

Sino-African Relations at a New Stage of Development

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Since the introduction of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, China-Africa relations have entered a new period of development, with both sides striving for the development of a new type of strategic partnership based on such principles as political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchange. Sincerity, equality and mutual benefit, solidarity and common development have become the major themes for China-Africa exchange and cooperation and the driving force to lasting China-Africa relations.

Background to This New Stage

China-Africa friendship is embedded in the long history of interchange. Sharing similar historical experience, China and Africa have all along sympathized with and supported each other in the struggle for national liberation and independence, and have forged a profound friendship, which has stood the test of all kinds in the past 50 years. For over half a century, the two sides have enjoyed close political ties and frequent exchange of high-level visits and people-to-people contacts. The bilateral trade and economic cooperation have grown rapidly; cooperation in other fields has yielded good results; and consultation and coordination in international affairs have been intensified. China has provided assistance to the best of its ability to African countries, while African countries have also rendered strong support to China on many occasions. Thus, one can say with confidence, that with the care and cultivation of both sides, China-Africa relations have reached their maturity.

At the turn of the century, new circumstances brought China and Africa closer together. At the African level, the idea of African Renaissance prevailed on the continent, with African countries making every effort to achieve peace and stability, promote economic development and realize the Millennium Development Goals. In the face of ever intensifying trend of globalization VS African marginalization,

African countries, after meticulous consultation and coordination, worked out the grand plan for African development----the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), as well as engaged themselves in the organizational construction of the AU, which replaced the OAU in 2002, so as to build a solid foundation for collective efforts for common economic development. At the Chinese level, after more than two decades of fast economic growth, China stood firm on her way to rise. As a rising power, China assumed more international responsibilities and needed to work out a grand international strategy to accompany her peaceful rise. The common destiny of China----the largest developing country and Africa----the continent with most of the developing countries, has brought China and Africa closer together as well as called for both sides to coordinate their efforts for common development in a world dominated by Western developed powers. In the light of this new circumstance, a new mechanism of cooperation is badly needed for China and Africa so as to facilitate further development of China-Africa relations in the new century.

It is against this background that FOCAC was introduced with the common efforts of both China and Africa in 2000 to serve as a platform for collective dialog, consultation and coordination, which has been proved to be of great success in consolidation of China-Africa traditional friendship and providing a practical and effective vehicle for further cooperation. Over the past 7 years, FOCAC, which has successfully held three ministerial conferences in 2000, 2003 and 2006 respectively and a summit in 2006 in Beijing, constantly added new contents to China-Africa cooperation. With the mechanism provided by FOCAC, China-Africa cooperation has reached a new height and yielded even greater results. The chief features of this period will be fully expressed in the next section.

Features of Sino-African Relations at a New Stage

As we can see, FOCAC was introduced in accordance with new circumstances, and served as a practical and effective platform for the common development of China and Africa in the new century. With the introduction of FOCAC, China-Africa relations entered another period of development, which presented some new characteristics.

First, China-Africa relations occupied an important place in China's external strategy. In January 2006, China issued her first ever African Policy Paper, announcing to the world China's intention to develop a new type of strategic partnership with Africa, featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation, and cultural exchange. Such a strategic partnership is based on the following principles: sincerity, friendship and equality; mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity; mutual support and close coordination; learning from each other and seeking common development. During his visit to three African countries in April 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao presented a five-point proposal for such a strategic partnership: strengthening political mutual trust, expanding win-win economic cooperation, increasing cultural interaction, cooperation on security issues, and coordinating closely in international affairs, which highlighted the principles put forward in China's African Policy Paper.

Second, China-Africa bilateral cooperation has become diversified and comprehensive. The African Policy Paper also identified in greater detail the areas of bilateral cooperation: (1) the political field, which includes high-level visits, exchanges between legislative bodies, exchanges between political parties, cooperation in international affairs, exchanges between local governments; (2) the economic field, which includes trade, investment, financial cooperation, agricultural cooperation, infrastructure, resources cooperation, tourism cooperation, debt reduction and relief, economic assistance, multilateral cooperation; (3) Education, science, culture, health and social aspects, which include cooperation in human resources development and education; science and technology cooperation; cultural exchanges; medical and health cooperation; media cooperation; administrative cooperation; consular cooperation; people-to-people exchange; environmental cooperation; disaster reduction; relief and humanitarian assistance; (4) Peace and security, which includes military cooperation; conflict settlement and peacekeeping operations; judicial and police cooperation; and non-traditional security cooperation.

Third, the past three ministerial conferences and the Beijing Summit have produced a number of documents as well as follow-up plans which not only set the tone for China-Africa cooperation, but also promote the realization of the goals set by each conference. During the Beijing Summit in 2006, China announced important initiatives for further strengthening relations with Africa, as well as 8 measures to help African countries accelerate their development and to promote Sino-African cooperation. These measures include: doubling China's 2006 assistance

to Africa by 2009; providing Africa with \$ 3 billion of preferential loans and \$ 2 billion of preferential buyer's credits; setting up a China-Africa development fund worth \$ 5 billion; building a conference center for the African Union; canceling debt owned by heavily indebted poor countries and the least developed countries in Africa; further opening up China's market to Africa by increasing from 190 to over 440 the number of export items to China that receive zero-tariff treatment from the least developed countries in Africa; establishing several trade and economic cooperation zones in Africa and creating other measures to promote Sino-African cooperation in the socio-economic field. In the field of socio-cultural cooperation, China has promised: training 15000 African professionals; sending 100 senior agricultural experts to Africa; setting up 10 special agricultural technology demonstration centers; building 30 hospitals, donating RMB 300 million in grants for anti-malarial activities, and building 30 malaria prevention and treatment centers; dispatching 300 youth volunteers; building 100 rural schools; and increasing the number of Chinese government scholarships to African students from the current 2000 a year to 4000 a year by 2009. Thus, one can say with confidence that the proposals made by FOCAC summit meeting will be a major driving force for upgrading the future mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Africa.

Fourth, many African countries have adopted "Look East" policy, eager to learn from China's success of economic development and longing for closer cooperation with China so as to speed up their development. There have been frequent high-level visits by African ruling parties to China, actively comparing notes and discussing with their counterpart, the CPC, as to how to run their respective countries well. While, there have also been frequent high-level visits by the CPC to Africa, which are engaged in exchange of their administrative experiences.

Last, the development of China-Africa relations is accelerating and some satisfying results have been achieved:

(1) Bilateral trade has grown rapidly. In 2006, the volume of bilateral trade between China and Africa reached \$ 55.5 billion, more than 5 times that of 2000. China is trying to bring its bilateral trade volume with Africa to \$ 100 billion in the year 2010. One may also notice that since 2000, China's trade surplus with Africa has been greatly reduced and since 2004 China's trade with Africa has been in deficit. Such phenomena had rarely been seen prior to 2000.

(2) By the end of 2006, China's total investment to Africa reached \$ 11.7 billion, many times that of 1999. At present, China's investment to Africa takes up 9% of her total external investment, dispersed in 49 African countries, covering such areas as trade, processing, resource exploitation, transportation, agriculture, etc.

(3) In 2006, China finished contract projects in Africa worth \$ 9.5 billion, which covered such areas as residential construction, petrol-chemistry projects, electricity, communication, transportation, hydraulic projects, etc.

(4) From 2004 to 2006, 10000 African talents of various kinds were trained by China as promised at the Second FOCAC held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2003. And at Beijing Summit in 2006, China once again promised to train another 15000 African talents in next 3 years.

(5) In 2006, another 9 African countries, including Algeria, Gabon, Rwanda, Mali, Mozambique and Nigeria, were added to the list of Tourist-Destinations for Chinese nationals, making 26 in total.

(6) China has taken an active part in peace-keeping in Africa. At the moment, China is engaged in 7 peace-keeping operations in Africa, contributing 1273 peace-keeping troops. In addition to the peace-keeping troops committed by China, China also contributes both financially and materially to the peace-keeping operations in Africa.

(7) China has written off RMB 10.9 billion Yuan debt owned by 30 some African countries since 2000 and promised to write off RMB 10 billion more owned the heavily indebted poorest African countries before the year 2009.

(8) Recently, China pointed Ambassador Liu Guijin, a veteran diplomat and Africa-hand, as special envoy of China on African affairs, which implies China's more active engagement in Africa.

Challenges Ahead

Since the introduction of FOCAC, China and Africa are confronted with a number of new challenges. These challenges, as Prof. Li Anshan of Peking University correctly pointed out, include: (1) China's (or Chinese enterprises') interest VS African (or African enterprises') interest; (2) China's national interest VS Chinese

enterprises' interest; (3) China's interest VS the big powers' vested interest; (4) China's need for natural resources VS Africa's expectance for sustainable development; (5) Chinese and African temporary interest VS their long-term interest.

Presently, how to meet with these challenges so as to further the development of China-Africa relations remains a deep concern for the Chinese government as well as the main topic of studies for the Chinese scholars, especially those who are engaged in policy studies and analysis in China.

But, it goes without saying, these challenges are by no means impediments to the further development of China-Africa relations. On the contrary, their resolution will further push China-Africa relations forward and consolidate the foundation for Sino-African strategic partnership.

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