© 2026 Centro de Estudos Internacionais do Iscte - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC): International Development Cooperation, strategic interests, and African agency

Isabella Welker Antoni
San Tiago Dantas Graduate Program in International Relations
UNESP/UNICAMP/PUC-SP, Brazil
isawantoni@gmail.com

Laerte Apolinário Júnior
Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP) and
Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado (FAAP), Brazil
laerteapj@gmail.com

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC): International Development Cooperation, strategic interests, and African agency

This article examines the role of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) as the primary instrument of China's International Development Cooperation (IDC) in Africa. Drawing on a qualitative case study of the FOCAC Action Plans (2000-2025), Chinese official documents, and the specialized literature, this article analyzes how the Forum serves to advance Beijing's strategic interests. The findings indicate that FOCAC advances economic, political, diplomatic, and security objectives, all framed within the rhetoric of South-South Cooperation. Moreover, the analysis highlights the agency of African countries in negotiating and implementing cooperation initiatives, revealing FOCAC not only as an instrument of China's cooperation but also as a space for socialization, negotiation, and the convergence of interests between China and Africa.

Keywords: international development cooperation, South-South cooperation, China, Africa, FOCAC, foreign policy

O Fórum de Cooperação China-África (FOCAC): Cooperação Internacional para o Desenvolvimento, interesses estratégicos e agência africana

Este artigo analisa o papel do Fórum de Cooperação China-África (FOCAC) como principal instrumento da Cooperação Internacional para o Desenvolvimento (CID) chinesa no continente africano. Por meio de um estudo de caso qualitativo, fundamentado na análise dos Planos de Ação do FOCAC (2000-2025), de documentos oficiais chineses e da literatura especializada, investiga-se como o Fórum operacionaliza os interesses estratégicos de Pequim. Os resultados indicam que o FOCAC articula objetivos econômicos, políticos, diplomáticos e de segurança, sustentados pela retórica da Cooperação Sul-Sul. Além disso, evidencia-se a agência dos países africanos na negociação e implementação da cooperação, caracterizando o Fórum como um espaço de socialização, negociação e convergência de interesses entre a China e a África.

Palavras-chave: cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento, cooperação Sul-Sul, China, África, FOCAC, política externa

China's International Development Cooperation (IDC) is one of the main instruments of its contemporary international engagement (Brautigam, 2009). Grounded in South-South Cooperation (SSC), this approach was systematized by Zhou Enlai in 1964 through the *Eight Principles for Economic and Technical Assistance to Other Countries* (Zhou, 1964), and subsequently expanded and institutionalized as China rose within the international system (Brautigam, 2009). Between 2000 and 2023, Chinese loans and grants totaled approximately US$2.2 trillion across nearly 200 countries, underscoring the growing importance of IDC as an instrument of Beijing's foreign policy (Reuters, 2025).

According to The State Council of the People's Republic of China, China's IDC is guided by the principles of respect for sovereignty, promotion of development, knowledge sharing, and cooperation without creating dependency. It encompasses a range of instruments, including infrastructure projects, financing, technical cooperation, humanitarian assistance, capacity building, and debt relief (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

One of the main expressions of this approach in Africa is the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), established in 2000 and subsequently consolidated as the primary platform for coordinating China-Africa cooperation (Vadell et al., 2013). Beyond its role as a platform for coordination, the Forum can also be understood as a space for socialization. According to Johnston, socialization is the process through which sustained interaction within international institutions drives actors to internalize shared norms, values, and patterns of behavior, which, in turn, shape their preferences and practices (Johnston, 2001). From this perspective, FOCAC serves not only as a mechanism for coordinating cooperation initiatives but also as a forum for disseminating norms, reinforcing collective identities, and fostering shared interests between China and African countries (Gazibo & Mbabia, 2012).

Established through the Beijing Declaration in 2000, the Forum is grounded in a narrative of solidarity among Global South countries and seeks to promote cooperation based on mutual benefit and respect, as well as the strengthening of developing countries' participation in global governance (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021). In this way, FOCAC has become a central instrument of China's foreign policy by linking development cooperation to political support and the projection of Beijing's influence across Africa (Gazibo & Mbabia, 2012).

As FOCAC has gained prominence in academic debate, China's official narrative presents it as an instrument combining solidarity and pragmatism (FOCAC, 2004; The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021), while part of

the literature emphasizes the strategic interests underlying its activities (Kai, 2022). Against this backdrop, this article examines how FOCAC serves to advance China's IDC while advancing Beijing's strategic interests in Africa. It therefore seeks to: (i) identify the main IDC initiatives outlined in the Forum's Action Plans; (ii) examine the economic, political, financial, and security interests underlying China's engagement; and (iii) discuss the agency of African countries in shaping and implementing this cooperation.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, exploratory case study design focused on the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). FOCAC was selected as the unit of analysis because it constitutes the primary institutional platform for China's IDC in Africa, bringing together the key political, economic, and strategic commitments underpinning cooperation between China and African countries.

The corpus of documents consists of the Action Plans and official declarations adopted at FOCAC Summits and Ministerial Conferences between 2000 and 2024/2025, complemented by the official documents *China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era* (2021) and *China's Foreign Aid* (2014), as well as Zhou Enlai's 1964 speech outlining the *Eight Principles for Economic and Technical Assistance to Other Countries*. These documents were triangulated with specialized academic literature, including studies by African scholars such as Madakufamba (2024), Mboya (2024), Soulé (2025), and Gazibo & Mbabia (2012), and Chinese scholars such as Yu (2024), Kai (2022), and Zhang (2024), as well as publications by international research centers. This triangulation made it possible to examine China's official narrative alongside the diverse interpretations advanced in the specialized literature.

The documents were subjected to categorical content analysis, following Bardin's (2016) methodological framework. The analytical categories were developed primarily through a deductive approach, based on the literature on China's IDC and an analysis of the FOCAC Action Plans. Four categories guided the analysis: (i) access to natural resources; (ii) regional security; (iii) economic and financial expansion; and (iv) soft power. In addition, an inductive category – African agency – was developed through an iterative reading of the empirical material and critical scholarship on China-Africa relations. By combining content analysis with documentary analysis of official sources, the study identified recurring narratives and legitimation strategies through which official documents support China's engagement in Africa.

The article argues that FOCAC enables China to align development objectives with broader geopolitical and economic interests, including securing ac-

cess to natural resources, expanding markets, internationalizing Chinese firms, strengthening political and diplomatic influence, and deepening security cooperation. At the same time, the analysis emphasizes that China-Africa relations are not one-sided but are also shaped by the bargaining power and agency of African countries.

The article contributes to scholarship on China's foreign policy and IDC by showing how Beijing links economic diplomacy, South-South solidarity rhetoric, and institutional mechanisms to expand its influence in Africa. It also provides an empirical analysis of FOCAC, a relatively understudied forum compared with cooperation mechanisms led by Western countries.

This article is organized into five sections. The first presents the foundations of China's International Development Cooperation. The second examines the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) as the main institutional mechanism for China-Africa cooperation. The third analyzes China's strategic interests within the Forum. The fourth discusses the role of soft power and socialization in China's engagement in Africa. Finally, the fifth examines the agency of African countries in shaping the cooperation dynamics established through FOCAC.

China's IDC: approach and interests

China's IDC is historically rooted in South-South Cooperation, which Zhou Enlai formally articulated in 1964 through the *Eight Principles for Economic and Technical Assistance to Other Countries*. These principles established a framework centered on three core commitments: equality and mutual assistance, distinguishing Chinese aid from charity; respect for national sovereignty, without imposing conditions or seeking privileges; and economic assistance through low- or zero-interest loans with extended repayment periods, intended to promote self-reliance and economic independence rather than dependence. They also included support for projects requiring relatively low levels of investment and capable of delivering rapid results; the provision of high-quality equipment; the requirement that local workers master the technologies transferred; and the principle that Chinese experts working abroad should maintain the same standard of living as local workers and enjoy no special privileges (Zhou, 1964).

As South-South Cooperation (SSC) regained prominence in the twenty-first century, China published the 2021 white paper *China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era*, which sets out its approach to IDC. The document identifies three main objectives: building a global community with a shared future; reducing inequalities between the Global North and Global South; and

promoting development through SSC, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and support for the UN 2030 Agenda. It also reaffirms principles such as respecting sovereignty, promoting mutual benefit, strengthening the capacities of partner countries, and advancing sustainable development (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

China implements its IDC through a range of instruments, including infrastructure projects, technical cooperation, capacity building, humanitarian assistance, the deployment of medical teams, debt relief, and financing mechanisms such as the SSC Assistance Fund (SSCAF). In 2015, Xi Jinping further advanced this agenda by announcing new SSC and peace and development funds, as well as exchange programs, interest-free loans, and the Six 100 Projects, aimed at supporting the socioeconomic development of partner countries (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

At the international level, China advocates a more equitable and balanced global development partnership based on the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities." Within this framework, it regards North-South Cooperation as the primary channel for IDC, with SSC serving a complementary role. It also expects developed countries to fully and promptly honor their official IDC commitments. At the same time, China advocates expanding SSC and strengthening the role of organizations within the UN system in promoting international cooperation based on multilateralism (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

China also argues that the international community should mobilize greater resources to strengthen both North-South and South-South cooperation, particularly to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development. More broadly, it reaffirms its commitment to building a moderately prosperous society, realizing the "Chinese Dream," and promoting an international order based on peace, cooperation, and mutual benefit (Information Office of the State Council, 2014).

The literature on China's IDC also shows that its engagement combines economic, political, and strategic interests, articulated through the rhetoric of SSC and mutual benefit (Apolinário Júnior et al., 2022; Milani & Carvalho, 2013). Chinese aid has distinctive features, particularly its integration of financing, trade, and investment and its general lack of political conditionalities (Brautigam, 2009). In this context, China's engagement in Africa serves not only to secure access to natural resources, expand markets, and internationalize Chinese firms, but also to cultivate long-term political partnerships and enhance China's influence in the international system (Dreher & Fuchs, 2016; Dreher et al., 2018).

FOCAC as an International Development Cooperation strategy in Africa

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was established in 2000 to strengthen cooperation between China and African countries, with its establishment marked by the adoption of the Programme for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development. Its follow-up mechanisms, formalized in 2002, operate at three levels: a triennial Ministerial Conference, meetings of senior officials, and regular consultations between African representatives and the Chinese Secretariat (FOCAC, 2024).

In addition to the three levels of consultation described above, the Third FOCAC Ministerial Conference, held in November 2006, decided that political consultations between Chinese and African foreign ministers would be held alongside the sessions of the UN General Assembly in the year following each Ministerial Conference. This arrangement demonstrates the strong and sustained dialogue between the parties that make up FOCAC (FOCAC, n.d.). Eswatini is the only African country that does not participate in FOCAC, as it maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan (Article 19, 2024).

At the Second FOCAC Ministerial Conference, in 2004, the Forum introduced the practice of adopting biennial action plans. The first, the Addis Ababa Action Plan (2004-2006), established a framework for China-Africa cooperation (FOCAC, 2009a). In the political sphere, it called for stronger high-level exchanges and political dialogue, while reaffirming its commitment to the UN Charter, the African Union, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (FOCAC, 2009a).

This Action Plan expanded China-Africa cooperation across several strategic areas. On peace and security, it provided for Chinese support for African Union peacekeeping operations through financial assistance, equipment and supplies, logistical support, and training. The Plan also strengthened multilateral coordination by committing Beijing to support African interests in international organizations and to back initiatives in infrastructure, health, agriculture, and human resource development. Economically, it prioritized investment in these areas, as well as in trade, natural resources, and energy – it promoted joint ventures and technology transfer, facilitated investment, provided preferential tariff treatment for African products, and offered development assistance without political conditionalities. The Plan also expanded health cooperation by providing for the deployment of medical teams and technical training. It also included debt relief measures, under which China cancelled or reduced RMB 10.5 billion in debt owed by 31 African countries classified as least developed and heavily indebted (FOCAC, 2009a).

China's interests in FOCAC

China's engagement through FOCAC reflects a broad range of strategic interests, encompassing economic, political, financial, and geopolitical dimensions (Brautigam, 2009). Although Beijing frequently presents the Forum as a mechanism for SSC focused on development, its institutional structure also serves to advance key Chinese foreign policy objectives in Africa (Brautigam, 2009). These objectives include securing access to natural resources and strategic commodities, expanding the international presence of Chinese companies and financial institutions, promoting the renminbi for international transactions, strengthening China's diplomatic presence, and increasing its influence in regional security. In addition, Beijing seeks to strengthen its international image through "soft power" initiatives and social cooperation, promoting a narrative of China as a development partner (Calabrese, 2024; Fontdeglória, 2017; Singh, 2020; Yu, 2024, our translation).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, China's rapid economic growth drove a sharp increase in oil demand to sustain its unprecedented expansion. Chinese oil demand was projected to increase by 130%, reaching 12.8 million barrels per day by 2025. As a result, China imports more than 50% of its oil, a share that is projected to rise to 80% by 2030 (Kennedy, 2010, as cited in Vadell *et* al., 2013).

China's growing demand for oil encouraged Chinese companies to pursue a "resources-for-infrastructure" strategy, particularly in the oil sector. In practice, Chinese oil companies invest in resource-rich African countries in exchange for long-term exploration rights. To implement this strategy, Chinese companies form joint ventures with local governments and state-owned energy companies, often offering more competitive terms than firms from developed countries because their investments are guided by long-term strategic objectives (Jiang, 2008, as cited in Vadell et al., 2013). This approach has helped consolidate an "oil-for-infrastructure" model of cooperation between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and African oil-producing countries.

Chinese policies aimed at strengthening regional security in Africa, including the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and the establishment of overseas military bases such as the one in Djibouti, are also important for understanding China's interests in the region. Beijing's expanding security cooperation with African countries is reflected in efforts to protect Chinese citizens and strategic assets on the continent, including embassies and investments. A closer analysis suggests that security cooperation can enhance the PRC's international credibility by demonstrating its capacity to project power and protect its interests beyond

its borders. In Africa, this form of engagement can expand China's diplomatic influence and reinforce core principles of its foreign policy, while strengthening its bargaining position within the international system (Lammich, 2025).

Promoting the use of China's currency, the renminbi, in trade is also a priority for Beijing in its relations with African countries, as part of its efforts to challenge the dominance of the US dollar. Since FOCAC was established, the People's Bank of China has signed bilateral currency swap agreements with Morocco, Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa to facilitate transactions in renminbi. At the same time, the presence of African banks in China and Chinese banks in Africa has helped expand the use of the renminbi in trade.

The expansion of Chinese companies is an important component of the PRC's foreign strategy. In 1990, Western companies accounted for more than 85% of construction contracts in Africa. Today, however, they face greater difficulty securing new projects in a market where Chinese companies have established a strong presence. This trend is unfolding against a backdrop of growing demand for infrastructure investment in Africa, which is expected to exceed US$300 billion annually by 2040, driven in part by the continent's population growth. As demand for infrastructure investment continues to expand, African countries are likely to increasingly rely on external investment, particularly from China. This shift in the balance of competition has raised concerns among Western governments, which view China's expanding economic presence in Africa as contributing to its growing strategic and diplomatic influence. In this sense, initiatives such as the BRI, which finances ports, roads, and other infrastructure projects, have fueled concerns about the potential expansion of China's military presence in Africa and Chinese control over strategic minerals, such as cobalt, used in electric vehicle production, through investments in African mines (The Economist, 2022, our translation).

Beyond economic interests, China also seeks to expand its soft power in Africa, particularly by emphasizing the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. This approach has helped strengthen Beijing's diplomatic influence across the continent and advance key foreign policy priorities, including support for the One-China policy. In this context, the view was that Beijing "needs to win the hearts of the [African] people, solidifying its economic power with its soft power" (Yu, 2024). A survey conducted across 34 African countries found that respondents ranked China's development model second in preference, after the US model and ahead of those of South Africa and the former colonial powers. Moreover, 63% of respondents viewed China's economic and political influence in their countries positively, compared with 14% who viewed it negatively –

views of US influence were similar, with 60% expressing positive views and 13% negative ones (Sanny & Selormey, 2021).

Access to oil and natural resources

In the areas of natural resources and energy development, the 2010 Action Plan stated that both the African and Chinese sides recognized that the sustainable exploitation and use of natural resources could contribute to social and economic prosperity and human development. Thus, Beijing committed to actively participating in resource development projects in African countries and increasing investment in this sector, guided by the principles of mutual benefit, reciprocity, and sustainable development. The African side, in turn, undertook to provide the necessary information, facilitate the operations of Chinese companies, and promote effective cooperation between Chinese and African companies, in accordance with international trade rules and practices (FOCAC, 2009a).

Thus, China began providing substantial infrastructure investment, long-term credit, and humanitarian assistance, while also granting debt relief to African countries rich in energy resources and other raw materials. In Africa, countries that have received Chinese loans in exchange for commodities include Angola, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. These resource-backed loans are secured by a diverse range of commodities, including oil, cocoa, platinum, tobacco, sesame seeds, and revenues from copper and diamond mining (Singh, 2020).

However, these commodity exchanges cannot be explained solely by China's interest in securing long-term access to natural resources. As Brautigam and Hwang (2016, p. 4) observe, "the purpose of this security is much less about locking up natural resources and more about reducing the risks of lending to poor and unstable countries." In addition, Beijing's policy of non-interference encouraged African states to engage with China by eschewing political conditionalities, including requirements to establish democratic institutions or protect and promote human rights (Vadell et al., 2013). As a result, Chinese companies gained a competitive advantage over their Western counterparts in accessing oil and other natural resources.

However, access to natural resources is more complex. The experiences of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrate a financing model tied to natural resource exploitation, known as resources-for-infrastructure or the "Angolan model." Although it operates alongside FOCAC, this strategy

sheds light on China's strategic interests, which also inform the Forum's initiatives and commitments.

In the context of Angola's post-civil war reconstruction, Chinese state-owned enterprises provided approximately US$2 billion in oil-backed financing, helping to establish the resources-for-infrastructure model (Olander, 2020). Although initially advantageous, this mechanism created limitations by reducing foreign-currency revenues and increasing Angola's exposure to fluctuations in international oil prices. When oil prices fell during the 2008 crisis, Angola struggled to meet its commitments, prompting additional borrowing that further increased its debt burden (Olander, 2020).

This model was also applied in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where the Congolese government partnered with Sinohydro and China Railway Engineering Corporation in 2008 to establish the Sicomines joint venture for copper and cobalt development. The agreement provided for US$6 billion in infrastructure investment and US$3 billion in mining investment in exchange for concessions to these resources (Hansrod, 2023). However, a 2023 audit by the General Inspectorate of Finance (IGF) found that only US$822 million had been invested in infrastructure, prompting the Congolese government to demand compensation from Sicomines. The Chinese embassy disputed the report's findings, arguing that the partnership had been mutually beneficial (Hansrod, 2023). In 2024, the agreement was revised to provide for approximately US$7 billion in new infrastructure investments, contingent on copper prices, while retaining benefits such as Sicomines' tax exemption until 2040 – a provision criticized by Congolese and international organizations (Rolley, 2024). In light of these limitations, Song Wei, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation of the Ministry of Commerce, called for improvements to the cooperation model. Although he regards the so-called "Angolan model" as a success story, the author acknowledges its risks for economic policy, security, repayment capacity, and the environment (Rede Angola, 2016).

Security cooperation

In the Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027), China introduced the Global Security Initiative (GSI) for the first time. In the context of FOCAC, the initiative seeks to strengthen global governance and international justice and promote an international order based on broad consultation and shared benefits (FOCAC, 2024). It rests on six core principles outlined in Table 1.

Table 1
GSI principles

Principle	Description
Promote China's vision of common security	Advancing a security model based on shared benefits and collective stability
Respect state sovereignty	Emphasizing non-interference in internal affairs
Uphold the United Nations Charter	Supporting an international order based on multilateral norms
Take seriously the legitimate security concerns of all countries	Recognizing the security threats perceived by different states
Resolve differences through dialogue and consultation	Prioritizing diplomatic and negotiated solutions
Maintain security in traditional and non-traditional domains	Addressing threats such as terrorism, cybersecurity, and development challenges

Source: Prepared by the authors based on FOCAC (2025)

In the year of its launch, the GSI identified Africa as a priority, supporting the efforts of African countries, the African Union (AU), and subregional organizations to resolve regional conflicts, combat terrorism in the Sahel, and safeguard maritime security. The initiative also emphasizes the principle that African problems should be addressed by Africans themselves, promoting peaceful solutions to sources of instability across the continent (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023). Moreover, China recognizes that fragile security environments, such as the Sahel, have both regional and global implications, reflecting the premise that security is indivisible because states are interconnected by shared security interests (Zhang, 2024).

In addition to these principles, Beijing has expanded material cooperation with Sahelian countries such as Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso by supplying weapons and various types of other military equipment. In June 2024, for example, Burkina Faso received 100 tanks from China; subsequently, Mali signed an agreement with North Industries Corporation Limited (Norinco), a Chinese manufacturer of explosives and military equipment, including firearms and ammunition, to strengthen its counterterrorism capabilities. Against this backdrop, Norinco's presence in the Sahel has expanded, while the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has also begun acquiring Chinese-made equipment and other resources (Oshodi, 2025; Stropasolas, 2025).

However, while China's security initiatives in Africa are relatively recent, its military involvement on the continent dates back to 2017, when Beijing inaugurated its first overseas military base in Djibouti. Chinese authorities described the facility as a "logistics center" intended to support troops deployed on the continent. However, its establishment also reflected China's broader objective of developing a "naval fleet capable of operating in deep waters and defending the numerous interests that the Asian giant has far from home" (Fontdeglória, 2017, free translation).

Beyond economic interests, the expansion of security cooperation between Beijing and African countries also reflects China's concern with protecting its citizens and strategic assets on the continent, including embassies and investments. Safeguarding these assets is particularly important to Beijing, given China's growing investment in the Sahel's critical mineral resources, including gold, copper, lithium, and uranium (Lammich, 2025; Oshodi, 2025).

Economic expansion: Chinese companies, Chinese banks, and the renminbi

Across successive FOCAC Action Plans, the guidelines governing the operations of Chinese companies in Africa have gradually expanded in scope. Initially, the Forum sought to encourage Chinese investment in economic and trade cooperation zones established in Africa. Subsequent plans placed greater emphasis on the social responsibilities of Chinese companies, calling on them to contribute to the development and well-being of local communities (FOCAC, 2009b; 2012; 2015a; 2018; 2021; 2024).

Recent plans further broadened this framework by encouraging and supporting Chinese companies' participation in all stages of economic zones, from planning and design to construction, operation, and management of these ventures. In addition, FOCAC set a target of encouraging Chinese companies to invest at least US$10 billion in Africa over a three-year period, while promoting the creation of corporate social responsibility alliances among Chinese companies operating on the continent. This investment target was subsequently reaffirmed, reinforcing the commitment to expand Chinese investment in Africa and consolidate its role in regional economic development (FOCAC, 2009b; 2012; 2015a; 2018; 2021; 2024).

In this regard, Chinese companies play a central role in implementing Beijing-financed projects across Africa. In 2020 alone, they were involved in approximately 31% of all infrastructure projects carried out on the continent, encompass-

ing initiatives ranging from small- to large-scale projects (The Economist, 2022). Notable projects include the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, Mauritania's Friendship Port, the Grand National Theatre of Senegal, and Bangui Stadium in the Central African Republic, all built by the Chinese company China National Complete Plant Import Export Corporation Ltd. (COMPLANT), as well as Maputo Airport in Mozambique, constructed by another Chinese company, Anhui Foreign Economic Construction Co., Ltd. (AFECC) (COMPLANT, n.d.; UNCTAD, 2013).

With respect to Chinese banks, the 2013 FOCAC Action Plan reflects a gradual expansion of financing mechanisms to support economic development in Africa. Initially, China encouraged its financial institutions to provide renminbi-denominated loans while continuing to support African small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (FOCAC, 2012).

In the subsequent Action Plans (2016 and 2022), these guidelines were expanded to encourage Chinese financial institutions to provide financing and insurance for projects in infrastructure, information and communications technology, and other sectors (FOCAC, 2015a; 2021). In parallel, the Forum encouraged the expansion of Chinese banks' presence in Africa through the opening of new branches and increased the special loan facility for small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa (SMEAs) from US$1 billion to US$6 billion (FOCAC, 2015a). In the most recent plans, Chinese financial institutions were encouraged to independently determine whether to provide additional financing to African countries, thereby expanding investment capacity and deepening China-Africa financial cooperation (FOCAC, 2021).

In addition, the Action Plans (2007-2022) show that Beijing encouraged the establishment and development of special economic zones, industrial parks, and processing areas with the participation of Chinese and African companies, alongside strategic investments in logistics and manufacturing. In this context, Chinese companies were encouraged to fulfill social responsibilities, make significant investments – estimated at more than US$10 billion – and strengthen partnerships with local communities (FOCAC, 2006; 2009b; 2012; 2015a; 2018; 2021).

Regarding the renminbi, the 2013 Action Plan outlined Beijing's efforts to expand its use in official lending (FOCAC, 2012), both through national banks, such as the China Development Bank, and through multilateral institutions, such as the New Development Bank of the BRICS (Calabrese, 2024). In this context, the presence of African banks in China and Chinese banks in Africa has contributed to consolidating the use of the renminbi as a transaction currency. African banks such as Access Bank (Nigeria), Absa (South Africa), First Bank of Nigeria, Bank of Africa Morocco, and the National Bank of Egypt have established offices or

subsidiaries in China. Conversely, Chinese institutions such as the Bank of China and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China have expanded their presence in Africa, facilitating financial transfers, credit provision, and commercial transactions between Chinese and African counterparts. At the same time, this reduces reliance on the dollar in bilateral transactions, promotes international use of the renminbi, and deepens economic integration through FOCAC and the Belt and Road Initiative (Calabrese, 2024).

Chinese soft power

For Nye (2004), soft power refers to a state's ability to influence other international actors through attraction rather than coercion or material incentives. It derives primarily from culture, political values, and foreign policy, insofar as these are perceived as legitimate and attractive by others. In this way, soft power enables states to shape preferences and behaviors without resorting to military force or coercive economic measures (Nye, 2004).

Far from being a peripheral element, soft power has become a central component of China's official foreign policy discourse. Beijing thus regards it as a strategic instrument for strengthening its international legitimacy and, over the long term, mitigating the effects of the so-called "China threat theory," a narrative widely disseminated at both the regional and global levels (Duarte, 2012). This theory posits that China's rise threatens the international order and other states' interests and is often invoked to justify perceptions of insecurity about Beijing's growing political, economic, and military influence (Yang & Liu, 2012). Accordingly, China uses soft power to promote international understanding of its leaders' intentions, reinforcing the perception that its rise is peaceful and creates opportunities for its partners (Tremblay, 2007, as cited in Duarte, 2012).

In light of this, Beijing seeks to "win the hearts of the [African] people" (Yu, 2024). To this end, China has launched academic exchange and professional training programs and plans to establish 25 China-Africa think tanks. In public health, Beijing committed to sending 2,000 Chinese medical professionals, establishing five regional disease control centers, and encouraging Chinese companies to invest in medicine and vaccine production in Africa, thereby supporting the development of local biotechnology industries. In addition, the PRC announced 500 philanthropic projects focused on women's and children's health, education, rural development, and access to clean drinking water (Yu, 2024). This philanthropic dimension marks a significant development in China-Africa cooperation because, drawing on Western models, it signals a further expansion of Chinese soft power on the continent (Yu, 2024).

Chinese engagement in infrastructure and agriculture also contributes to the social and symbolic dimensions of China-Africa cooperation. In the infrastructure sector, China has financed the construction of transportation and telecommunications systems, among other projects. In agriculture, the focus is on eradicating food insecurity by deploying agricultural technology teams and training local technicians (FOCAC, 2006; 2009b; 2012; 2015a; 2018; 2021).

The expansion of Chinese state media in Africa is also part of Beijing's soft power strategy, driven by the internationalization of outlets such as China Central Television (CCTV), China Radio International (CRI), Xinhua, and China Daily (Li, 2008, as cited in Heiermann, 2020; Shambaugh, 2010). The growing presence of these media outlets in Africa facilitates the dissemination of narratives favorable to China's engagement, thereby strengthening its political, economic, and diplomatic influence in the continent (Bénazéraf, 2014; Heiermann, 2020).

African agency

Mohan and Lampert (2013) argue that recent studies of China's presence in Africa often reproduce interpretations reminiscent of earlier dependency theories, which portray African political and economic processes as determined by external forces (Mohan & Lampert, 2013). Especially in Western debates, African countries are often portrayed as lacking agency vis-à-vis China and as responding passively to Beijing's initiatives (Jones & Hameiri, 2020).

One of the main criticisms of China's engagement in Africa is the so-called "debt-trap," a concept developed by Brahma Chellaney – head of the British intelligence agency MI6 – according to which Beijing uses infrastructure financing to create dependency by indebting recipient countries (Pautasso & Maia, 2024). This interpretation was subsequently endorsed by Western officials, including Richard Moore and former U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who accused China of using predatory lending and opaque contracts to expand its political and economic influence (Tao, 2023).

By contrast, scholars such as Will Brown (2011) argue that transformations in the international order – including rising demand for natural resources, post-9/11 securitization, and the emergence of new Global South actors, particularly China – have enabled African states to diversify their external partnerships, expanding their room for maneuver and strengthening their bargaining power (Brown, 2011).

Greater bargaining power and room for maneuver enabled African countries to exercise greater agency vis-à-vis external actors. Mohan and Lampert (2013)

further conceptualize this agency through Colin Wight's theory (1999; 2004), which distinguishes three dimensions of agency. The first concerns actors' capacity to act intentionally and responsibly. The second emphasizes that all action is embedded in a social context in which individuals are shaped by structures but can also reproduce or transform them. The third concerns the institutional roles occupied by agents, such as diplomats, whose functions persist regardless of the individuals who perform them. According to Wight, these three dimensions are interdependent and should therefore be analyzed together (Wight, 1999; 2004, as cited in Mohan & Lampert, 2013).

However, Mohan and Lampert (2013) identify limitations in Wight's approach, arguing that it gives insufficient attention to economic relations and confines agency to the state. For the authors, China-Africa relations involve multiple Chinese and African actors whose interactions are shaped by ongoing processes of negotiation, contestation, and adaptation. From this perspective, African agency is exercised by a range of actors, and cooperation with China should therefore be understood as a negotiated process rather than a unilateral relationship in which African countries act merely as passive recipients (Hagmann & Péclard, 2010, as cited in Mohan & Lampert, 2013).

In this regard, Madakufamba (2024) challenges the notion that African countries are passive recipients of Chinese cooperation, arguing that their leaders use FOCAC to negotiate financing and advance national and regional priorities in areas such as infrastructure, agriculture, industrialization, the digital economy, and green development. Similarly, Mboya (2024) argues that African countries prioritize partnerships that address their development needs, engaging with China and other emerging powers to secure cooperation and diplomatic support.

In light of this, Lucy Corkin's article, "Angola's Management of China's Credit Lines," illustrates African agency in the cooperation process with China, particularly through actors' capacity to act intentionally and responsibly and the institutional roles they occupy.

Under the financing agreement with China, the Angolan government structured the credit lines to support its postwar reconstruction objectives. To manage the financing, the government set up an escrow account jointly administered by the National Bank of Angola and the Export-Import Bank of China, where oil revenues designated for infrastructure projects were deposited. The Angolan authorities had to approve each disbursement, and the government required at least three Chinese companies to bid for each project to curb overpricing and improve construction efficiency (Corkin, 2013). Angola's Ministry of Finance played a central role in managing contracts with China, demonstrating the coun-

try's agency in negotiating and implementing these agreements. The decision to turn to Chinese loans, which came without political conditionalities, was part of a broader effort to secure the greatest possible benefits from the partnership (Corkin, 2013).

In addition, African agency can be analyzed across six dimensions: (i) presidential agency; (ii) executive agency; (iii) bureaucratic agency; (iv) co-agency; (v) organized civic agency; and (vi) semi-organized civic agency (Soulé, 2025). Presidential agency is exercised by heads of state in defining and implementing projects with China. It may involve promoting, renegotiating, or canceling projects to advance national, geopolitical interests, or maintain their political position. Presidents can also exert influence by intervening directly in projects, bypassing bureaucratic procedures, or stepping up monitoring (Soulé, 2025).

Presidential agency can be illustrated by the co-presidency of the 2015 FOCAC Johannesburg Summit, held jointly by Jacob Zuma, President of South Africa, and Xi Jinping (FOCAC, 2015b). In the lead-up to the Summit, Xi Jinping also visited South Africa, where he held discussions with President Zuma. During the bilateral visit, the two presidents signed 26 agreements covering cooperation in industrialization, infrastructure, special economic zones, maritime development, human resources, and finance (Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2015). These agreements anticipated and reinforced priorities that were subsequently incorporated into the Johannesburg Action Plan (2016-2018), which placed industrialization and cooperation on production capacity at the center of the FOCAC agenda (FOCAC, 2015a). Thus, the South African government's engagement illustrates how presidential agency operated across both bilateral and multilateral settings, using FOCAC to align national priorities with cooperation initiatives involving China.

Executive agency is exercised by ministers and senior officials who adapt Chinese strategies to national priorities, using cooperation to advance development and infrastructure policies (Soulé, 2025). The establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), announced at the Third FOCAC Ministerial Conference in 2006, illustrates this process: African governments adopted a policy model inspired by China's industrialization experience and incorporated it into their own development strategies. In Mozambique, the Nacala Special Economic Zone was implemented through the Office for Accelerated Economic Development Zones (GAZEDA), illustrating how Mozambican authorities adapted the model to their national context (Pinto, 2017). In addition, the establishment of the Nacala SEZ was led by Mozambique's Ministry of Planning and Development, indicating that its implementation was treated as a government priority rather than mere-

ly as a project driven by external investors (Cuereneia, 2010). Thus, Chinese involvement in the development of SEZs in Africa continues, as reflected in the 2024 Action Plan: "the two sides will support leveraging the various economic and trade cooperation zones in Africa to advance cooperation across the whole industrial chain of agro-products" (FOCAC, 2021).

Bureaucratic agency, in turn, is exercised by public officials responsible for implementing policies, negotiating projects, and overseeing their execution (Soulé, 2025). Bureaucratic agency can be observed in the implementation of infrastructure projects outlined in the Action Plans, particularly the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway. The Ethiopian Railway Corporation – a state-owned railway company – worked in coordination with national decision-makers and was responsible for planning, implementing, and managing the project (Chen, 2021). Rather than merely receiving Chinese investment, these actors helped shape the project in line with national priorities, particularly industrialization and the strengthening of state capacity (Chen, 2021).

Co-agency, understood as cooperation between state and civil society actors through coalitions involving bureaucrats, trade unions, ministries, and the media (Soulé, 2025), can also be illustrated by the construction – or, in this case, rehabilitation – of a railway. The rehabilitation of the Akassato-Bohicon road in Benin involved cooperation among bureaucrats, trade unions from different ministries – particularly the Ministry of Economy and Finance – and civil society actors such as radio hosts, who amplified bureaucrats' criticisms (Benabdallah, 2020). This coordination highlights the relational dimension of agency, demonstrating how state and civic actors can form coalitions and jointly influence project implementation.

Civic agency is also evident in China-Africa relations. Organized civic agency, exercised by civil society actors such as NGOs and trade unions, can both expand and constrain China's presence in Africa (Soulé, 2025). In the 2016 and 2022 Action Plans these guidelines were expanded to encourage Chinese financial institutions to provide financing and insurance for mining-related projects (FOCAC, 2015a; 2021). During this period, in 2020, the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) and other civil society organizations denounced the ecological degradation caused by Chinese mining activities in Hwange, Zimbabwe. As a result, ZELA filed an urgent application with the High Court of Zimbabwe seeking to suspend the mining licenses, arguing that the activities posed a risk of irreversible environmental degradation. This legal action, combined with public pressure, contributed to the government's subsequent decision to ban mining in Hwange (BBC News, 2020).

There is also semi- or unorganized civic agency, exercised spontaneously by citizens and informal groups (Soulé, 2025). In what concerns mining, this form of agency was illustrated in 2017 when Ghanaian cartoonist Bright Tetteh Ackwerh published the cartoon We Dey Beg, criticizing the involvement of Chinese companies in illegal gold mining in Ghana and its environmental impacts. The cartoon portrayed President Xi Jinping as responsible for pollution caused by mining activities, prompting the Chinese Embassy to lodge a formal protest with the Ghanaian government on the grounds that the reports and cartoon had defamed Chinese leaders (Asiedu, 2017).

In summary, the different forms of agency demonstrate that China-Africa relations cannot be understood through the notion of a passive Africa in the face of China's rise. Presidents, ministers, bureaucrats, civil society organizations, and other actors mobilize different repertoires of action to negotiate, adapt, contest, or shape cooperation with China according to their own interests and priorities. African agency is therefore plural and relational, varying according to the institutional capacities, political contexts, and objectives of the actors involved.

Conclusion

This study has provided insights into the complex architecture underpinning China's engagement in Africa in the twenty-first century, with FOCAC serving as its primary institutional platform. Far from being merely a mechanism for diplomatic coordination, the Forum has become the main instrument for operationalizing and socializing China's IDC, integrating initiatives in infrastructure, financing, trade, security, and technical cooperation within a broader narrative of South-South solidarity.

In response to the questions that guided this study, the findings suggest that China's IDC remains grounded in the historical principles of non-interference, respect for sovereignty, and mutual benefit, formulated by Zhou Enlai in 1964 and reaffirmed in contemporary official documents. However, the FOCAC Action Plans and specialized literature also demonstrate that this narrative of solidarity is closely intertwined with the promotion of China's strategic interests in Africa.

These interests can be grouped into four main dimensions: access to strategic natural resources essential to China's industrial and technological development; economic and financial expansion through access to new markets, the internationalization of Chinese companies, and the wider use of the renminbi; political and diplomatic influence through the construction of a positive image of China and the promotion of norms and values associated with South-South

Cooperation; and security cooperation to protect assets, citizens, and strategic routes while expanding China's role in peace and security affairs in Africa.

However, the findings also demonstrate that China-Africa cooperation cannot be understood solely as a process through which Beijing imposes its interests. The analysis on African agency shows that African states play an active role in formulating, negotiating, and implementing initiatives developed within the FOCAC framework. In different contexts, African governments have negotiated priorities, renegotiated unfavorable agreements, and used cooperation mechanisms offered by China to pursue national development objectives, strengthen their international bargaining power, and diversify their external partnerships. Thus, China-Africa relations are characterized by ongoing processes of negotiation and adaptation that generate mutual, albeit asymmetric, benefits.

This finding helps to qualify interpretations that reduce China's presence in Africa to the so-called "debt trap" or to an exclusively predatory logic. Although China's strategic interests are clear, this study demonstrates that African countries can influence the direction of cooperation by actively participating in agenda-setting, renegotiating projects, and shaping the outcomes produced by the Forum.

FOCAC can therefore be understood as a central instrument of Chinese foreign policy through which Beijing combines economic diplomacy, South-South Cooperation, soft power, and institutional mechanisms to advance its international influence. At the same time, the Forum provides African countries with an important platform to access financing, foster cooperation, and diversify their partnerships amid the ongoing reconfiguration of the international order. By highlighting both China's strategic interests and African agency, this study contributes to a more balanced understanding of China-Africa relations, moving beyond excessively deterministic interpretations and emphasizing the negotiated and dynamic nature of cooperation within FOCAC.

References

Anhui Foreign Economic Construction Co., Ltd. (n.d.). *Introduction*. https://www.cccme.cn/shop/cccme13699/introduction.aspx

Apolinário Júnior, L., Rinaldi, A. L., & Lima, R. C. (2022). Chinese and Indian COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy during the health emergency crisis. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, *65*(1), e014.

Article 19. (2024, October 3). *Cooperação China-África: A visão de Pequim levanta preocupações com a liberdade de expressão*. https://www.article19.org/pt-pt/resources/cooperacao-china-africa-a-visao-de-pequim-levanta-preocupacoes-com-a-liberdade-de-expressao/

Asiedu, K. G. (2017, November 25). How a lone Ghanaian cartoonist stood up to China. *Quartz Africa*. https://qz.com/africa/1137709/how-a-lone-ghanaian-cartoonist-stood-up-to-china

Bardin, L. (2016). *Análise de conteúdo*. Edições 70.

BBC News. (2020, September 9). *Zimbabwe bans coal mining in Hwange and other game parks.* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54085549

Benabdallah, L. (2020). *Shaping the future of power: Knowledge production and network-building in China-Africa relations*. University of Michigan Press.

Bénazéraf, D. (2014, September 2). *Soft power chinois en Afrique: Renforcer les intérêts de la Chine au nom de l'amitié sino-africaine* (Asie.Visions No. 71). Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri). https://www.ifri.org/fr/notes/soft-power-chinois-en-afrique-renforcer-les-interets-de-la-chine-au-nom-de-lamitie-sino

Brautigam, D. (2009). *The dragon's gift: The real story of China in Africa*. Oxford University Press.

Brautigam, D., & Hwang, J. (2016). Eastern promises: New data on Chinese loans in Africa, 2000 to 2014 (Working Paper No. 2016/4). China Africa Research Initiative, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. https://hdl.handle.net/10419/248132

Brown, W. (2011, November 2-3). African agency in international politics [Unpublished conference paper]. ESRC African Agency in International Politics Seminar, Stellenbosch, South Africa. http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/bisa-africa/african-agency

Calabrese, L. (2024, September 30). *Why China is seeking greater presence in Africa – The strategy behind its financial deals*. ODI: Think Change. https://odi.org/en/insights/why-china-is-seeking-greater-presence-in-africa-the-strategy-behind-its-financial-deals/

Chen, Y. (2021). *Laying the tracks: The political economy of railway development in Ethiopia's railway sector and implications for technology transfer* (SAIS-CARI Working Paper No. 43). China Africa Research Initiative, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. https://hdl.handle.net/10419/248171

COMPLANT (China National Complete Plant Import & Export Group Corporation Limited). (n.d.). *Company profile*. https://www.complant.com/english/AboutUs/CompanyProfile/index.html

Corkin, L. (2013). *Uncovering African agency: Angola's management of China's credit lines*. Ashgate.

Cuereneia, A. (2010, September 30). *Intervenção de Sua Excelência Aiuba Cuereneia, Ministro da Planificação e Desenvolvimento, no Seminário sobre o Desenvolvimento da Zona Económica Especial de Nacala*. Ministério da Planificação e Desenvolvimento da República de

Moçambique. https://www.mef.gov.mz/index.php/todas-publicacoes/discurso/112-discurso-de-sexcia-mpd-no-seminario-da-zeen/file

Dreher, A., & Fuchs, A. (2016). Rogue aid? An empirical analysis of China's aid allocation. *Canadian Journal of Economics, 48*(3), 988-1023. https://doi.org/10.1111/caje.12166

Dreher, A., Fuchs, A., Parks, B., Strange, A. M., & Tierney, M. J. (2018). Apples and dragon fruits: The determinants of aid and other forms of state financing from China to Africa. *International Studies Quarterly*, *62*(1), 182-194. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx052

Duarte, P. (2012). Soft China: O caráter evolutivo da estratégia de charme chinesa. *Contexto Internacional*, *34*(2). https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-85292012000200005

FOCAC. (2006). *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Beijing action plan (2007-2009)*. http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/200611/t20061116_7933564.htm

FOCAC. (2009a). *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Addis Ababa action plan (2004-2006)*. http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/200909/t20090925_7933568.htm

FOCAC. (2009b). *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Sharm El Sheikh action plan (2010-2012)*. http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/200911/t20091112_7933571.htm

FOCAC. (2012). *The fifth ministerial conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Beijing action plan (2013-2015)*. http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/201207/t20120723_8079762.htm

FOCAC. (2015a). *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Johannesburg action plan (2016-2018)*. http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/201512/t20151225_7933575.htm

FOCAC. (2015b). *Declaration of the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.* https://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/201512/t20151225_7933574.htm

FOCAC. (2018). *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Beijing action plan (2019-2021)*. http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/201809/t20180912_7933578.htm

FOCAC. (2021). *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Dakar action plan (2022-2024)*. http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/202201/t20220124_10632444.htm

FOCAC. (2024). *Beijing Summit Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Beijing action* plan (2025-2027). https://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/202409/t20240926_11497783.htm

FOCAC. (n.d.). *FOCAC mechanisms*. https://www.focac.org/eng/ltjj_3/

Fontdeglòria, X. (2017, August 2). China inaugura primeira base militar no exterior. *EL PAÍS Brasil.* https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/08/01/internacional/1501589492_007630.html

Gazibo, M., & Mbabia, O. (2012). Reordering international affairs: The forum on China-Africa cooperation. *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, *1*(1), 51-74. https://doi.org/10.22456/2238-6912.27992

Hansrod, Z. (2023, August 12). *Long road for DRC as it renegotiates minerals deal with China*. Radio France Internationale. https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20230812-long-road-for-drc-as-it-renegotiates-minerals-deal-with-china

Heiermann, F. A. (2020). O soft power como um instrumento da política externa chinesa e sua estratégia na África Subsaariana. *Caderno de Relações Internacionais*, *11*(21), 149-173. https://doi.org/10.22293/2179-1376.v11i21.1339

Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2014). *China's foreign aid (2014)*. Foreign Languages Press. https://en.cidca.gov.cn/2018-08/09/c_261152.htm

Johnston, A. I. (2001). Treating international institutions as social environments. *International Studies Quarterly*, *45*(4), 487-515. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3096058

Jones, L., & Hameiri, S. (2020, August 19). *Debunking the myth of "debt-trap diplomacy": How recipient countries shape China's Belt and Road Initiativ*e. Chatham House. https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/08/debunking-myth-debt-trap-diplomacy

Kai, W. (2022, January 8). A China está se aproveitando de países pobres com "armadilha da dívida?" *BBC News Brasil*. https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-59895468

Lammich, G. (2025). China's evolving security engagement in Africa: Policies, strategies, and implications. *European Journal of International Security*, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2025.3

Madakufamba, M. (2024, September 4). *FOCAC 2024: More than just diplomacy: Africa's modernisation top on the agenda*. Southern African Research and Documentation Centre. https://sardc.net/en/southern-african-news-features/focac-2024-more-than-just-diplomacy-africas-modernisation-top-on-the-agenda/

Mboya, C. (2024, November 4). *What happened in Beijing in September? An analysis of FOCAC and the geopolitics of Africa's partnership*s. Africa Policy Research Institute (APRI). https://afripoli.org/what-happened-in-beijing-in-september-an-analysis-of-focac-and-the-geopolitics-of-africas-partnerships.

Milani, C. R. S., & Carvalho, T. C. (2013). Cooperação Sul-Sul e política externa: Brasil e China no continente africano. *Estudos Internacionais: Revista de Relações Internacionais da PUC Minas*, *1*(1), 77-100.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2023, February 21). *The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper*. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/wjbxw/202405/t20240530_11343274.html

Mohan, G., & Lampert, B. (2013). Negotiating China: Reinserting African agency into China-Africa relations. *African Affairs, 112*(446), 92-110. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ads065

Nye, J. S., Jr. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.

Olander, E. (2020, January 14). China's infrastructure finance model is changing: Here's how. *The Africa Report*. https://www.theafricareport.com/22133/chinasinfrastructure-finance-model-is-changing-heres-how/

Oshodi, A.-G. T. (2025, February 10). West Africa: Power vacuum in West Africa's Sahel – 3 ways China could fill the gap as West exits. *AllAfrica*. https://allafrica.com/stories/202502110005.html

Pautasso, D., & Maia, I. (2024). A China e a armadilha da dívida: Entre a narrativa e as mudanças sistêmicas. *Conjuntura Austral*, *15*, 49-61. https://doi.org/10.22456/2178-8839.136340

Pinto, R. E. F. (2017). *A presença da China em África e os modelos de zonas económicas especiais: O caso de Nacala* [PhD Dissertation, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa – Iscte-IUL]. Repositório do Iscte.

Presidência da República da África do Sul. (2015, December 2). *Government signs 26 agreements worth R94 billion with China. South African Government.* https://www.gov.za/speeches/government-signs-twenty-six-agreements-worth-r94-billion-china-2-dec-2015-0000

Rede Angola. (2016, October 22). *China em processo de* rever *o seu "modelo angolano" de relações com África*. http://m.redeangola.info/china-em-processo-de-rever-o-seu-modelo-angolano-de-relacoes-com-africa/

Reuters. (2025, November 18). *US is biggest recipient of Chinese loans, study shows*. https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/us-is-biggest-recipient-chinese-loans-study-shows-2025-11-18

Rolley, S. (2024, May 8). *IMF and DR Congo reach agreement on final review of loan deal*. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/imf-dr-congo-reach-agreement-final-review-loan-deal-2024-05-08/

Sanny, J., & Selormey, E. (2021, November 15). *Africans welcome China's influence but maintain democratic aspirations*. Afrobarometer. https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad489-africans-welcome-chinas-influence-maintain-democratic-aspirations/

Shambaugh, D. (2010, June 7). *China flexes its soft power*. Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/china-flexes-its-soft-power/

Singh, A. (2020). The myth of 'debt-trap diplomacy' and realities of Chinese development finance. *Third World Quarterly*, *42*(2), 239-253. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1807318

Soulé, F. (2025). The study of agency in Africa-China relations: The case for typologies. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *58*(3), 514-519. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096525000083

Stropasolas, P. (2025, September 19). "Rússia e China nos respeitam", diz membro do governo de Burkina Faso sobre geopolítica no Sahel. *Brasil de Fato*. https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2025/09/19/russia-e-china-nos-respeitam-diz-membro-do-governo-de-burkina-faso-sobre-geopolitica-no-sahel/

Tao, A. (2023, August 2). Beyond the narrative of China's debt trap diplomacy. *E-International Relations*. https://www.e-ir.info/2023/08/02/beyond-the-narrative-of-chinas-debt-trap-diplomacy

The Economist. (2022, February 19). *How Chinese firms have dominated African infrastructure*.

The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. (2021, January 10). *China's international development cooperation in the new era*. https://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2021-01/10/content_77099782_3.htm

UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). (2013, May). *Mozambique sector-specific investment strategy and action plan: G20 indicators for measuring and maximizing economic value added and job creation from private investment in specific value chains-Pilot study results.* Author.

Vadell, J. A., Lopes, B., & Cardoso, D. (2013). FOCAC: Estratégia econômica e política de cooperação Sul-Sul sino-africana. *Carta Internacional*, *8*(2), 81-99. https://www.cartainternacional.abri.org.br/Carta/article/view/110

Yang, Y. E., & Liu, X. (2012). The "China threat" through the lens of US print media: 1992-2006. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *21*(76), 695-711. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2012.666838

Yu, S. Z. (2024, November 6). How has a quarter-century of FOCAC shaped the role of China in Africa? *Africa at LSE*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2024/11/06/how-has-a-quarter-century-of-focac-shaped-therole-of-china-in-africa/

Zhang, C. (2024, September 23). Global Security Initiative and China-Africa security cooperation. *China Diplomacy*. https://en.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/gsi/2024-09/23/content_117443870.shtml

Zhou, E. (1964, January 15). *Oito princípios da assistência técnica e econômica para outros países*. Marxists Internet Archive. https://www.marxists.org/portugues/chu-en-lai/1964/01/15.htm