

Exchanges between the Communist Party of China and Political Parties in African Countries

ISSA KANSAYE

Faculty of Law and Politics, Northeast Normal University
Changchun City, Jilin Province China

Abstract

China-Africa relations go beyond trade, infrastructural development, cultural exchange and aid. The relations include the political dimension which is characterized by inter-party exchanges between the Communist Party of China and political parties in Africa. The Communist Party of China and political parties in Africa have a long history of contact dating back to the 1950s when most African countries were fighting for independence from colonial masters. Leaders of African liberation movements sought assistance from the Peoples' Republic of China. These relations have blossomed from just exchanges between the Communist Party of China and communist parties in African countries to both ruling and opposition parties and youth leaders who represent the future generations. The exchanges have been formalized to include trainings and visits by party cadres both from the Peoples' Republic of China and African countries. South Africa, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia are classical examples of the exchanges between the Communist Party of China and political parties in African countries. As the Peoples' Republic of China seeks to popularize the China model of development and governance in Africa, political training and the interparty exchanges constitute an important avenue for selling the Chinese ideological agenda.

Keywords: Exchanges, Communist Party of China, political parties in African countries

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Most focus has been placed on the economic and infrastructural dimension of China-Africa relations. The political dimension receives

less emphasis yet it is at the heart of China's foreign policy for Africa. Early modern bilateral relations between Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) were mainly influenced by the cold war and the communist ideology. China initially had close ties with the anti-apartheid and liberation movement, African National Congress (ANC), in South Africa. As the PRC's relations with the Soviet Union worsened, the ANC moved closer to the Soviet Union. The PRC drifted away from the ANC towards the Pan-Africanist Congress (Taylor, 2000). At this point in time in history, most African countries were fighting against the colonial masters in order to gain independence. The Soviet Union supported Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union, and supplied them with arms. Robert Mugabe's attempts to gain the Soviet Union's support for his Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) failed, leading him to enter into relations with China (Blair, 2002; Meredith, 2002; Alao, 2012). The PRC supported many of the African liberation movements. The PRC adopted several principles, among them supporting the independence of African countries while investing in infrastructure projects (O'ballance, 2000; Genin, 2019). The relations began just before independence and have continued to grow over the years and have widened in scope.

According to Green, Nelson & Washington (2020), Africa's central role within China's broader foreign policy dates to the early days of the Cold War and has been reemphasized by successive Chinese leaders. In recent years, China's engagement has grown to span the continent. Through a series of strategic partnerships in each key African region, Beijing prioritizes its relationships with Africa's most populous, economically dynamic, and culturally influential countries to advance its interests across the continent. Beijing maintains particularly strong ties with countries with which it has historically shared an ideological affinity, such as Angola, Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. China has made Africa a central focus of its foreign policy since the early days of the Cold War. Green, Nelson & Washington (2020) further observe that over the last two decades, this focus has grown more pronounced as Beijing has significantly expanded its political, technological, economic, and security engagement with nearly all African countries. China's deepening connections with Africa have helped the continent in many important ways, most notably through activities to address the severe infrastructure shortage many African countries face. At

the same time, Beijing has sought to leverage its near-ubiquitous presence on the continent to promote an alternative political model that promotes state-led, illiberal governance. Both China and the African continent continue to benefit from the bilateral ties.

2.0 Exchanges between the Communist Party of China and Political Parties in African Countries

The exchanges between the Chinese and African political parties began in the 1950s. At that time, the Communist Party of China (CPC) only established relations with political parties of communist nature around the world. However, many African national liberation organizations sent delegations to visit China to seek political, moral and material support and receive political and military training. Though most of these delegations were invited by China's non-governmental organizations, they had their first contact with related departments in the CPC. By the end of the 1970s, the CPC adjusted its foreign policies and started to develop relations with non-communist African parties and in particular with ruling parties (Weiyun, 2012). It is clear that the CPC and political parties in Africa have had a long history of contact which spans to several decades ago when Africans were fighting for independence. Initially, the CPC had contact with countries that were communist in nature but later on moved on to support even countries that were not aligned towards communism.

By 1988, over 40 political parties from Sub-Saharan Africa had established relations with the CPC. In the early 1990s, a wave of multi-party democracy swept the African continent and posed certain negative impact on Sino-African inter-party exchange. After years of sustained communications, many of the long-reigning parties with which China had invested much time and energy developing relationships were replaced. The new ruling parties had little understanding of the CPC and Sino-African inter-party exchanges experienced a low ebb. In the mid-1990s African political parties once again became interested in contact with the CPC. The CPC successively established relations with a batch of new African political parties. Contact has been growing even faster in the 21st century and as many African countries have become stable and these nation's political parties have the increasing desire to work with the CPC. The momentum of bilateral party relations has been good, and to date the

CPC has established relations with 81 African parties both in and out of power (Weiyun, 2012). The rise of multi-party system in Africa slowed down the progress that had been made. This is because the CPC supported a one-party authoritarian system of government as opposed to several parties as was the case in Africa at that time. In addition some of the ruling parties that had prior contact with the CPC lost elections and were replaced with new parties. This implied that the CPC had to consider engaging again with the new ruling parties.

Ideological affinity drawing on a shared socialist and anticolonial heritage plays a key role in a number of China's strongest and most enduring partnerships, including those with Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. Most of these countries have been governed since their independence by the former national liberation movements that China trained during the Cold War (Nantulya, 2020). The ties have since extended to cover almost all countries on the African continent.

Talks between Chinese and African parties cover both political and economic topics and are used to enhance economic and trade cooperation. Under the multi-party system in African countries, the ruling parties strive to win support from their people by performing well, and practical and fruitful cooperation with China through inter-party exchanges is to their advantage. The CPC also wants to strengthen Sino-African ties through promoting economic cooperation and trade (Weiyun, 2012). Both China and African countries view Sino-African relations as mutually benefitting even though these relations have been criticized for being asymmetrical.

The foreign Communist Party's diplomacy policy remains to this day at the bedside of development reforms initiated by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party after the death of Mao Zedong in (1976)

In 1979 Deng Xiaoping, architect of the reform and opening of the People's Republic of China (PRC) based on two major principles of the diplomacy of the Chinese Communist Party which emerges Peace and development

New Chinese diplomacy in Africa is based on 5 principles governing Chinese foreign policy first set out in 1953 by Chou En- lai and which are

1 mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity

- 2 mutual non-aggressions
- 3 non-interference in internal affairs
- 4 Equality and reciprocal benefits
- 5 peaceful coexistences

In July 1992 the African visit of Chinese President Yang Shang Kun, during the course were discussed the new bases of Sino African orientation reflected and recalled the visit of Chou Enlai of 1953; China supports African countries in maintaining their sovereignty and national independence, as well as in their fight against external intervention China respects African countries in their choice of a political system and a proposed development path to their nationals.

After several years, these principles remain the heart of the Sino-African relationship.

This orientation of the new Chinese Communist Party diplomacy has the right to be clear It barely veiled neocolonialism denounces as stated in the Beijing declaration from the meeting of foreign trade and cooperation foreign ministers International of China and African Countries held from 10 to 12 October 2000, all states have the right to participate on an equal footing in international affairs No country or group of countries has the right to impose its will others, nor to interfere in the internal affairs of others under the pretext China and African countries have shared interests, if China benefits a lot from cooperation, Africa expects no less from the advantage of having resources to finance its development, but also allows the bypassing of traditional trade circuits . The arrival of China in Africa offers African countries the opportunity to choose and expand their economic and political partners. In this context, Chinese aid is welcome for the revival of African economies. China's investments in Africa are growing steadily, with regard to official development assistance it should be noted that the People's Republic has made considerable donations to African countries. However, Sino - African cooperation is highly valued on the continent and on the other hand contributes to an initiation of African economic growth. In the recent past the People's Republic of China had always seduced other nations by the singularity of its culture, today it is through its industrial development and its gigantic economic growth. China attached to the principles of equality in rights of the states and respect for the

sovereignty of African countries; this allowed him to conquer the hearts of the majority of Africans.

Ideological aspect of China's engagement in Africa has always been an intriguing topic for observers. This can be traced back into history. During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government spent great efforts and resources on "exporting revolution" (communism and revolutionary war) to developing countries, particularly in Africa and Southeast Asia. Since the reform and opening up, China gradually abandoned the ideology-driven foreign policy. However, with China's more recent rise, what has emerged instead is the so-called "China model" featuring authoritarian capitalism. China is actively promoting this new model of China's political and economic development in Africa through political party training programs, which constitute a key component of Chinese foreign policy toward Africa. The political party training programs' goal is to educate African political parties on China's experience in economic development and political governance. They almost universally include three basic components. These are 1) lectures at a Chinese education or training institution, 2) field trips to a local government for first-hand experience and meetings with local officials, farmers, and businesses, and 3) cultural programs to familiarize participants with Chinese traditional culture (Sun, 2016). The party-to-party training is an important platform for diffusing the CPC ideologies even though African cadres are not obliged to take up the ideas after the training.

Ethiopia has been the most eager student of China's development and government experience in Africa. The ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), first sent a senior delegation to Beijing in 1994 for "China's advice on Ethiopia's development." Through training and exchanges, China also contributed significantly to the EPRDF's political development and capacity building. EPRDF's cadre training system has learned and imitated many aspects of Chinese Communist Party's setups. Its Central Party School and party cadre education system owes its success to a 2011 training program by the Central Party School of the Chinese Communist Party in Beijing (Sun, 2016). The EPRDF, which had been the dominant party in Ethiopia since 1991 until late 2019, is the best example of China molding an African party in its image through party-to-party relations. In December 2019, Ethiopia's Prime

Minister Abiy Ahmed disbanded the EPRDF and formed a new political party.[‡] It is not yet clear whether this new party will retain the EPRDF's close ties with China, but the CCP's historical imprint on Ethiopia is significant (Gardner, 2020). The EPRDF historically shared with the CCP an antipathy for liberalism and a revolutionary leftist heritage; its guiding ideology of "Revolutionary Democracy" was partly influenced by Maoism, and early cadres were encouraged to read Mao's revolutionary writings (Gadzala, 2015).

In other cases, African political parties' training programs in China focus less on authoritarian aspects of governance, but more on the capacity and the development of political parties themselves. In the past five years, this type of training program has been conducted for National Congress Party of Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement of South Sudan, the South West African People's Organization of Namibia, and the Communist Party of South Africa. South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) and the Chinese Communist Party signed a memorandum of understanding in 2008 on China's enhanced efforts to train ANC members in China. A key tool of Chinese influence in Africa is the CCP's party-to-party training, which China uses to spread its model of authoritarian, state-led development on the continent. China's cadre training program dates to the Cold War, when Beijing exported its Maoist revolutionary ideology to Africa and developing countries on other continents. Afterward, Beijing adopted a largely non-ideological foreign policy toward Africa dating from the late 1970s until the latter part of the 2000s. The global financial crisis in 2007–2008, followed by General Secretary Xi's ascent to power in 2012, contributed to a shift in China's foreign policy and intensified Beijing's ideological approach to party-to-party training (Eisenmann & Shinn, 2018).

With the older generation of leaders leaving political arena, it has become a common task for young politicians of both sides to continue the Sino-African friendship. Sam Nujoma, the first president of Namibia, went to China to receive political and military training while fighting for national independence. According to the proposal of Namibia's South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), the CPC and the SWAPO co-organized the first Africa-China Young Leaders Forum in Windhoek in May 2011. In June 2012, the second China-Africa Young Leaders' Forum was held in Beijing. Nearly 200 young leaders from China and 38 African countries attended the

forum. The forum is not only a venue for both sides to review traditional friendship, but also a platform to discuss new cooperation. Both sides agree that the forum should be held regularly. The forum would be held for every three years in China and Africa by turns (Weiyun, 2012). By reaching out to the young leaders, the CPC hopes to foster continuity and sustainability of the party exchanges in the future.

3.0 Methodology

This was a qualitative case study design which used content analysis to analyze data and summarize findings. Data was collected mainly from books and journal articles from different authors. Sources of information were filtered depending on their relevance to the purpose of the study and credibility of the authors.

REFERENCES

1. Alao, A. (2012). *Mugabe and the politics of security in Zimbabwe*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University press.
2. Blair, D. (2002). *Degrees in violence: Robert Mugabe and the struggle for power in Zimbabwe*. London and New York: Continuum.
3. Eisenman, J. & Shinn, D.H. (2018). China's strategy in Africa in Joshua, E. & Eric, H., Eds, *China steps out: Beijing's major power engagement with the developing world*. Routledge.
4. Gadzala, A. (2015). Ethiopia: Toward a Foreign-Funded Revolutionary Democracy in Aleksandra, G., ed., *Africa and China: How Africans and their governments are shaping relations with China*. Rowan & Littlefields publishers.
5. Gardner, T. (2020). Will Abiy Ahmed's Bet on Ethiopia's Political Future Pay off? *Foreign Policy*, January.
6. Genin, A. (2019). France resets African political relations: a potential lesson for Trump
7. Green, W., Nelson, L. & Washington, B. (2020). China's engagement with Africa: Foundations for an alternative governance regime. *US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, May 1st*.
8. Meredith, M. (2002). *Our votes, our guns: Robert Mugabe and the tragedy of Zimbabwe*. New York: Public Affairs
9. Nantulya, P. (2020). *US-China Economic security Review Commission, Hearing on China's Military power projection and U.S National interests. Written testimony*
10. O'balance, E. (2000). *Sudan, Civil War, and Terrorism, 1956-99*. New York: St. Martin's Press, and London: MacMillan Press

11. Sun, Y. (2016). Political party training: China's ideological push in Africa. Retrieved from: www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/07/05
12. Weiyun, Z. (2012). Inter-party relations promote Sino-African strategic partnership. Retrieved from: www.china.org.n