

# CHINA–AFRICA ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE COMMUNITY WITH SHARED BENEFITS

## Achievements, Challenges, and Prospects

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**Abstract:** The China–Africa Community with Shared Benefits is the cornerstone of the China–Africa Community with Shared Future. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, through economic and trade cooperation, China and Africa have promoted the common economic and social development of both sides, and consolidated the material foundation of the China–Africa Community with Shared Benefits. The economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa has developed rapidly with remarkable achievements and great influence. This article fully affirms and reviews the great achievements of China–Africa trade and economic cooperation, points out that the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation still faces some challenges, but overall, the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation has an absolutely bright future and will become a persistence engine to build the Community with Shared Benefits. China’s investment will further promote economic and social development in Africa, and the China–Africa Community with Shared Benefits will have a huge demonstration effect internationally.

**Key words:** China–Africa relationship; the Community with Shared Benefits; China–Africa economic and trade cooperation

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Economic and Trade Cooperation Is the Material Foundation of the China–Africa Community with Shared Benefits

In recent years, with China's growing comprehensive strength and rapid rise internationally, certain countries ceaselessly put forward plans to contain China in order to maintain regional control and partial balance. At the same time, with the deepening of globalization, when facing the complex economic situation and problems, it is impossible for any country to keep independent. To avoid falling into hegemonic conflicts and regional tensions, the Chinese government has put forward the concept of "the Community with Shared Future" to seek common development and lasting prosperity with other countries. This concept breaks the idea of regional balance, and transcends the political system, ideology, and social development stage, advocating "seeking the common benefits and values of human beings under the perspective of the Community with Shared Future," which seeks a global development balance, has been widely recognized and accepted by the international community and has become a public product exported globally by China.

As the engine of world economic growth gradually turned to developing countries, the Chinese economy gradually began to undergo structural transformation adjustment after maintaining a high growth rate for 30 years, then Africa took over the baton of China and became the new growth pole of the world economy. From the "desperate continent" to the "land of hope," the African economy has entered a period of steady and rapid growth that has lasted for ten years.

The relationship between China and various African countries is often dominated by national interests. With the development of China–Africa traditional friendship policy since the 1950s, the China–Africa energy cooperation since the 1990s, and the China–Africa Cooperation Forum in the new century, China has grasped strategic initiatives and opportunities in its interactions with Africa, and the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation has developed rapidly. Since 2009, China has become Africa's largest trading partner and the largest infrastructure contractor. African markets have become the important export destination for Chinese products. Africa has also become the second largest overseas engineering market and the fourth largest investment destination for China. China and Africa are forming a new type of close relationship of cooperation and win-win development based on their growing economic ties (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China 2013).

When Premier Li Keqiang visited Africa in 2014, he clearly stated that China and Africa are the community with the trinity of responsibility, interests, and destiny.<sup>1</sup> It shows that the cooperation between China and Africa is based on common benefits and is a win-win cooperation. In order to achieve a win-win result, China and Africa must share equal responsibilities and ultimately realize the vision of building a community of shared future between China and Africa. In November 2015, President Xi Jinping extended the China–Africa relationship from “the community with shared future and benefits” to the “community of cooperation and win-win” in Beijing during the talks with the Liberian president. On September 3, 2018, in a speech at China–Africa Cooperation Forum Beijing Summit, President Xi Jinping proposed that China and Africa are the community with a shared future, featuring shared responsibilities, win-win cooperation, happiness, cultural prosperity, security, and harmony.<sup>2</sup> The mutual respect, support, and cooperation between China and Africa is based on common benefits. The Community with Shared Benefits not only includes economic benefits, but also includes all aspects such as common security, social, and cultural benefits. Economic benefits are the most important aspect of the Community with Shared Benefits and the guarantee of the realization of other aspects of benefits. Economic and trade cooperation is the most important way to achieve economic benefits. Through economic and trade cooperation, Africa can enjoy the spillover effect of China’s economic development and promote Africa’s economic development and social progress. China can also take advantage of the development opportunities of the African continent to drive the transformation of its domestic economy.

## **1.2. Present Studies on China–Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation**

Since the beginning of the new century, with its resource endowment and demographic dividend, Africa has rapidly become a promising continent, a promising land for development, and a “treasure bowl” for the world. In 2010, China’s GDP surpassed Japan’s to become the world’s second largest economy.<sup>3</sup> With closer economic and trade exchanges between China and Africa, China–Africa cooperation in international and regional affairs has expanded, and the anxiety of Western countries in their strategies towards China has gradually increased. China–Africa relations have transcended China and Africa and involved the whole world, attracting unprecedented attention from the international community. Along with the rapid development of the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation, the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation has achieved remarkable results, but a few problems and frictions will inevitably appear. Western countries keep exerting pressure on China, and the arguments such as “energy plundering,” “expansion,” “new colonialism” appear from time to time, trying to prove that the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation is only for China’s unilateral

benefit, rather than the common benefits of both China and Africa. Are China and Africa building a Community with Shared Future on earth?

Chinese scholars generally believe that China–Africa economic and trade exchanges are mutually equal and without any conditions attached (Yang 2013, 267; Zhang 2012, 167; Tang 2015). China’s behavior in Africa is not “neo-colonialism.” China and Africa are following a new path of mutually beneficial and win-win international relations. For China, China–Africa cooperation has promoted its internationalization strategy and helped solve problems such as China’s shortage of resources. For Africa, China–Africa cooperation promotes its economic development and improves its people’s livelihood, which serves the common interests of both sides (Shu 2008; Zhang 2012; Zhou and Zhao 2017; Xu 2017; Ma and Cheng 2018). The development of China–Africa economic cooperation and sustainable development of African economies meet great challenges because of Africa’s own factors and the international environment (Liu 2016; Yao 2018; Li 2018). Looking into the future, China–Africa economic and trade cooperation serves the common interests of both sides and has broad prospects, but it still requires the two sides to work together in many aspects (Zhang and Liu 2010; Jiang 2012; Liu 2018). On the whole, Chinese scholars mostly analyze the impact of China–Africa economic and trade cooperation on China and Africa from the perspective of social development, economic progress, and trade effect. Most of them hold positive views on China–Africa economic and trade cooperation, and believe that China–Africa economic and trade cooperation is in line with the common interests and development demands of both sides. With the deepening and increasing scope of cooperation, small-scale business frictions will increase, which is normal and based on business profit, not related to politics, not to mention neo-colonialism. The increasingly complex international environment will make both China and Africa face serious challenges. However, Chinese scholars are generally optimistic about the prospect of economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa.

Scholars outside China have also made some studies on the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation. Some scholars hold positive attitudes towards the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation, believing that it is based on common interests and beneficial to both sides (Kane et al. 2011). Some scholars think that the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation has complicated impacts on both sides, and both sides face risks and challenges (see Mbeki 2011). In the short term, the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation serves the interests of Africa and can meet China’s huge demand for energy, while in the long term, it is uncertain (Duclos 2011). Some scholars have criticized the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation, arguing that the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation will harm the interests of Africa, hit the local African manufacturing

industries in Africa, and make it impossible to achieve industrial localization (King 2014). There are also views that China's resource development in Africa has caused damage to the local environment (Taylor 2015); China's economic practices in Africa are not based on common interests, and they are a new enclosure movement (Games 2011). On the whole, most academic research on China–Africa economic and trade cooperation does not go beyond the inherent political stereotype, and most scholars hold a negative attitude. They think that China's economic behavior in Africa is a kind of “neo-colonialism”; China's economic and trade cooperation with Africa is only for China's own resource demand, which will damage Africa's environment, have a bad impact on local industries in Africa, and will harm African development. A small number of scholars also mention that China's massive infrastructure construction and aid in Africa have greatly promoted Africa's economic and social development, but unfortunately, the number of scholars holding this view is very small.

In short, there have been many studies on the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation at home and abroad, most of which have not surpassed political stereotypes and social development status. Looking back at the history and achievements of the China–Africa economic and trade cooperation, it is not difficult to see that it has greatly promoted the economic and social development of both sides. As cooperation deepens, it is normal that some small frictions occur, but the China-Africa economic and trade cooperation is a win-win choice to meet the common interests of both sides and will have a bright future.

### **1.3. The Basis for China–Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation**

China and Africa have similar historical experiences. Both China and Africa are ancient cradles of human civilization. They have created glorious histories and made great contributions to the progress of human society. In modern times, the pace of development in China and Africa slowed down, capitalism in Western countries has expanded rapidly, and China and Africa have been reduced to semi-colonial and semi-feudal areas and oppressed and exploited. In the twentieth century, national liberation movements in China and Africa were carried out successively and national independence was achieved. Then, China and Africa gradually entered the period of stable and rapid economic growth and became the engine of global economic growth. At present, both China and Africa have economic development and modernization as their primary goals. Similar historical experiences and common development demands have made China and Africa natural and reliable partners and external forces to rely on.

China and Africa have consistent traditional friendship. Since China's first aid to Africa in 1956, China–Africa cooperation has gone through more than 60 years under the active promotion of both sides' governments. From the initial pursuit of

political appeals, to the comprehensive cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, security, humanities, etc., China and Africa have mutually supported each other, helped each other, and formed a profound friendship. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, with the gradual maturity of the China–Africa multilateral cooperation forum and other operational mechanisms, China–Africa friendship has been further deepened and China and Africa have gradually constructed the “comprehensive strategic partnership.” Now China–Africa cooperation has become a model of Asian and African resurgence and South–South cooperation.

China and Africa share common development aspirations. On November 29, 2012, President Xi Jinping visited the exhibition of “The Road to Rejuvenation” at the National Museum. He pointed out that the “Chinese Dream” is to achieve “national prosperity, national rejuvenation, people’s happiness and social harmony.”<sup>4</sup> Africa presented Agenda 2063 at the African Union Summit in 2015, which can be seen as the “African Dream” and aims to achieve economic growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development. China is the largest developing country in the world, the African continent has the most developing countries, and for developing countries, development is the biggest political goal. The essence of “Chinese Dream” and “African Dream” is advanced by these countries to fulfill revitalization and self-improvement for economic and social development and satisfy the demands for the people’s livelihood, which are the highest national interests. China has put forward the “Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative,” which aims to achieve win-win cooperation with countries involved through extensive consultation, sharing, and joint contribution by taking advantage of China’s production capacity and capital. African leaders have responded enthusiastically and the two sides extended the “Belt and Road Initiative” to the “Belt and Road and Continent.” The close relationship between China and Africa has brought unprecedented development opportunities to each other.

China and Africa are complementary in economic development. Africa has a vast territory and abundant natural resources, but it is not highly industrialized and lacks energy exploitation technology. China has a huge energy demand and high-quality infrastructure construction capacity. China has implemented the “energy-for-infrastructure” strategy, which not only provides Africa with much-needed public infrastructure for economic development, but also solves the shortage of energy urgently needed by China’s economic development, thus achieving a win-win cooperation. China has brought a large amount of investment in infrastructure and downstream equipment, which has improved Africa’s independent development capabilities and helped Africa reduce exploitation by Western oil giants. China has acquired some land in Africa, but the food produced is basically consumed in Africa, China even provides food aid and food aid exchanges to Africa.

At the same time, China brings advanced agricultural technology and equipment to Africa, which fundamentally helps Africa solve the problem of food security. Africa has a huge demographic dividend, which means a large number of young laborers and a considerable consumer market. China is currently implementing economic restructuring and upgrading, and a large number of labor-intensive industries are in urgent need of relocation. “The only place that can undertake such a large-scale labor-intensive industry transformation in the world is Africa” (Lin 2015). Currently, Africa is implementing urbanization, which means a huge investment market, consumption potential, and employment opportunities. China’s rapid economic growth in the past four decades has accumulated a large amount of capital, industrial development technology, and experience, which meet Africa’s needs.

## **2. Remarkable Achievements Have Been Made in China–Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation**

In six decades of China–Africa economic and trade cooperation, especially since the establishment of China–Africa multilateral cooperation forum mechanism in 2000, China–Africa economic and trade cooperation has made great strides through cooperation on the resources, market, capital, technology, and experience. This has supported the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, promoted the development of African economies and improved people’s livelihoods, built win-win cooperation, opened up “South-South cooperation” in the economic field, contributed a lot to building the Community with Shared Future, and set a good example.

### **2.1. The Trade between China and Africa Is Developing Rapidly**

On the whole, since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and African countries, the scale of trade has been expanding. In 1950, the trade volume between China and Africa was only \$121.4 million, but it reached \$6.484 billion in 1999, increasing by 533 times in 50 years (Liang 2011). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, with the rapid development of China’s economy and the establishment of China–Africa Cooperation Forum, the China–Africa economic and trade momentum has been growing by leaps and bounds. From \$10.6 billion in 2000 to \$221.88 billion in 2014, China has been Africa’s largest trading partner since 2009.<sup>5</sup> In 2015 and 2016, during the global economic downturn, some African countries with strong dependence on mineral resources were greatly affected by the fluctuations in international energy and mineral prices, and the number of imports of labor-intensive products and mechanical and electrical products declined. China has a trade deficit with Africa, but by 2017 it had improved



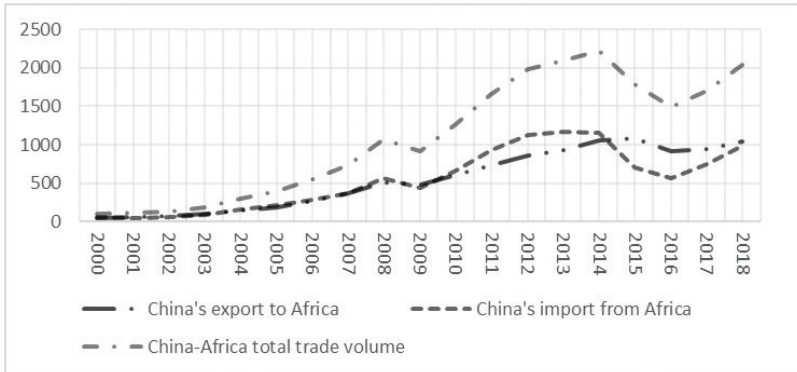


Figure 1 Trade Volume and Trend between China and Africa in 2000–2018 (unit: \$100 million)

Sources: Data from Ministry of Commerce of PRC (<http://zhs.mofcom.gov.cn/article/aa/>), UNCTADSTAT (<https://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=101>), and DOTS database of IMF (<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/SPROLLS/world-economic-outlook-databases#sort=%40imfdate%20descending>).

significantly, rising to \$204.2 billion in 2018. Figure 1 shows the trend in the volume of import and export trade between China and Africa.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of growth rate, the proportion of exports to Africa in China's total exports and the proportion of imports from Africa in China's total imports rose steadily from 2000 to 2014. In 2015 and 2016, due to the impact of the global economic situation, there was a sharp drop. Another reason was that, under the influence of the Chinese government's strategy of "going global" and "great economy and trade," more and more Chinese enterprises went to Africa and invested in Africa, and their products replaced some of Africa's imports. Although the absolute value of China–Africa trade has declined, the economic ties have become even closer. Figure 2 shows the trend and growth rate changes of China's import and export trade with Africa.

Since 2000, the proportion of China–Africa trade in China's total international trade has gradually increased from 2.1% to 4.3%. According to China's customs statistics, China's trade with Africa increased by 20% in 2018, which is the highest since 2011 and seven percentage points higher than China's international trade in the same period. China's imports from Africa rose by as much as 31%, 15% higher than the foreign trade in the same period.<sup>7</sup> The importance of China–Africa trade to the social and economic development of both sides is self-evident.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, with the continuous growth of China's economy and the acceleration of Africa's industrialization process, the commodities types traded between China and Africa have been increasing and the structure has been optimized. China's commodities exported to Africa have



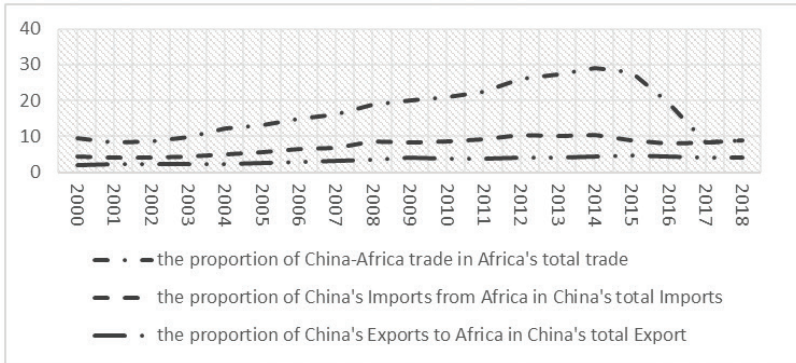


Figure 2 Trend and Growth Rate Changes of China's Import and Export Trade with Africa from 2000 to 2018 (unit: %)

Sources: Ministry of Commerce of PRC (<http://zh.mofcom.gov.cn/article/aa/>), UNCTADSTAT (<https://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=101>), and DOTS database of IMF (<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/SPROLLS/world-economic-outlook-databases#sort=%40imfdte%20descending>).

gradually shifted from primary industrial products to production tools and products requiring high technology and high industrial chains, such as mechanical and electrical equipment. The proportion of light industrial textiles has been decreasing, the proportion of mechanical and electrical products has been increasing, and the proportion of auto parts and communication equipment has also greatly increased.

Energy and minerals represent the greatest proportion of China's imported commodities from Africa. Agriculture and forestry products take the second greatest proportion. China actively imports raw materials from Africa and further refines them to then export back to Africa. For example, Nigerian oil is processed into diesel and gasoline which are then exported back to Nigeria. South Africa, Angola, Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, the republic of Congo, Libya and Kenya have become China's top ten trading partners in Africa. In terms of import data, South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt rank as the top three in China's import volume from Africa. China's trading partners in Africa are mainly countries with rich oil and mineral resources and advantageous geographical locations. China's import volume is still higher with resource-based countries.

## 2.2. China's Investment Cooperation with Africa Has Been Upgraded

Africa's economic foundations are weak and the lack of construction funds has constrained African economic development. The Chinese government actively guides, encourages, and supports Chinese enterprises and financial institutions to

invest in Africa. Since the mid-to-late 1990s, China’s investment in Africa has accelerated and the total amount of investment has grown rapidly, providing much-needed funds for the economic development of African countries.

China’s total investment amount in Africa has increased rapidly, from \$900 million in 2004 to \$43.3 billion in 2017, which increased nearly 50 times in just 13 years and reached an annual growth rate of about 40%.<sup>8</sup> In 2011 and 2012, affected by the financial crisis, European and American investment in Africa decreased significantly, while China’s investment in Africa continued to increase, which greatly alleviated the impact of Western divestments in Africa and stabilized the African economy. A series of policies and planning such as the “Ten Sino-African Cooperation Programs” in the China–Africa Cooperation Forum Johannesburg Summit in 2015, the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in Beijing in May 2017 expanding Africa into the framework of the Belt and Road construction, and the “Eight Actions” in the China–Africa Cooperation Forum Beijing Summit further promote China’s investment in infrastructure construction, investment, and trade in Africa. In 2017 alone, China’s investment in Africa increased by \$4.1 billion, up by 70.8% year on year. The scale and intensity of China’s investment in Africa will further increase.<sup>9</sup> Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the changing trend of China’s investment in Africa.

The fields and geographical scope of China’s investment in Africa have been gradually expanded. Currently, more than 10,000 enterprises invest in Africa,

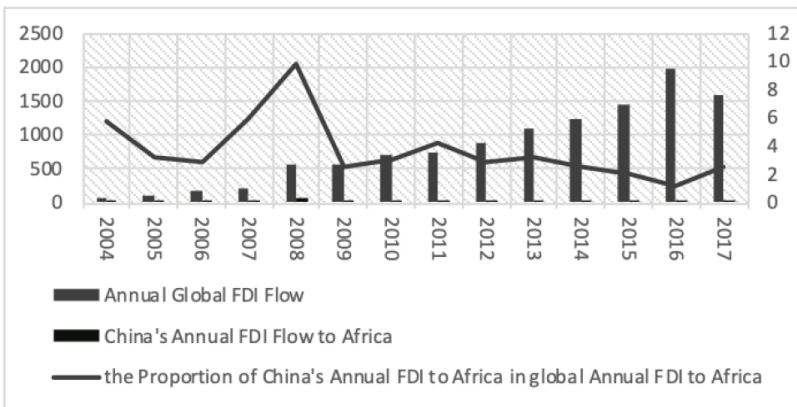


Figure 3 Growth Rate of China’s Outbound Investment Flow and Its Investment Flow to Africa (unit: \$100 million, %)

Source: Data from “Statistical Bulletin of China’s Outward Foreign Direct Investment” (2004–2017) (<http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/tongjiziliao/dgz>).

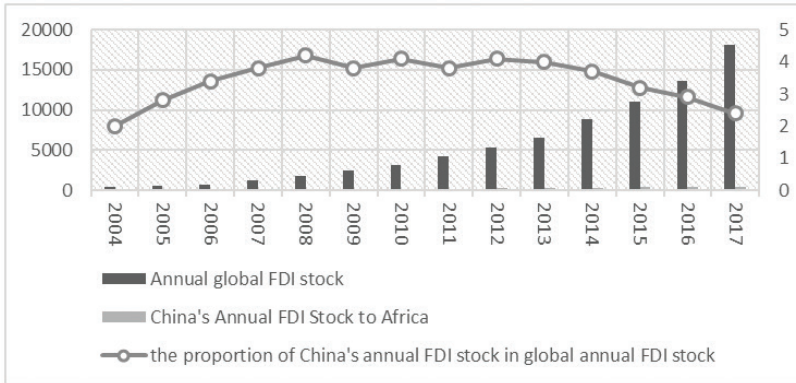


Figure 4 Annual Stock of China's Direct Investment in Africa and Its Proportion

Sources: Data from "Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment" (2004–2017) (<http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/tongjiziliao/dgzj/>).

which were initially concentrated in more traditional industries such as construction and agriculture. Investment then moved into labor-intensive enterprises such as clothing, pharmaceutical, textiles, and food processing, after the 1990s that turned to energy and mineral resource investment cooperation (Table 1). The China–Africa cooperation continues to expand and the economy continues to grow in Africa, and investment in services such as finance and telecommunications has increased rapidly. There are 60 countries on the African continent. By the end of 2017, China had invested in 52 countries (not including the Canary Islands, Sabtai, Reunion, Somalia, Melilla, Swaziland, Mayotte, and Western Sahara), covering 86.7% of the total countries. The continuous expansion of investment in

Table 1 The Top Five Industries of China's Stock of Direct Investment in Africa in 2017 (unit: \$100 million, %)

<i>The name of the industry</i>	<i>The stock</i>	<i>The proportion</i>
The construction industry	128.8	29.8
The mining industry	97.6	22.5
The financial sector	60.8	14.0
Manufacturing	57.1	13.2
Leasing and business services	23.1	5.3
Subtotal	367.4	84.8

Sources: Data from "2017 Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment" (<http://images.mofcom.gov.cn/hzs/201810/20181029160118046.pdf>).

Africa has promoted the comprehensive and balanced economic development of these African countries.<sup>10</sup>

Chinese investors in Africa are gradually diversifying. Before the 1990s, China's investment in Africa was mainly represented by government investment in the form of aid. Since the 1990s, with the economic development and the deepening of the reform of the foreign economic and trade system, the investment in Africa has gradually been transformed into state-owned enterprises under the guidance of the government. After the twenty-first century, with the China–Africa Cooperation Forum, China–Africa economic and trade exchanges have become closer. The government has begun to implement strategies to encourage and guide diversification investment. The enthusiasm of private enterprises and individual enterprises to participate in investment in Africa has been continuously improved. Gradually, state-owned enterprises, private enterprises, and individual enterprises share the investment field in Africa. In terms of the investment amount, state-owned enterprises are still the main force of investment in Africa, accounting for a large proportion of the investment amount. In terms of the enterprises number, private enterprises have an absolute advantage. According to a McKinsey survey, there are more than 10,000 Chinese enterprises in Africa, 90% of which are private enterprises. Private enterprises have replaced traditional state-owned enterprises and become the main investors in Africa (Sun et al. 2017).

By September 2018, China had invested and built 25 economic and trade cooperation zones in Africa, covering resources and energy cooperation, light processing, comprehensive trade, and so on (Huang 2018). The investors put a large amount of money in economic and trade cooperation zones and they have rich experience in the construction of these zones. They serve as a bridge for China's overseas direct investment. They not only help African countries learn from China's experience and promote African economic development, but also promote the internationalization and localization of Chinese enterprises, which meets the interests of both China and Africa.

### **2.3. Significant Achievements Have Been Made in China–Africa Development Cooperation**

China–Africa development cooperation is mainly reflected in China's assistance to Africa, which refers to the material, financial, and technical assistance to Africa (Luo 2000). China does not attach any political conditions to its aid to Africa. The form of assistance mainly focuses on infrastructure construction, agricultural cooperation, human resources training, and medical care for the population. By the end of 2018, China had trained more than 200,000 professional and technical personnel for Africa and over 40,000 government officials and technicians (Ministry of

Commerce 2018). The absolute value of China's aid to Africa is not large amongst all foreign aid in Africa, but the effect is very good (Zhang 2013). China's aid to Africa improves the livelihood of African people, promotes African independent development ability and social and economic progress, all of which provide an extremely important boost to the rise of Africa as the most promising continent.

Infrastructure construction has always been the key point of China–Africa economic and trade cooperation, and is also an important guarantee for Africa's connectivity and integration process. By the end of 2018, China had more than 200 infrastructure construction projects in Africa, making China the largest donor of infrastructure assistance in Africa. From the Tanzania-Zambia railway, the Cairo international conference center, Mauritania friendship port, Ghana, Mauritius airport, Ghana Buvi hydropower station to the recent Aji railway and the African union center, China's infrastructure projects in Africa meet Africa's social and economic development needs and the new changes in the international system, gradually occupying the main market of Africa and become the guarantee of African countries to realize self-development. The Chinese government has actively encouraged and supported financial institutions to expand investment in Africa and provided a large number of concessional loans.

Agricultural cooperation is also a traditional area of China's assistance to Africa. To improve Africa's agricultural production capacity, China has provided quality products and trained agricultural technicians and managers to African countries by building agricultural demonstration centers, dispatching agricultural technical experts and organizing agricultural technical education. A large number of agricultural technology test stations, extension stations, water conservancy facilities have been built in African countries, which have improved the agricultural production capacity and raised the food security level of African countries. By the end of 2017, the Chinese government had sent a large number of experts and technical personnel to Africa to train local farmers and technical personnel, and as many as 30,000 of them were trained. More than 300 demonstration and extension projects on small-scale agricultural research have been launched in Africa. Based on the tropical climate characteristics of Africa, 450 agricultural technologies suitable for Africa's climate will be promoted.<sup>11</sup>

Human resources training is also a major focus of China's development assistance and cooperation with Africa. First, it provides hardware facilities through constructing schools and teaching and training centers. Second, Chinese universities and research institutions provide much-needed talents for African countries through education assistance and human resources training, such as government scholarships, master's program for developing countries, 20+20 cooperation plan between Chinese and African universities, Confucius institutes, and so on. Third, it trains management talents for African governments by holding training courses,

seminars, and surveys on the governance experience of China and Africa. Fourth, it provides technical support to Africa through technical assistance, for example, the construction team of Tanzania-Zambia railway has trained more than 12,000 technical workers, setting up a Chinese agricultural technology demonstration center in Zambia to promote technology, and setting up a technical training course for developing countries.

Medical and health assistance to Africa has always been a traditional area of China's assistance to Africa. China supports recipient countries to improve medical and health care conditions, improving disease control and prevention, and strengthening public health capacity building by constructing hospitals, providing drugs and medical equipment, sending medical teams, training medical staff and cooperating with developing countries in disease prevention and control (Information Office 2014). Since 1963, when China sent its first medical team to Algeria, Chinese medical teams have provided free medical and health services to local residents in Africa for nearly 60 years, including sending 20,000 medical teams to 50 African countries and treating 210 million African patients (Li 2017). China has built nearly 100 hospitals in Africa and equipped them with appropriate medical facilities and instruments. In 2014, when Ebola broke out in Africa, China provided four rounds of emergency assistance with a total value of 750 million yuan to Africa, effectively controlling the Ebola epidemic by dispatching experts and conducting public health training (National Health and Family Planning Commission 2015, 49).

### **3. China–Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation Still Faces Many Challenges**

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, with the deepening of China–Africa economic and trade cooperation and the sustained growth of the African economies, the international community has paid unprecedented attention to Africa. The discussion on the influence of the rapid development of China–Africa economic and trade relations on both sides in the international community has been unprecedentedly heated. China–Africa economic and trade activities have attracted the attention of the whole world, and because of the malicious prejudice of Western countries and the improper implementation of China's policies towards Africa, some negative aspects have been magnified. The problems in China–Africa economic and trade cooperation mainly focus on the following four aspects.

#### **3.1. Challenges in China–Africa Trade**

As trade cooperation between China and Africa deepens and the total volume of trade between China and Africa expands rapidly, it is inevitable that minor frictions

and minor problems will arise. The trade problems between China and Africa are mainly concentrated on the unreasonable trade structure and trade imbalance.

First of all, the trade structure between China and Africa is unreasonable. China and Africa have a typical single trade structure of “manufactured products–energy and mineral products.” As the least developed continent in the world, Africa has a relatively low level of productivity, but its energy and mineral resources are very rich. Most of China’s imports from Africa are energy and mineral products, while most of Africa’s imports from China are industrial products. China’s trading partners are mainly in a small number of African economic powers and resource powers. Therefore, international doubts about “China’s plunder of resources in Africa” occur from time to time. This trade division pattern is caused by the single mal-formed economic structure that has been solidified by long-term colonial rule in Africa and conforms to the comparative advantage of China and Africa. This continues the original pattern of international division of labor. Some resource-rich countries are very sensitive, as Western countries combine with African local politicians for political purposes to agitate the populations. They question the normal mineral resources trade between China and Africa and this affects the normal business activities between China and Africa.

Unequal productivity levels in China and Africa will have a certain impact on Africa’s low-end manufacturing industry. African countries have low productivity and low income, and most of the means of livelihood and means of production depend on imports. China’s traditional manufacturing industry is developed with a high level of production technology, especially in the low-end manufacturing industry. Most of the products sold to Africa are of high quality and low price, and they have a high market share in the local market.

The influx of manufactured goods is not conducive to the development of local manufacturing in Africa and is likely to cause a decline in the competitiveness of African domestic products. China’s trade policy with Africa lags behind, especially the services trade. The level and scale of China’s goods trade with Africa is much higher than that of the services trade. From January to July 2018, the proportion of services trade in total trade was only 15.1%. The service rate of China’s economy is not high, and the scale of services trade is small, especially the development of emerging modern services, such as telecommunications or finance, which cannot meet enterprises’ needs (China Business Network 2018). What is inconsistent about the huge trade volume between China and Africa is that the services trade cannot keep up with it. Since the 1950s, the new China began to trade with Africa, but it was not until 2006 that China issued *China’s Africa Policy Paper*. The document only lays out the direction and focus of China–Africa cooperation as a whole. However, there are many countries with different economic, legal, historical, and cultural backgrounds in Africa. The document does



not provide strong guidance for specific trade behaviors, and it is not easy to operate and measure. For example, with the deepening of trade links between China and Africa, some quality problems have occurred in the products of Chinese enterprises. In order to compete for market share, some enterprises adopt low-price marketing, which disrupts the normal competition in the local market and has poor after-sales service of products. But there are no corresponding laws and regulations or regulatory agencies to supervise these behaviors.

### **3.2. Problems in China's Investment in Africa**

The problem of China's investment in Africa has gradually emerged with the increase in its amount and expansion. First, Chinese investment in Africa faces stiff competition. The enterprises from Europe, the United States, India, Japan, and so on started their investment in Africa earlier. They have already taken first-mover advantages in some industries. In addition, these enterprises often have strong financial strength while Chinese enterprises have a late start and small scale in Africa. Chinese enterprises have to choose a few relatively low-profit projects to invest in because of their weak competitive ability. In the process of competition, Chinese enterprises prefer to adopt a low-price competition strategy, which greatly damages the interests of Chinese enterprises, further affects the reputation of Chinese enterprises, and puts Chinese enterprises at a disadvantage in later competition.

The Chinese government lacks effective control over enterprises investing in Africa, especially for the influx of private enterprises. Small and medium-sized enterprises or private enterprises account for more than 90% of the total number of Chinese enterprises in Africa. In terms of the number of enterprises, private enterprises have an absolute advantage, but in terms of the scale of investment, the largest investments are still undertaken by state-owned enterprises. Compared with state-owned enterprises, private enterprises are less connected with the government, and policy guidance is often less attractive than the actual profits, making it difficult to manage them. In addition, due to political factors and social security problems in Africa, the risk of investment in African countries is relatively high, so small private enterprises may pay more attention to short-term benefits and fail to fulfill their corporate social responsibilities. A small number of private business owners with discreditable behavior also easily lead to conflicts with the local governments.

While state-owned enterprises undertake aid projects in Africa, they also undertake some government or social functions, making their identity as investors easily obscured and their behavior vulnerable to suspicion. Enterprises ought to be profit-oriented and attach importance also to social benefits, but it is difficult for state-owned enterprises to coordinate the conflict between them. Therefore, they have

been criticized by some Western countries who regard normal business behavior as the Chinese government's behavior and give enormous publicity to negative actions, and then they attack the Chinese government's policies in Africa, which has adversely affected the Chinese government and China's international image.

The services system for investment in Africa lags far behind. First, the legal guarantee and support system for China's investment in Africa is not complete, China has not set up special laws and regulations on investment in Africa for Chinese enterprises to follow. Second, the information service system for investment in Africa is not complete. Relevant government agencies lack guiding information and documents for investment in Africa, enterprises in Africa cannot timely obtain relevant statistical information and data, there is no authoritative consultation agency to provide information services, which has greatly increased the blindness and risks of enterprises. Third, there are many problems in the financial support for investment in Africa. The financial institutions mainly support state-owned enterprises, the small and medium-sized private enterprises lack financial support, and there is a high threshold for them to apply for financial support, which seriously affects the development of their investment in Africa.

### **3.3. Problem in China's Aid to Africa**

In terms of aid to Africa, China lags far behind Western countries both in hard and soft power. Although China's overall economic strength has been growing rapidly, it has a large population and a low per capita level. Compared with the amount of funds that the United States, Germany, Japan, France, and other countries invest in Africa, China lags behind, which is the root cause why China's aid to Africa is limited (Luo 2013). Africa has a history of being colonized by developed countries. Whether in terms of emotional identity or social and cultural customs, Africa is naturally close to Western developed countries. There is a difference between China's insistence on "no political conditions" assistance and the concepts of deep-rooted democracy and good governance in Africa. Western developed countries often exert their influence on Africa through mass media and other means. Due to the differences in language, culture, and other aspects, and China's lack of propaganda on its aid to Africa, the social influence of China's aid to Africa is very limited.

The radiation effects of aid programs are limited. First, China has no laws and regulations on foreign aid that have been published, and information about foreign aid projects has not been effectively publicized. The radiation and driving effect of regions, sectors, industries, and enterprises involved in the aid projects are not obvious, as their role in promoting the communications between Chinese and African people, facilitating China–Africa trade and investment, and enhancing the position of China in the international political arena is limited. Second, the

channels and means of communication between the aid project personnel and native Africans are limited, for most aid project personnel have contact with local Africans only when they are working. In addition, considering security factors, Chinese investors often ask aid project personnel to reduce contact with local people in their spare time, which obviously reduces the radiating and driving effect of aid projects.

There exist some disparities between some aid projects and the actual needs of African countries. Most African countries have very distinct strata, and the binary opposition is serious. Traditional sectors need some basic living and production facilities, but some large modern production facilities provided by China in the aid projects make the traditional sectors in Africa no longer useful. Modern sectors need more advanced facilities to improve the living standards, while China often provides some infrastructure and basic equipment, which cannot meet the different needs of different classes, resulting in low efficiency of assistance. The public service and administrative management system in African countries is generally poor and lacks sufficient capability to manage public infrastructure, thus the inadequacy in the maintenance and management of aid projects makes the aid projects unable to fully realize their social and political effects.

### **3.4. Problems in Environmental Protection and Labor Rights**

With the rapid increase in the number and scale of Chinese-funded enterprises in Africa, problems such as environmental protection, labor rights, and enterprises' undertaking of social responsibility have occurred from time to time in China–Africa economic and trade cooperation, which is hard to avoid.

In terms of environmental protection, with the increase in the number of Chinese enterprises investing in Africa, there have been some incidents affecting the ecological environment of host countries in recent years. For example, oil and gas extraction by Sinopec in 2004 had a negative impact on the marine ecosystem and biological resources in Angola (Gill and Reilly 2007). Sinopec was accused of “barbarous construction” and destroying virgin forests in 2006 (Taylor 2007). Chinese illegal gold mining in Ghana has damaged water bodies and farmland, and triggered strong protests from local communities. In August 2013, PetroChina failed to clean up oil spills in Chad as required by the local law.<sup>12</sup> Some reports about the environmental damage caused by Chinese enterprises in Africa have appeared in newspapers from time to time and lead to pernicious consequences. In terms of labor relations, China does not have a good record in Africa. Some Chinese enterprises in Africa do not sign labor contracts when they hire local people for a short time because of their flexible work needs. Chinese people are used to working overtime to meet deadlines, while local workers are reluctant to work overtime. Working conditions in some Chinese companies are poor, safeguard

measures are insufficient, and then labor disputes have occurred from time to time, together with some exaggerated media reports. There have been some extremely violent incidents including protests, boycotts, and even attacks, which have severely damaged China's image, damaged China–Africa relations, and affected Chinese investment in Africa.

Since we lack enough statistical data on Chinese enterprises performing social responsibility in Africa, we cannot base our analysis on summarized media reports or case studies. However, we do admit that these individual incidents have had a bad influence on China's overall image through the media's deliberate exaggeration. It has become a problem which is hard to bypass in China–Africa economic and trade cooperation.

#### **4. China–Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation Enjoys Bright Prospects**

Against the background of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development proposed by the United Nations, Agenda 2063 proposed by the African Union, and the promotion of the China–Africa Cooperation Forum, Chinese and African governments have jointly formulated a number of innovative strategic combinations to promote the building of a China–Africa Community of Shared Future. If China and Africa can combine their respective national strategies, follow the trend of win-win cooperation, and formulate economic and trade cooperation strategies at a higher level, it will greatly promote Africa's economic and social development, and China will be able to enjoy a favorable external environment for the implementation of a new round of reform and transformation.

##### **4.1. Trade Will Serve as a Lasting Engine for China–Africa Community with Shared Benefits**

China–Africa economic and trade cooperation serves the common interests of both sides and will greatly promote economic and social development. As far as China is concerned, sustained and rapid economic growth requires a large amount of energy and mineral resources, and the transformation and upgrading of industrial structure requires a large labor force. The resource endowment and demographic dividend of Africa will bring greater attraction to China. As far as Africa is concerned, to achieve socio-economic development, it not only needs to make full use of resource advantages in exchange for capital and technology, but also needs a large number of consumers to buy products. China is an ideal trading partner and does not require additional political conditions compared with Europe, the United States, and other countries. China and Africa have obvious complementary advantages in trade. Mutual benefit and win-win cooperation will become the

mainstream of China–Africa trade. The upstream and downstream of the industrial chain of China and Africa will cooperate closely. China–Africa economic and trade cooperation will face historic opportunities, and African countries can fully release their economic development potential. China and Africa have a solid foundation for trade cooperation. If both sides can make full use of their respective effective needs, it will not only meet the needs of China’s economic growth, but also boost the economic development in Africa, so as to achieve their respective development goals.

#### **4.2. Investment in Africa Will Further Lay the Foundation for Africa’s Social Progress and Economic Development**

A high proportion of China’s investment in Africa is for infrastructure construction, which not only provides convenience for local residents, but also provides fundamental support for sustainable economic growth. Good infrastructure construction is strongly positively correlated with economic growth and social development. Infrastructure construction can promote economic growth and social development, and economic growth can in turn contribute to infrastructure construction. For African countries, low productivity and weak technical foundations require a large amount of infrastructure construction to achieve economic development and solve people’s livelihood needs. China has the solid strength and rich experience in infrastructure construction in Africa. African countries have become more and more aware that industrialization is necessary to achieve economic development and reduce their economic dependence on the outside. In addition, China pays great attention to improving the technological level of African countries in its investment in Africa, which can drive the development of relevant industries in Africa. China is in a period of transforming its economic development model and adjusting its industrial structure. Africa’s needs coincide with China’s superior production capacity to “going global.” Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that Africa’s demand for infrastructure construction will inevitably trigger a new round of Chinese investment in Africa, and a large amount of investment will definitely contribute to Africa’s economic development and further lay the foundation of African economic development. In this way, China can also complete the economic transformation and adjustment, and ultimately achieve mutual benefit and win-win situation between China and Africa.

#### **4.3. China’s Strategic Initiative in Africa Will Be Further Strengthened**

China–Africa relations are close. With the further deepening of bilateral economic and trade cooperation, there will be more and more cooperation achievements, and the interference and containment of China by Western powers in Africa will become more obvious. In the game between China and Western powers in Africa,

China acts first and the West responds later. China is the main actor in the changes of relations between great powers in Africa and will continue to maintain the strategic initiative of great power relations in Africa. As China's economic and trade cooperation with Africa further develops, China–Africa relations will inevitably impact on the Western powers' vested interests in Africa. After decades of strategic layout and development in Africa, China has formed intricate resource and interpersonal networks. With the Chinese government continuously guiding and constraining the enterprise behavior and enterprises paying increasing attention to social responsibility construction, China's economic relations with Africa will be closer and more complex, China's positive image in Africa will be magnified, China's position in Africa will be more difficult to shake, and China's strategic initiative in Africa will be further strengthened. Therefore, apart from the relations of competition between Western powers and China in Africa, the Western powers will also seek cooperation with China.

#### **4.4. The Demonstration Effect of China–Africa Community with Shared Benefits in the International Arena Was Further Magnified**

China and Africa exchanges have always adhered to the principles of equal treatment and mutual respect in their corporation. From the economic perspective, China has provided African countries with a large amount of infrastructure, funds, equipment, technology, and experience for economic development and people's livelihoods through the bridge of China–Africa economic and trade cooperation, which have promoted African economic progress and improved people's livelihood. China has obtained from Africa a favorable environment for economic structural transformation, energy and mineral products required for economic growth, and a large number of demographic dividends and consumer markets. From the perspective of political and social development, China's "people-centered" development principles and giving full play to the leading role of state-owned enterprises and state-owned capital are the fundamental reasons for China's economic and social development. It is different from the values and development model of Western capitalist countries, and this provides a new pattern of the African economic development.

China and Africa are a community of shared benefits. China has realized the interests of African countries while realizing its own interests. In seeking its own development and transformation, China has helped African countries achieve economic development. This is an important value advocated by the concept of a community with shared future for mankind. It shows that sustainable development can be achieved through sharing, cooperation, win-win, and tolerance. With the emergence of global problems such as the financial crisis, climate warming, and the refugee problem, the interests of various countries are blended with each other.

All of mankind is in a chain of common interests. The zero-sum game strategy of passing on crisis and doing harm to other countries can no longer handle international disputes and safeguard national interests. Respect and trust, cooperation and mutual assistance are the fundamental way to solve these problems. The outstanding achievements in the development of China–Africa economic and trade cooperation will become a successful model of “South–South cooperation” and attract more countries to join the construction of the Community with Shared Benefits.

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## Notes

1. See <http://hi.people.com.cn/GB/359023/361721/362536/index.html>.
2. See “Keynote Speech by Xi Jinping at the Opening Ceremony of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum Beijing Summit 2018 (Full Text).” [In Chinese.] [http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2018-09/03/c\\_1123373881.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2018-09/03/c_1123373881.htm).
3. See “China’s GDP Surpassed Japan’s to Become the Second Largest Economy in the World in 2010.” [In Chinese.] <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/13594169.html>.
4. See <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/0703/c40531-25232264.html>.
5. See “Statistical Bulletin of China’s Foreign Direct Investment.” [In Chinese.] <http://hzs.mofcom.gov.cn/article/date/201512/20151201223578.shtml>.
6. See <http://news.afrindex.com/zixun/article10384.html>, and <http://news.afrindex.com/zixun/article11618.html>.
7. See “Statistical Bulletin of China’s Foreign Direct Investment.” [In Chinese.] <http://hzs.mofcom.gov.cn/article/date/201512/20151201223578.shtml>.
8. See “China Offshore Direct Investment Statistics Bulletin 2017.” [In Chinese.] <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/tongjiziliao/dgz/201809/20180902791492.shtml>.
9. See “China Offshore Direct Investment Statistics Bulletin 2017.” [In Chinese.] <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/tongjiziliao/dgz/201809/20180902791492.shtml>.
10. See “2017 Statistical Bulletin of China’s Outward Foreign Direct Investment.” [In Chinese.] <http://images.mofcom.gov.cn/hzs/201810/20181029160118046.pdf>.
11. See “China and Africa Will Promote Agricultural Cooperation and Accelerate the Transformation of Scientific Research Achievements.” [In Chinese.] [http://www.sohu.com/a/240991445\\_198170](http://www.sohu.com/a/240991445_198170).
12. See “Chad Suspended PetroChina’s Exploitation Activities, Claiming That It Violated Environmental Regulations.” [In Chinese.] *Global Times*, August 15, 2013.



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