long haul, drawing closer and altering any sense of distance or difference. Part of China's overall policy for engaging Africa is to develop a foothold in the media landscape. To achieve this goal, it is employing various strategies on the continent: buying shares in existing media organizations, training African journalists, and establishing its own media organizations. In Ghana, for example, a number of journalists in both state and private media have benefited from training in China—an indication of Ghana's standing in China's Africa policy. Anecdotal evidence indicates that China is not only working to influence what is reported about it but also making strenuous efforts to tell its own story and control narratives. This increased media engagement and involvement is happening in many African countries.

This essay provides a case study of Ghana to better understand China's strategy to influence media in Africa. After a brief overview of China's participation in media on the continent, the essay examines how China is seeking to shape the narrative in African countries such as Ghana by investing in media organizations and training African journalists. It then assesses the implications of current trends for the exercise of free press.

China and the African Media

To understand China's involvement in Ghana's media it is important to consider its overall participation in media on the continent. Over the last ten years, China has left an appreciable mark on Africa's media.³ In South Africa, for instance, it has engaged in numerous activities: content production, distribution, infrastructure development, direct investment in local media, and journalist training.⁴ In December 2014, South African president Jacob Zuma visited Beijing and was accompanied by a large delegation of more than one hundred businesspeople and ministers. During the visit a member of the delegation, Iqbal Survé (a medical doctor and investor connected to South Africa's ruling party) signed a partnership between state-owned China Central Television (CCTV)—later rebranded as China Global Television Network (CGTN)—and the Independent Media, one of his country's largest press groups.⁵ The deal planned to create an Africa-wide multimedia news platform.

China's foray into the media in African countries is a response to what it sees as Western media propaganda—a reaction to how narratives about China are framed. Some have argued that the

¹ Conal Guan-Yow Ho, "The 'Doing' and 'Undoing' of Community: Chinese Networks in Ghana," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 37, no. 3 (2008): 46–77.

² Iginio Gagliardone, Nicole Stremlau, and Daniel Nkrumah, "Partner, Prototype or Persuader? China's Renewed Media Engagement with Ghana," *Communication, Politics and Culture* 45, no. 2 (2012): 174–96.

³ Dani Madrid-Morales and Herman Wasserman, "Chinese Media Engagement in South Africa: What Is Its Impact on Local Journalism?" *Journalism Studies* 19, no. 8 (2017): 1218–35.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

launch of Chinese state media was in response to the Western media's framing of events leading up to the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics and perceived anti-Chinese coverage.⁶ There is also the possibility that China's increasing bilateral relations and trade with African countries led to an expansion of media as a result of what Beijing perceived as misinformation that it was giving aid only to resource-rich countries. Efforts to set up Chinese media in Africa, then, were to balance international coverage of China's activities and engagement on the continent.⁷

To change the media landscape, China set up its own media outlets in Africa, creating an African version of CGTN. This expanded China's existing initiatives, such as engagement by the state news agency Xinhua. Beijing also extended its reach into the telecommunications market by helping governments, both democratic and authoritarian, expand access to the internet and mobile phones and offering export credits to Chinese companies willing to invest in African markets.⁸ All this expansion was part of China's going-out and soft-power strategies to extend influence in new sectors and locations.⁹ However, for some this process represents an information war due to cybersecurity concerns over Chinese-built telecommunications infrastructure and the tendency of Chinese media to promote "positive reporting," which poses a threat to independent watchdog journalism.¹⁰

China's infiltration of media in African countries has been years in the making. In 2006, China Radio International began locally broadcasting from Nairobi, Kenya. In early 2011, Xinhua's television station, CNC World, began broadcasting to African satellite and cable viewers, and the news agency now has over 37 bureaus across the continent. In April 2011, Xinhua partnered with a Kenyan mobile operator to provide news feeds for mobile phones. CCTV (now CGTN) likewise launched its first overseas news production center (CGTN Africa) in Nairobi in January 2012. The launch was a milestone in that CGTN Africa became the first international media established in Africa that is responsible for gathering news from the continent and distributing it to a global audience. In addition, CGTN dedicates on average more than ten hours per week to Africa through programs such as *Africa Live*, *Talk Africa*, and *Faces of Africa*.

In print, in December 2012, *China Daily* launched its "Africa Weekly" edition, which is published in Nairobi and printed by the Nation Media Group (the largest media company in East and Central Africa). The newspaper is circulated throughout the African continent and is also available in digital format. It publishes 24-page editions from Monday to Friday and 16-page editions on Saturdays and Sundays. The paper uses innovative design, photographs, and artwork to provide in-depth reports that analyze affairs both in China and globally. It also has a "China Watch" section—a monthly publication distributed as an insert in mainstream newspapers in the United States and Europe.¹¹

⁶ Emeka Umejei, "What Is the Influence of Chinese Media in West Africa?" Council on Foreign Relations, September 14, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/what-influence-chinese-media-west-africa>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Iginio Gagliardone and Sam Geall, "China in Africa's Media and Telecommunications: Cooperation, Connectivity and Control," Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, April 2014.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Shubo Li, *Mediatized China-Africa Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chap. 5.

China in the Ghanaian Media

Ghana represents a critical case study for examining China-Africa relations. In 1960, post-independence Ghana was the second country in sub-Saharan Africa to establish diplomatic ties with China, making it an early example of the benefits of China-Africa relations.¹² Even today, the bilateral relationship continues to prosper. China provides loans and other economic assistance to Ghana, and Chinese companies have invested in almost every sector of the country, including media.

According to the Media Ownership Monitor, Ghana has a long tradition of state ownership and control of the media dating back to the period before independence.¹³ From the introduction of radio in 1935 and television in 1965 until the liberalization of the airwaves in 1996, all broadcasts were controlled by the state. Private print media was also all but absent from the Ghana media landscape until 1992.¹⁴ Since the promulgation of the new constitution in 1992, and the repeal of the Criminal Libel Law in 2001, Ghana has evolved into one of the freest media systems in Africa.¹⁵ With the formation of independent newspapers, television channels, and radio stations, the Ghanaian system is characterized not only by an unprecedented availability of media outlets but also by the increasing liberty citizens enjoy in communicating through these services.¹⁶ It was during this period that Chinese media firms entered Ghana.

Through foreign representatives, China started engaging local media (e.g., the *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide*) to publish news items on bilateral projects and other economic activities in the country to Ghanaians. Thereafter, Beijing started broadcasting directly into the country through major Chinese media outlets. China Radio International now reaches Ghana through shortwaves, while CGTN and CNC World can be accessed through satellite or cable as part of a package offered by Cable Gold, a company owned by a Chinese entrepreneur.¹⁷ Cable Gold is not part of a coordinated Chinese government strategy to reach foreign publics but simply the result of an enterprising young Chinese graduate who visited Ghana in the late 1990s and decided to invest in the country. The company offers not only content from China but also many other channels as part of its package, from CNN to the Cartoon Network.¹⁸ Within the last decade, Chinese media giants such as StarTimes, CGTN, and Xinhua have also made inroads.

StarTimes is a digital terrestrial television (DTT) and satellite service provider with a strong presence in sub-Saharan Africa. In April 2012, it won a contract from the Ghanaian government to supply and install a reliable, energy-efficient, and cost-effective DTT network solution. But three years later Ghana's Ministry of Communications, which was the lead agency in the deal, abrogated the contract. The government cited the inability of StarTimes to secure the financing for the project, as a result of which the project execution was delayed. According to the official explanation, "the Ministry of Communications signed [a] preconditioned agreement in April 2012 with Star Communications Network Technology for the supply and installation of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) Network platform with the clear mutual understanding that funding

¹² Gagliardone, Stremmlau, and Nkrumah, "Partner, Prototype or Persuader?"

¹³ Media Ownership Monitor (Ghana), "History," <https://ghana.mom-rsf.org/en/context/history>. The Media Ownership Monitor is a collaborative project by the Media Foundation for West Africa and Reporters Without Borders.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gagliardone, Stremmlau, and Nkrumah, "Partner, Prototype or Persuader?"

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

will be secured from the China Exim Bank through the facilitation of Star Communications Network Technology company.”¹⁹

The minister was quoted as saying: “All information, guarantees, and support agreements required to be provided by the Ministry of Communications to facilitate access to the...funding were duly provided to the China Exim Bank who followed up with due diligence visits to the country.” However, as the deadline for the migration from analogue to digital broadcasting approaches, the ministry said that it “is yet to receive the financing agreement and the funding required for the implementation of the project.”²⁰ In response, StarTimes sued the government. But none of the court actions in both a Ghanaian court and the International Commercial Court went far.²¹

StarTimes then in 2016 signed a groundbreaking ten-year deal with the Ghana Football Association and acquired media rights for the Ghana Premier League, the National Division One League, the Ghanaian FA Cup, the Ghana Women’s League, and the Ghana Juvenile League. As part of the deal, StarTimes is expected to construct ten pitches as stipulated in the contract.²²

Coverage is not restricted to cities and urban centers. Since the advent of cable and satellite television, most Ghanaians, including those in rural areas, have acquired satellite dishes to access local and international media outlets. Through StarTimes, Ghanaians in both urban and rural areas watch news items and programs of Chinese origin. CGTN has steadily increased its reach in Africa over the years and is displayed on televisions in corridors at the African Union and beamed for free to thousands of rural villages in a number of African countries, including Ghana. StarTimes’ cheapest packages bundle together Chinese and African channels, whereas access to the BBC or Al Jazeera costs more and is beyond the means of most viewers.²³ Ghanaian audiences today have a wide range of programming options to fill their time, with Chinese dramas standing out among them.²⁴ In fact, Chinese programming is so popular that broadcasters are already concerned that StarTimes is edging local companies out of Ghana’s media market. In September 2018, for example, the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association warned that if “StarTimes is allowed to control Ghana’s digital transmission infrastructure and the satellite space...Ghana would have virtually submitted its broadcast space to Chinese control and content.”²⁵

Chinese companies have also had direct involvement in the media and telecommunications sectors by providing loans, equipment, and technical expertise. This is combined with China’s public diplomacy strategy to expand international broadcasters and increase exchange and training programs targeting Ghanaian journalists. Chinese companies also support the media in Ghana by organizing training and workshop programs for journalists and other stakeholders in the media sector. In May 2021, Huawei organized “Huawei day with the media,” which included a virtual tour of the company’s ultramodern Darwin Exhibition Centre in Shenzhen, where selected

¹⁹ “Government of Ghana Terminates Digital Migration Contract with StarTimes,” Africa Business Communities, January 19, 2015, <https://africabusinesscommunities.com/news/government-of-ghana-terminates-digital-migration-contract-with-startimes.html>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “Court Dismisses Injunction Suspending Digital Migration,” Ghana Business News, March 11, 2015, <https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2015/03/11/court-dismisses-injunction-suspending-digital-migration>.

²² Pilot Sedode, “GFA Cancels \$17.9m Broadcast Rights Contract with StarTimes,” Kuulpeeps, December 5, 2019, <https://kuulpeeps.com/2019/12/05/gfa-cancels-17-9m-broadcast-rights-contract-with-startimes/trending/news>.

²³ Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, “Inside China’s Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign,” *Guardian*, December 7, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xinping>.

²⁴ “Chinese Dramas Becoming Increasingly Popular in Ghana,” Broadcast Media Africa, September 8, 2021, <https://broadcastmediaafrica.com/chinese-dramas-becoming-increasingly-popular-in-ghana>.

²⁵ Lim and Bergin, “Inside China’s Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign.”

journalists were told about how the company is employing advanced technology to make the world a better place.²⁶ Workshops have also been organized by the Chinese government. In a move to enhance the skills of media professionals and documentary filmmakers and to further strengthen international collaboration between China and developing countries, the Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Foreign Affairs also sponsored training for Ghanaian journalists in 2019.²⁷

The Ghanaian Journalist Experience

As noted above, China provides Ghanaian journalists with bursaries and funding to attend conferences and workshops and undertake graduate-level media studies at Chinese universities as part of its broader media strategy. Some of these journalists granted interviews to the author and shared their experiences, including what they think about China and its intentions for the media in Africa.

McAnthony Dagyenga, a correspondent for the privately owned news website GhanaWeb, says his 2019 trip to China was a revelation that continues to influence his views about the country:

Initially, I viewed China to be an irresponsible country that sought to throw its citizens into Ghana or [other] African countries to perpetrate illegalities, including illegal mining of gold and illegal lumbering of rosewood. I initially viewed China as a poor country. But the trip and experience in China changed all that. That country and its leaders are full of wisdom. The citizens are good-hearted people and are business-minded who focus on working to enhance their respective economic lives. No time for frivolities.²⁸

During his visit, Dagyenga attended a 21-day documentary filmmaking training session sponsored by the Chinese government. The training has influenced his thoughts on China, making him see it as a responsible, strategic, well-planned, structured, hospitable, and media-friendly nation.

Gifty Amofa, who works with the state-owned Ghana News Agency, went to China in 2015 to study for one year. She obtained a master's degree in international communication at the Communication University of China. She states that the opportunity allowed her not only to study in China but to understand the Chinese people.²⁹ She believes that the curriculum was designed to teach students how the West frames news stories about other countries. Amofa says she “had a lot of misconceptions about them [the Chinese], but after training and having lived with them for some time, I understand why they behave the way they do.” She explains that China has partnered with a number of media houses, including electronic and print organizations, and personnel from Ghana are sometimes sponsored to continue their studies and glean a fair perspective of China through tours. Of course, Amofa recognizes that China sometimes uses Ghanaian media to propagate its own agenda.

²⁶ “Huawei Day with Media: Chinese Tech Giant Shares Plans with Ghanaian Journalists,” Citi Newsroom, May 29, 2021, <https://citinewsroom.com/2021/05/huawei-day-with-media-chinese-tech-giant-shares-plans-with-ghanaian-journalists>.

²⁷ McAnthony Dagyenga, “Beijing: Ghanaian Journalists Undergo Chinese Media Training,” Class FM Online, August 12, 2019, <https://www.classfmonline.com/news/Beijing-Ghanaian-journalists-undergo-Chinese-media-training-6138>.

²⁸ Author interview with McAnthony Dagyenga on December 21, 2021.

²⁹ Author interview with Gifty Amofa on December 21, 2021.

Stephen Asante, chief reporter at the Ghana News Agency, went to China in 2018 for a media training program.³⁰ The program, he says, was organized by the China International Publishing Group Training Centre in Beijing in collaboration with Peking University and the Communication University of China. According to Asante, the State Council Information Office sponsored the trip. He spent three months in China during the program and took various courses: “Journalism: The African and Chinese Perspectives and the Role of the Media in Promoting China/Africa Economic, Political and Cultural Relations,” “China’s Foreign Policies,” “China’s Mitigation Efforts to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions,” and “The Belt and Road Initiative and Building a Shared Future.” He says the training enabled him “to be more objective when reporting on China” and avoid stereotypes. Asante now holds that the Chinese government’s exchange programs strive to deepen understanding of the media in Ghana on China-Ghana relations.

Kwadwo Donkor, who works with the state-owned *Daily Graphic*, spent three weeks in China as a delegate at the China-Africa Think Tank Forum in June 2016.³¹ Donkor says he learned a great deal from the trip:

Before leaving Ghana, we were told that we would be making a presentation on Ghana. We were not given any specific area, but a day to the formal opening of the forum our [African] delegation was asked to make a presentation at the group sessions, and our confrères from Kenya did that on behalf of the group. If my memory serves me right, it was in the extractive sector....Aside from the culture shock, we were also exposed to the Chinese type of democracy. A Ghanaian would consider it a one-party state, but they call it democracy. For them, they did not have to copy what the West calls democracy but the one that suits that system....Though the meeting was for us to know more about China and its foreign policy toward Africa, from the lectures we were taken to, it looked like a propaganda agenda (call it brainwashing, if you like). The participants were media personnel, lecturers, and heads of think tanks. They were carefully selected because they were people who can shape the thinking of the populace back home.

Donkor believes that what he has learned will influence how he writes about the country: “Well, at least, for now if I want to write about the governance system in China, I would not have to judge them by what I know or think democracy should be. They have their own system which is working for them perfectly. After all, there is no full-proof system anywhere in the world.” He also found that the Chinese government has a firm grip on its media because he did not have access to any foreign channel during his three-week sojourn.

An anonymous Ghanaian journalist who has worked with a Chinese news outlet for eleven years visited China in 2004 for a five-week seminar. This journalist says that “the seminar was about understanding Chinese culture, media concepts, and a bit of their history, and it has helped me to report on China with better understanding.”³² The journalist, however, believes that Chinese media is propagandized to promote bilateral relationships with host countries, making reports that focus on advancing an agenda through contributing only positive stories:

Before the training, I didn’t know China had a grasp of global issues that much, but this changed after listening to how facilitators delved into global issues with

³⁰ Author interview with Stephen Asante on December 20, 2021.

³¹ Author interview with Kwadwo Donkor on December 20, 2021.

³² Author interview with an anonymous Ghanaian journalist on December 22, 2021.

depth and precision, expressing their perspectives on these issues. China is still learning how to relate with the Ghanaian media. For instance, they have to grow from where they only invite the media for events and sharing press releases to the point where they are open to granting interviews on wide ranges of issues.

A recent incident illustrates how Chinese officials exploit relations with Ghanaian journalists to spread government propaganda. In November 2019, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) published a major investigation exposing secret Chinese detention camps holding members of the Muslim minority Uighurs. The research was based on leaked documents that contained information about the nature of the detention camps and how the inmates were being treated.³³

The investigation by the ICIJ as expected was rubbished by China. More importantly, in Ghana the Chinese ambassador, Wang Shiting, met with Ghanaian journalists and issued a denial of the reports. The following day, the story was all over the Ghanaian media that “the Chinese Ambassador says there are no detention camps in China.” But none of the journalists at the press conference had access to the same information as the ICIJ, nor were they involved in the work that led to that publication.³⁴ They, however, carried the version of the Chinese ambassador.

Potential Pitfalls

A recent development in Ghana-China relations is the increasing skepticism about Chinese investment and aid activities, particularly in the gold-mining sector. Accordingly, there have been some changes in Ghanaians’ perception of China’s engagement as the issue of rising anti-Chinese sentiments in Ghana has shown. In view of this, there are some within the media circles who have become suspicious of the activities of Chinese officials.

For example, at the height of illegal gold-mining activities by Chinese companies and individuals in Ghana, there was a national uproar calling on the Ghanaian government to stop what was known as the “Chinese invasion.” Chinese citizens appropriated large tracts of land and engaged in illegal mining. The media reported incessantly on the subject, focusing on the Chinese operations. The Chinese ambassador to Ghana at the time, Sun Baohong, then wrote a letter to Ghanaian authorities complaining about the characterizations and what she described as distorted or biased reports, stories, and cartoons that defamed Chinese leaders and senior officials.³⁵ The ambassador directed the authorities to pay attention to the media and take necessary actions, urging them to “guide the media to give an objective coverage on the illegal mining issue so as to create a good environment for further development of our bilateral exchanges and cooperation.”³⁶ The letter was a clear threat that used Ghana’s reliance on Chinese loans as collateral.

Beijing further attempted to push back against Ghanaian reports about Chinese citizens engaging in the illegal mining that has engulfed the country by using some local journalists and media firms to promote its agenda. Since most journalists in Ghana are poorly paid,

³³ International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, “China Cables,” webpage, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables>.

³⁴ “Chinese Ambassador to Ghana Tells Journalists No Concentration Camps in Xinjiang,” Ghana Business News, January 9, 2020.

³⁵ Emmanuel K. Dogbevi, “Despite Deporting More than 4500 Chinese, They Still Contribute to \$2.3b Illegal Gold Mining Loss to Ghana,” Ghana Business News, April 11, 2017, <https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2017/04/11/despote-deporting-more-than-4500-chinese-they-still-contribute-to-2-3b-illegal-gold-mining-loss-to-ghana>.

³⁶ Ibid.

under-resourced, and often lack training, they find themselves susceptible to bribery and self-censorship. With the availability of funds from Chinese media firms that sponsor trips to China for exchange and training programs, some of these journalists will be vulnerable to Chinese influence and may end up doing the bidding of their paymasters. As a result, they might be obliged to promote Chinese content ahead of local or Ghanaian news items, which would affect local news coverage and the media environment in Ghana in general.

Additionally, with the training of journalists and the offer of free trips, China is attempting not only to indoctrinate and use journalists from Ghana to promote its policies beyond its borders in a concerted new push for influence but to obtain favorable news coverage about its government and citizens. As noted earlier, when a deal was signed between the government and StarTimes, local broadcasters were highly concerned about StarTimes edging local companies out of Ghana's media market.

In Ghana, the quality of radio and television programming is low. With respect to newspapers, the ownership landscape is politically polarized, with most newspapers supporting either the government or opposition party. With the influx of Chinese media firms in an already polarized system where some journalists are ready to provide favorable coverage of an entity once they receive stipends from it, the potential exists for China to influence the news content in its favor.

This issue is exacerbated by the fact that most media organizations in Ghana are commercial and depend on advertising revenue for operation. Advertising revenue, however, is dwindling. Advertisers target social media sites like Facebook and Instagram, starving private media of much-needed revenue. Finding themselves in this situation, most media organizations in Ghana defer to the highest bidder (i.e., the advertiser with the largest budget). As a result, most are increasingly shirking their watchdog role so as not to offend advertisers, a situation that leaves them vulnerable to manipulation, including by foreign governments and businesses. Some media organizations had hoped that their connection to Chinese companies would effectively translate into those companies taking up advertising spaces and slots, but that does not seem to have happened so far. It is, however, unclear what this would mean to the bond between the Chinese authorities in Ghana and the media over time. Whether this would possibly lead to the media doing critical reporting on China and Chinese activities remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Ghana is like an oasis in a region plagued with many issues, including misgovernance and instability, and the country's media landscape is one of the freest in the region. The number of media organizations is growing, as individuals have established private newspapers and television and radio stations. But this free environment has come with its benefits as well as pitfalls. The Chinese involvement in the Ghanaian media, directly and indirectly, therefore, raises concerns.

As described in this essay, Chinese companies through their foreign representatives have started engaging the local media for news items on Chinese projects and other economic activities in the country to be broadcast or reported to Ghanaian audiences. China has even started broadcasting and reporting directly into the country through Chinese-owned media outlets such as StarTimes, CTGN, and Xinhua. Some Chinese media outlets have also partnered with local media organizations to show Chinese content as well as project China's economic and development activities on Ghanaian screens.

To increase their local influence and promote a positive image of China in the eyes of Ghanaians through the local media, Chinese companies and government agencies train journalists and even sponsor delegations of journalists to travel to China. Ghanaian journalism students are also awarded scholarships to study at various Chinese universities. While this is not any different from what Western countries do, China, unlike Western countries, aims at getting the journalists to spread Chinese propaganda rather than report critically on events.

Given that Ghanaian journalists are often poorly paid and resourced, they are susceptible to such influence and may end up doing China's bidding. The result of China's involvement in the Ghanaian media landscape is not only that local journalists are compelled to promote a positive image of China and its policies. Some stations and media outlets are also compelled to promote Chinese content ahead of local or Ghanaian news items, adversely affecting the general media environment in Ghana.

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Elite Relationships: Drivers of China's Influence in East Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay examines interactions at the elite level of China's political and social circles and assesses the role of East Africa within China's strategy to instrumentalize the "global South" to support the country's global power ambitions.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Despite the divergent development paths of Kenya and Tanzania, China's tailored strategy toward the two countries has achieved a relatively similar outcome. Both countries' elected officials actively seek to incorporate elements of the "China model" into their governance framework while serving as a basis of support to China's bid to change the global landscape to be more amenable to its distinctive institutions and governance. The changing geopolitical landscape in East Africa largely stems from great-power competition. Kenyan and Tanzanian political elites cite dissatisfaction with the West's emphasis on human rights and democracy as one of the main reasons for the pivot to the East. Additionally, China's responsive and iterative tactics for cultivating influence enable it to manage local criticism without jeopardizing future prospects. The evolution of the party-state's presence in East Africa has gradually shifted from economic-centric to political, including the dissemination of state-curated propaganda and ideology. In many instances, Kenya and Tanzania are the primary testing grounds for new, noneconomic initiatives. As a result, other countries in the global South can expect to see some of these ideas deployed in the near future.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- China's shifts in policy toward East Africa are mainly aimed at diversifying its mediums for influence. Policy considerations and discussions should recognize that the future of China's bilateral relations with Kenya and Tanzania will be increasingly less economic and more political and ideological.
- The dispositions of Kenya's and Tanzania's presidents bear considerable influence over those countries' foreign policy decisions and outcomes. China's clear and consistent outreach at the executive and ministerial levels appears to mold these established beliefs. Western foreign policy should place a greater premium on high-level visits with East African leaders.
- Kenyan and Tanzanian leaders, when pressed over governance concerns by the West, are willing to prioritize other partnerships. An engagement strategy rooted in democratic values is unlikely to outcompete China's so-called noninterference strategy, given the current international incentive structure and China's already firm grasp on international institutions.

In recent years, Beijing's influence initiatives in Africa have gradually shifted from economic ties to a focus on incorporating closer relationships with African political leaders and elites. State-curated propaganda, message discipline and dissemination, and control of the local narrative have become critical tools in widening China's base of support in Africa, as well as in adapting to the changing landscape for information consumption. These shifts reflect the party-state's identification that infrastructure loans and investments in Africa are no longer sufficient for cultivating the political influence required to support its growing global ambitions.

For the People's Republic of China (PRC) to continue to revise the existing world order into one more amenable to its preferred policy interests and adherent, or at least favorable, to the values and norms of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), deeper support from African governments and, to a lesser extent, African citizens in incorporating the "China model" will be required. To achieve this objective, China will need to leverage its "close friendship" with the continent to test and refine its methods for deploying effective influence campaigns before expanding their geographic scope to other areas of the "global South." Within the African context, the East African countries of Kenya and Tanzania have historically served as bellwethers for the ways in which China will try to persuade the continent and other developing regions to adopt elements of its economic and political system.

This essay explores the party-state's use of Kenya and Tanzania as the primary testing grounds for political influence initiatives for the global South, including what persons and organizations are central to realizing them, the outcome of its efforts, and why this matters for other developing countries. The essay begins with a historical overview of relations between the PRC and Tanzania and Kenya since their independence in the nineteenth century. It then pivots to discuss three important contemporary modes of PRC influence cultivation in East Africa, with an emphasis on how the party-state operationalizes its strategic goals with local stakeholders and institutions: regulatory capture, information manipulation and telecommunications, and political parties. Last, the essay concludes with a section on key interlocutors, demonstrating that top elected Kenyan and Tanzanian officials play critical roles in courting and disseminating PRC interests in their respective countries.

Historical Background

A comparative advantage for China in the emerging great-power competition in Africa is its long-standing relationship with African liberation movements that eventually became ruling parties and governing administrations. This advantage, in many instances, was compounded by the perceived shared ideological base among many former socialist African governments and the CCP. Given the plurality of ruling ideologies in Africa, however, Beijing has diversified its approach and rhetoric to court more democratic-leaning governments. The development of Tanzania and Kenya and their relationships with the party-state embody China's tailored approach to influence cultivation, but also its ability to persuade countries with and without deep historical and ideological connections to voluntarily participate in systems that facilitate the party-state's global ambitions.

Tanzania

In December 1961, just days after its own independence, Tanganyika became the tenth African state to recognize the PRC. The country's first president, Julius Nyerere, saw Mao Zedong and his Maoism as a personality and governance approach to mimic for Tanganyika, which would become the United Republic of Tanzania in 1964.¹ The power of ideology as a diplomatic tool is evident in the early relationship between Tanzania and China. President Nyerere drew inspiration from Mao in his bid to create a socialist development state in Tanzania through his own PRC-style developmental symbolism and ideology, such as Nyerere's 1966 "long march" or the codification of Ujamaa (a pan-African socialism) in Tanzania's legal and regulatory frameworks.²

An examination of the discursive tactics employed by Mao in the 1960s with Tanzania's eager ruling party, Tanganyika African National Union, illustrates that methods to export ideology and shape narratives to build a cadre of countries and leaders amenable to institutions and governance used by the CCP, and its once-in-a-generation commanding leader, are not that dissimilar from what is currently happening in the Xi Jinping era. PRC state-curated propaganda was distributed to Tanzanian political and economic elites as a means to forge "an alternative" path to development. For instance, Mao's Little Red Book was translated into Swahili and English and sold for one shilling.³ Additionally, newspapers such as the *Nationalist* and *Uhuru* printed quotations from the book, while radio stations read quotations across the country.⁴

Beyond ideology, the CCP used the same pragmatic approach to building political influence through technical assistance and infrastructure development in Tanzania that exists today. Most notable was the construction of the Tazara Railway linking Dar es Salaam to Kapiri Mposhi. Following rejection from the World Bank, China offered to give the Tanzanian government an interest-free loan to build a regional railway to support Ujamaa. The bilateral relationship of this era also foreshadowed the importance of media and language and the party-state's understanding that its many forms can be used to disseminate propaganda and embolden partner governments' campaigns to popularize ideology.⁵

Yet, while ties between Dodoma and Beijing initially progressed rapidly after independence, they came to a slow boil as the century ended. The failure of Nyerere's economic policies, coupled with political reform leading to modestly competitive multiparty democracy in Tanzania, among other domestic concerns, eventually led Tanzanian foreign policy to become less dependent on ideological and financial support from the party-state.⁶ This dynamic remained until the advent of two authoritarian leaders and political parties that ushered in a new era of authoritarianism, aiming to expand the party to all levels of government and society and fueled through the embrace of capitalism.

¹ Priya Lal, "Maoism in Tanzania: Material Connections and Shared Imaginaries," in *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*, ed. Alexander C. Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 96–116.

² Nsa Kaisi, "Mwalimu's Long March," *Nationalist* (Tanzania), February 4, 1967.

³ Lal, "Maoism in Tanzania."

⁴ For an example of dissemination of PRC propaganda, see "No Censorship of Books in Tanzania," *Nationalist* (Tanzania), December 12, 1967. Additionally, it is important to note that Tanzanian policy adherence to Maoist principles ventured as far as to create the "Tanzanian Cultural Revolution," banning tribes from wearing traditional garb and forcibly relocating lower-class members of various tribes to the countryside, among other shared elements.

⁵ By 1967, Radio Peking broadcasted 21 hours of Swahili-language programs to Tanzanian audiences per week, while Chinese state-media employees simultaneously supported the Tanganyika Broadcasting Corporation in its postcolonial modernization.

⁶ Bonny Ibhawoh and J.I. Dibua, "Deconstructing Ujamaa: The Legacy of Julius Nyerere in the Quest for Social and Economic Development in Africa," *African Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (2003): 59–83.

Kenya

The evolution of Kenya-China relations is starkly different from Tanzania-China relations. Although China was the fourth country to recognize Kenya in 1963, the relationship progressed in a piecemeal fashion and historically tracked with the inclinations and personal interests of Kenya's president—the country's central foreign policy voice. Kenya's early adoption of capitalism and democratic governance methods were barriers to sustained, meaningful relations with China. Furthermore, the global shift away from Communism toward capitalism and liberal governance pushed pragmatic Kenyan political and social elites to favor relations with the United States and Western European governments.

In 1966, Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, and his ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU), set the tone for Kenya-China relations for the remainder of the twentieth century. Following an intraparty ideological battle on Kenya's future political direction, KANU removed its left wing—closely associated with pro-China and Communist principles—from the party and government.⁷ The public nature of the schism drew the ire of the PRC embassy, which claimed that speeches made by certain KANU members “had subjected the People's Republic of China to slander, vilification, and grave provocation.”⁸ Relations further deteriorated when Kenya recalled its ambassador to China, downgrading diplomatic status to the *chargé d'affaires* level and labeling the PRC's *chargé d'affaires* as *persona non grata*.⁹

It was at this low point in the relationship that President Daniel arap Moi came to power in 1978. For most of his tenure in office, lasting until 2002, the relationship remained static, with the notable exception of the restoration of full diplomatic relations.¹⁰ Following changes to the global geopolitical landscape at the end of the Cold War, Moi gradually increased official cooperation with Beijing, including a state visit in 2002, bilateral trade agreements, and foundations for contemporary cultural exchanges that to this day define the relationship. Moi's successor, Mwai Kibaki, and his National Alliance Rainbow Coalition accelerated the thawing of relations. The new Kenyan administration claimed that heightened Western scrutiny over human rights and allegations of corruption prompted it to embark on the increasingly common “Look East” policy.¹¹

Economic entry points were quickly used to expand into other areas of cooperation, technical assistance, and political and ideological exchange. The breadth and depth of the modern Kenya-China relationship, however, would not be established until the election of President Uhuru Kenyatta, who has played a central role in tethering his country and its political institutions to Xi Jinping's bid for greater global prominence.

⁷ Susanne D. Mueller, “Review of *The Politics of Independent Kenya, 1963–8*,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, no. 3 (1972): 481–84.

⁸ *East African Standard*, July 13, 1966, 6.

⁹ *East African Standard*, June 8, 1967, 2.

¹⁰ Lilian Tunai Mulati, “China-Kenya Relations: An Analysis of Its Nature since Independence,” *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Sciences* 3, no. 10 (2019): 735–46.

¹¹ While never an official policy, Look East yielded its desired effect by increasing the centrality of Asian governments, particularly the PRC, in Kenya's economy. China's development assistance to Kenya increased from 20% to 56% in 2005, becoming the country's largest bilateral donor. This claim and additional information on the PRC's rapid involvement in the Kenyan economy can be found in UN Development Programme, “Kenya Development Cooperation Report,” 2006.

From Theory to Reality: China's Influence on the Ground

This section will examine the PRC's current objectives in East Africa as well as how the party-state operationalizes engagements to achieve its preferred policy outcomes. Following recommendations from Chinese scholars over fears of a "structural imbalance" emerging between China and African countries—among other considerations such as a changing geopolitical landscape and domestic economic concerns—Beijing developed new, less economic-centric objectives for its relationships with these countries. Broadly stated, these objectives are as follows:

- Reform economic development assistance to include lower-dollar value and more targeted projects to maintain inroads with political elites and general populace support.
- Expand information operations to create more state-curated propaganda and disseminate that content to larger, more diverse African audiences to increase positive public sentiment.
- Further consolidate China's grip on political and social elites and then leverage that relationship to facilitate economic and political goals at the regional and national levels.

Given the wide-ranging tactics used by the PRC to cultivate political and economic influence, it is challenging to distill the activities into cohesive, neat categories. The examples below represent the three significant mediums currently observed at the local level.¹²

Regulatory Capture

The PRC's use of economic assistance as an entry point into other areas of East African society is well documented. Furthermore, Chinese scholars and East African civil society have raised the prospect of a serious imbalance in the existing economic paradigm. As such, China's future economic engagement with Kenya (and to a lesser degree Tanzania) will likely look different from its engagement in the first years of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which can be categorized as China's rapid market access and control. As of 2020, there were roughly four hundred Chinese companies operating in Kenya that "won" nearly half of all federally offered construction projects.¹³ China's policy banks, such as the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China (China Exim Bank), often provide funding for marquee infrastructure projects with the condition that a preferred contractor must win the bid. Unsurprisingly, that vendor is always a Chinese state-owned enterprise (SOE).

One of the most discussed instances of this funding cycle is the \$3.6 billion loan to build a standard-gauge railway linking the coastal city of Mombasa with Nairobi. Following opaque negotiations with the donor (China Exim Bank), the Kenyan government awarded the single-source contract to China Communications Construction Company and its subsidiary China Road and Bridge Corporation. This project, as well as many others funded by PRC policy banks and implemented by SOEs, resulted in China becoming Kenya's top bilateral creditor, owning roughly

¹² A budding form of influence exists in the realm of security services and military relationships between the People's Liberation Army and East African military outfits. This essay does not include it as a significant bucket of influence, as it is still nascent and information through official reports and on-the-ground reporting is minimal.

¹³ The quotation marks around "won" indicate the contested fairness of many of these tenders. For more information on the strong position that Chinese SOEs have in East Africa and the allegations of procurement malfeasance, see "Chinese Firms in Kenya Grow Employment Opportunities," CGTN Africa, August 28, 2019, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2019/08/28/chinese-firms-in-kenya-grow-employment-opportunities>; Lewis Nyaundi, "Kenyan Contractors Cry Foul over Chinese Grip on Tenders," *Star* (Kenya), December 18, 2018, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2018-12-18-kenyan-contractors-cry-foul-over-chinese-grip-on-tenders>; and "How China Contractors Drove Kenya Firms Out of Mega Projects," *Business Daily*, January 26, 2017, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/economy/how-china-contractors-drove-kenyan-firms-out-of-mega-projects--2137652>.

\$6.5 billion of its debt. In 2019, Kenya's debt service payments to its creditors alone increased from \$300 million to \$700 million.¹⁴

The "debt trap" narrative has been debunked, but it remains true that the party-state has an outsized role in the Kenyan economy.¹⁵ While this position supported China's economic interests, it also incurred the scrutiny and ire of the Kenyan populace. Allegations of procurement corruption, continued refusal to publicly release terms and conditions, and enormous debt burdens, coupled with anger over the perceived lack of benefit to local communities, created meaningful resentment aimed at Beijing's interlocutors. The resultant attitude could jeopardize China's future ability to achieve its economic interests in East Africa.

The aforementioned issues, particularly the role of public outcry over African countries' debt portfolios, appear to have altered the way China will provide loans and investment in the future. The overall commitment from the 2021 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was roughly \$20 billion less than that from the 2018 forum.¹⁶ Additionally, China's FOCAC pledges contained only \$10 billion of credit, interest-free loans, or grants compared to its 2018 pledge that included \$20 billion of available credit and \$15 billion of interest-free loans and grants. Once hailed as one of Xi Jinping's greatest achievements and a staple of official communications, BRI was not mentioned in the 2021 CCP plenum's communiqué and only once mentioned in a resolution on the history of the party.¹⁷

Moving forward, it is likely that PRC investment in Kenya and Tanzania will continue its current trajectory toward smaller loans, mimicking microfinancing projects used by Western donors. Additionally, public-private partnerships with loans coming directly from Chinese SOEs will become more dominant. Amid a documented slowdown in China's economy, debt restructuring and forgiveness are likely to become diplomatic tools of the past. These strains, alongside relentless calls for transparency regarding PRC development bank loans and a desire for intra-Africa development financing, may severely reduce the space for China to leverage its most successful source of influence-building in East Africa.

Information Manipulation and Telecommunications

The party-state's global propaganda machine is central to its efforts to improve African perceptions of China by "telling the China story well." Furthermore, East Africa is a critical region for understanding how the party-state operationalizes its global media footprint in pursuit of its preferred policy outcomes. Using content-sharing arrangements, telecommunications development projects, strategic acquisitions, domestic talent capture, and the theory of "borrow boats," the party-state has deployed an arsenal of tools in East Africa to increase positive perceptions of itself. This pattern, first established in Kenya and Tanzania, has spread to other African countries and become a blueprint for influencing and cultivating the global South.

¹⁴ Caitlin Dearing Scott, "China Expands Global Authoritarian Influence Efforts: Some Fragile Democracies Show Resilience Against CCP Aggression," International Republican Institute, February 3, 2021, <https://www.iri.org/resources/china-expands-global-authoritarian-influence-efforts-some-fragile-democracies-show-resilience-against-ccp-aggression>.

¹⁵ See, for example, Lee Jones and Shahar Hameiri, "Debunking the Myth of 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy': How Recipient Countries Shape China's Belt and Road Initiative," Chatham House, August 19, 2020, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/08/debunking-myth-debt-trap-diplomacy>.

¹⁶ Yun Sun, "FOCAC 2021: China's Retrenchment from Africa?" Brookings Institution, December 6, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2021/12/06/focac-2021-chinas-retrenchment-from-africa>.

¹⁷ Jeremy Mark, "China's Real 'Debt Trap' Threat," Atlantic Council, December 13, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/chinas-real-debt-trap-threat>.

Unlike in other regions (particularly in developed, industrialized democracies), state-curated content is more likely to appear on East Africans' televisions or radios as opposed to their social media accounts or local newspapers. According to Luo Chen and Wang Yirong, the most effective propaganda mediums to increase an African's positive perception are radio and television.¹⁸ Additionally, their study found that newspaper and social media content did not have the desired effect and concluded that these tools "cannot significantly affect evaluation; at the level of values."

It is unclear if this or similar analysis played a direct role in the development of the party-state's media footprint in Kenya or Tanzania, but the observable approach to creation and dissemination of propaganda in East Africa would suggest that it bore some relevance. Three Chinese state-owned media companies—China Radio International (CRI), China Global Television Network (CGTN), and Xinhua—all selected Nairobi as the base of their operations in Africa. CRI now broadcasts nineteen hours of Kiswahili-, English-, and Chinese-language programming daily that, according to the Tanzanian ambassador to China, offers "African listeners opportunities to realize what happens in China, and to learn Chinese culture and language."¹⁹ Xinhua and CGTN operate in a similar manner, constantly creating and streaming seemingly benign information that portrays China, Xi Jinping, and the CCP's global aspirations in a favorable light.

The reach of CGTN and Xinhua was dramatically extended in 2019 when StarTimes, a private Chinese company, upgraded Kenya's and Tanzania's analog technology to digital networks.²⁰ The initiative, called "10,000 Villages," is the product of the 2015 FOCAC, at which Xi claimed that China-Africa relations would tackle the burgeoning digital divide between rural and urban areas in Africa by upgrading telecommunications systems and providing discounted or free television equipment to low-income communities. As the sole provider of the initiative, StarTimes has significant control over the content streamed on its networks. Consequently, it is no surprise that state-owned media outlets and cooperative local outlets dominate the content available on its platforms, often at the expense of Western outlets such as the BBC and CNN.

A less covered, but increasingly important, component of the party-state's information manipulation plan in East Africa is its concerted effort to co-opt local media outlets' executives and secure content-sharing arrangements. This includes frequently discussed "exchanges" or "trainings" in which PRC interlocutors offer expense-paid trips to local media staff and journalists with the aim to inundate them with state-curated propaganda. Although this practice is widespread, other channels for ideological influence appear more targeted and effective, such as the persistent outreach of PRC state media executives aimed at local media editorial staff. In Kenya, Joseph Odindo, former editorial director for the Nation Media Group, recalled the relentless efforts of Xinhua Africa's executive staff to enter into content-sharing agreements or simply allow Xinhua content to pass through local outlets.²¹ The director-general of Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation was more emphatic at a 2021 Cooperation Forum for Africa Media Partners organized by China Media Group: "Chinese and African media should seize the opportunities of a time of change

¹⁸ Luo Chen and Wang Yirong, "Media Contact, Values and Evaluation of China's Influence in Africa," *Global Media Journal* (2021).

¹⁹ Zheng Yang, "CRI's Kiswahili Broadcast Celebrates 50 Years on Air," *Chinafrica*, September 8, 2011, http://www.chinafrica.cn/exclusives/txt/2011-09/08/content_389281.htm.

²⁰ The StarTimes is owned by Pang Xinxing and was established in 1988. Its operations dramatically expanded in 2015 when it was selected to implement a 2015 FOCAC pledge to close the digital divide. Its areas of operation are mainly based in Central and East Africa, but increasingly West Africa as well.

²¹ The Nation Media Group and Xinhua entered into a content-sharing agreement in 2016. For more information on China's media executive influence strategy, see Chrispin Mwakideu, "Experts Warn of China's Growing Media Influence in Africa," *Deutsche Welle*, January 29, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/experts-warn-of-chinas-growing-media-influence-in-africa/a-56385420>.

and tap into the potential for cooperation in the areas including exchange of content, exchange of staff, and co-production.”²² At the forum, he announced that Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation would soon run the first Chinese-language television program on its platform.

PRC state-owned media organizations, however, have used competition with the United States to further the party-state’s propaganda goals in East Africa since at least 2017. Pang Xinhua, then CGTN Africa’s bureau chief, cited how China’s coverage of Africa aims to show that the continent “is more than a land of disease and conflict, insecurity and explosions.” In addition to attempting to increase coverage, CGTN and other outlets use coverage of Africa by Western media such as CNN and the BBC as a recruitment tool for local Kenyans and Tanzanians.²³

Political Parties

A core element of China’s influence efforts in East Africa is cultivating ruling parties. This practice, led by the International Liaison Department (ILD), was used by the CCP for decades, but its retooling in the Xi Jinping era has reached new heights. Buttressed by historical links, the ILD is using people-to-people interactions and party exchanges, among other methods, to generate an unprecedented level of cooperation and coordination with Kenya’s and Tanzania’s ruling parties, creating two reliable partners at international forums and local support for the PRC’s economic objectives.

The CCP’s relationship with Tanzania’s ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), is key to the recently revived relationship between the two countries. This is in part because former president John Magufuli did not seek China’s financial assistance to the same degree as other African leaders, namely Kenyan president Kenyatta, during the same period. Leveraging the ideological ties fostered during the Nyerere era, the CCP found an entry point into the Magufuli administration. One visible instance of cultivating a new ideological relationship was funding from the PRC government to build the Mwalimu Nyerere Leadership School. The school, according to Magufuli, was created to train CCM party cadres, as well as those from five other African nations, on the party’s history and ideology. At the groundbreaking ceremony on July 17, 2018, Magufuli called for curriculum that honored the history of liberation when Tanzania and China shared closer ideological ties. The following day, at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting, Magufuli reiterated the CCM’s desire to follow in the wake of the CCP’s development, echoing Xi’s talking points on “building a community with a shared future.”²⁴

In addition to robust economic engagement, Kenya’s ruling Jubilee Party has forged historic ties with the CCP. The evolution of these ties over the last decade is remarkable for many reasons and a clear indicator of the success of the ILD’s efforts. That a political party that had removed all Communist sympathizers now actively seeks party-management training from the CCP amplifies and validates scholars who have highlighted China’s attempt to export its model of institutions and governance. President Kenyatta is central to this dynamic, as he often calls for CCP training and echoes CCP talking points. For instance, in a 2014 meeting with Party Secretary Guo

²² “CMG Holds Cooperation Forum with African Media Partners,” CGTN Africa, November 26, 2021, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwtU0Hsg9A0>.

²³ Hillary Lisimba, “News Anchor Grace Kuria Moves to CGTN Days after Ditching KTN,” Tuko, January 19, 2021, <https://www.tuko.co.ke/400238-news-anchor-grace-kuria-moves-cgtn-days-ditching-ktn.html>.

²⁴ John Kamau, “Secrets, the CCM Legacy and the Magufuli Illness,” *Daily Nation* (Kenya), March 19, 2021, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/africa/secrets-ccm-legacy-magufuli-illness-3327950>; Bernard Lugongo, “CCM Underlines Lessons from CPC Successes,” *Daily News* (Tanzania), July 8, 2021, <https://dailynews.co.tz/news/2021-07-0860e69e850d1df.aspx>; and “High-Level Dialogue between CPC, African Parties Opens in Tanzania,” Xinhua, July 18, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0718/c90000-9481968.html>.

Jinlong, he pledged to learn from China's experience in governance. That promise was realized when Kenyatta called for Jubilee Party members to learn "grassroots mobilization, democracy, and party management skills" from the CCP. As of 2020, through ILD exchanges, the CCP had held workshops for Jubilee Party leaders in all of Kenya's 47 counties. The exchanges, which often include high-ranking elected officials such as county deputy-governors, emphasize reforms that ruling elites can enact to consolidate their grip on power within the party, among other topics related to strengthening the role of the party within Kenya's political system.²⁵

Key Interlocutors

Uhuru Kenyatta

Kenyan foreign policy behavior and outcomes are heavily influenced by the whims and idiosyncrasies of the Kenyan president. In addition to structural considerations, the mindset of the president often explains alterations to the Kenya-China relationship. In 2013, following the election of Uhuru Kenyatta, son of the country's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya accelerated its rapprochement with China, ushering in a new era for the bilateral relationship. By virtue of his role, President Kenyatta has been integral to this expansion.

President Kenyatta had many reasons to meaningfully advance the Look East policy started by his predecessor. Namely, Kenya's traditional Western allies balked at recognizing his administration amid claims of sponsored electoral violence, and China had become a serious alternative for development assistance. His arrival coincided with Xi Jinping's ascension to leadership and announcement of the "China dream," including BRI with its seemingly beneficial opportunities for Kenya. During his first year in office and in a snub to Washington, Kenyatta made a state visit to China (and nineteen other countries), where he offered Kenya's support to Xi's key foreign policy project.²⁶ Kenyatta was keen to join BRI and bridge the constant infrastructure financing gap that sub-Saharan African countries faced.

Two dynamics became clear at an early juncture in Kenyatta's tenure. First, party-state interlocutors, including the ILD, CCP Propaganda Department, and Cyberspace Administration, more aggressively pushed "sharp power" campaigns to extoll the virtues of China's distinctive institutions and governance approaches to Kenyan leaders. Second, Kenyan elected officials and ruling party members were not only open to but actively sought technical expertise and guidance from high-level CCP officials.

When attempting to cultivate political entry points with Kenya's ruling political elite, Beijing pushed an already open door. The Jubilee Party's increased cooperation and coordination start at the highest points of Kenya's government. President Kenyatta has led a top-down push to inject the party-state's methods to create a "great" ruling party that is central to the survival and function of the country.²⁷ An additional indicator of CCP influence within Kenyan elite political

²⁵ Stephen Mkawale, "China Now Trains Jubilee Officials in Counties on Leadership, Strengthening Its Party," *Standard* (Kenya), July 18, 2018, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/rift-valley/article/2001288474/china-jubilee-discuss-control-of-counties>.

²⁶ Sudarsan Raghavan, "In Snub to Washington, Kenyan President Visits China, Russia in First Official Visit Outside Africa," *Washington Post*, August 17, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-snob-to-washington-kenyan-president-visits-china-russia-in-first-official-visit-outside-africa/2013/08/17/baaed162-06a4-11e3-bfc5-406b928603b2_story.html.

²⁷ Justus Wanga, "Jubilee Looks to the Communist Party for Lessons," *Daily Nation* (Kenya), September 17, 2016, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/politics/jubilee-looks-to-the-communist-party-for-lessons-1239712>; and Renmin Wang, "Peng Qinghua lu Zhongguo gongchangdang daibiao tuan fangwen Keniya" [Peng Qinghua Leads Chinese Communist Party Delegation to Kenya], *Guangxi Daily*, August 22, 2016.

circles is that PRC officials appear to have been the only non-African international delegation to attend and speak at the official launch of the Jubilee Party in 2016.²⁸ Xi's personal attention and prioritization of Kenyatta and his party have clearly made an impact. The two leaders have met on at least six occasions since they assumed power in 2013. The high-level attention dedicated to Kenyan policymakers by Xi and other top CCP officials is a significant medium through which the party-state cultivates political influence.

Kenyatta's second term in office will end in 2022, and the disposition of his successor could meaningfully affect the strong relationship between China and Kenya. Thus far, though, the candidates who have officially expressed interest in the job, including William Ruto and Raila Odinga, already have good relationships with the party-state. It is unlikely that either major candidate would drastically change Kenya's now firmly entrenched relationship with China.

John Magufuli

The vestiges of Nyerere's influence over Tanzania remain strong in both political circles and popular culture. His posthumous nickname, "father of the nation," is a ubiquitous ornament on billboards, public transit, and advertisements, among many other contexts. Likewise, despite a momentary period of disaffection with the consequences of Nyerere's policies, Tanzania's political structures and methods have not strayed far from his legacy, including a one-party rule bend. These policies did not have a vocal advocate in the Ikulu (Tanzania's State House) again until the election of President Magufuli in 2015. In addition to leading with authoritarian tendencies, he followed in Nyerere's mold to reorient Tanzania to China's vision for the world.

On the surface, Magufuli's first term in office does not appear to have heavily emphasized Tanzania's relationship with China. Famously, he temporarily suspended the \$10 billion Bagamoyo port project in 2016 and permanently suspended it in 2019 on the grounds that it was "exploitative and awkward."²⁹ He insisted that the loan's terms and conditions be renegotiated to better prioritize Tanzanian economic interests. A closer look at Magufuli's relationship with Beijing, however, reveals a more complicated picture. While simultaneously adopting a more circumspect position vis-à-vis economic arrangements, he also desired to install elements of the China model in Tanzania.³⁰

Why President Magufuli reoriented Tanzanian foreign policy away from the West and to the East is not entirely clear. One prominent theory is that the late president, like many other African leaders, grew frustrated with the conditionality of loans and investment from Western donors on human rights and governance reforms. When responding to concerns of suspended aid from Denmark, he declared that he preferred aid from China because of its freedom from conditions: "The thing that makes you happy about their aid is that it is not tied to any conditions. When they decide to give you [assistance], they just give you."³¹

²⁸ Benjamin Wafula, "Chinese Party Officials Grace Jubilee Party Launch," Citizen Digital, September 10, 2016, <https://citizen.digital/news/chinese-party-officials-grace-jubilee-party-launch-140785>.

²⁹ Omar Mohammed, "Under Pressure from Western Donors, Tanzanian Leader Prefers Chinese Aid," Reuters, November 27, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tanzania-china-aid-idUSKCN1NW1SB>; "John Magufuli: Tanzania Prefers 'Condition-Free' Chinese Aid," BBC News, November 27, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46364342>; and Prachi Mittal, "Falling Apart: A Story of the Tanzanian Bagamoyo Port Project," Observer Research Foundation, September 15, 2020, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/falling-apart-a-story-of-the-tanzanian-bagamoyo-port-project>.

³⁰ Kamau, "Secrets, the CCM Legacy and the Magufuli Illness"; Lugongo, "CCM Underlines Lessons from CPC Successes"; and "High-Level Dialogue between CPC, African Parties Opens in Tanzania."

³¹ Mohammed, "Under Pressure from Western Donors, Tanzanian Leader Prefers Chinese Aid."

A perhaps more compelling argument is that Magufuli noted the success of the China model in consolidating Xi's power and wanted to replicate it in Tanzania. From the beginning of his time in office, Magufuli demonstrated an affinity for more centralized government control. Under the guise of anticorruption, for example, he led several reforms to limit the political and social freedoms of Tanzanians. Shortly after the 2020 China-Tanzania New Media Roundtable, sponsored by the PRC Embassy in Tanzania and the Cyberspace Administration of China, the Tanzanian government passed the Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations Act. The new laws curbed access to and freedom of speech on the internet, increased government data collection, and outlined severe penalties for those found guilty. The key architect of the law, the deputy minister for transport and communication Edwin Ngonyani, said at the roundtable that "our Chinese friends have managed to block such media in their country and replaced them with their homegrown sites that are safe, constructive and popular," while also citing the role of social media in destabilizing regimes during the Arab Spring.³²

Inspired by global democratic decline, Magufuli was rumored to have explored options that eliminate executive term limits, thereby enabling him to rule for life. This did not come to pass, in part because he died in early 2021. Magufuli's successor, President Samia Suluhu Hassan, has thus far not sought to alter the flourishing China-Tanzania relationship. In late 2021, Hassan revived the beleaguered Bagamoyo port project, albeit with multiple donors and a smaller role for China Merchants Port Holdings.

Conclusion

Has China increased its influence in East Africa using new, multilayered tactics? The answer by most measures is yes. Despite the incongruent basis of the two political systems in question, the party-state has tailored its campaigns to cultivate influence in Kenya and Tanzania and positioned historical legacies to advantage and further its political objectives. Beijing will continue to use growing dissatisfaction with the West in East Africa and many other regions in the global South to expedite the export of its China model as a cornerstone of continued economic and political growth.

China's future political influence in East Africa will likely continue on the path outlined in this essay of pursuing more targeted economic engagement while shifting significant resources to securing political support through propaganda and cooperation with ruling parties. The impact of different leadership in Kenya's and Tanzania's executive offices could shift the direction of these relationships, but most discernible signs indicate that major course corrections are unlikely. An additional deterrent to further co-optation of East African countries could be renewed U.S. engagement in the region. This prospect, however, remains unlikely given the United States' persistent bend toward prioritizing human rights and democracy over deeper, more material bilateral relationships.

Democratic activists and countries aiming to curb the export or import of CCP-styled authoritarianism elsewhere would be prudent to note the tactics used by the PRC in Kenya and Tanzania, as these tactics are likely to be used in their region, if they have not been used already. East Africa serves as a testing ground for influence cultivation activities, and given the

³² Nick Bailey, "East African States Adopt China's Playbook on Internet Censorship," Freedom House, October 24, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/east-african-states-adopt-chinas-playbook-internet-censorship>.

tremendous success experienced, the methods will likely be retooled for other countries in Africa and the global South. Moreover, countries with former socialist, Communist, or other ideological ties with the CCP are particularly vulnerable to this influence. Yet the existence of this dynamic is not necessary to facilitate the illiberal practices of the CCP into democratic political systems, as illustrated by the Kenyan case study. The elite relationships between PRC and East African political leaders are the driving force behind the dissemination and adaptation of Beijing's preferred policy outcomes, as well as incorporating elements of the China model. Elite dynamics between elected officials from the PRC and other global South countries ought to be explored to further map the role this plays in China's burgeoning global leadership aspirations.



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