



Evolving Principles and Guiding Concepts: How China Gains African Support for its Core National Interests

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The People's Republic of China's long-standing focus on the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of other countries has helped it successfully enlist the support, or at least acquiescence, of nearly all African countries on topics Chinese leaders consider their top priorities. General Secretary and President Xi Jinping has linked his "Chinese Dream" to the African continent via the "African Dream," and has combined that concept with the ostensibly pluralistic one of "The Community of Shared Future." These principles and concepts represent the conceptual framework that China has built to engage African countries amid a rapid expansion in its diplomatic, economic, technological, and security footprint on the continent. Beijing has established successfully diplomatic relations and some type of security cooperation with every African state except for Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), which is now the only African country to recognize the Republic of China (Taiwan).

China's conception of "non-interference" represents a two-way street. It also means that African governments must, at the very least, not speak against Beijing's position on a list of contentious issues that Chinese leaders consider to be exclusively domestic—Taiwan, Tibet, mistreatment of Muslim minorities, human rights, South China Sea, and Hong Kong. African countries are publicly encouraged to support Beijing's policy positions on these topics, which China sees as domestic matters over which its sovereignty cannot be questioned, but have little resonance among Africans. The result of this asymmetry of interest is that African governments either publicly support China's position on these topics or are careful to avoid them completely.

Of course, Africa's 54 countries are not monolithic, but there is surprising consistency in how China seeks to exert influence over them on the issues it considers most important. China tends to treat the more important and resource-rich countries, such as, South Africa, Angola, Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt and Algeria with greater deference (as compared to the smaller and resource poor ones). Nevertheless, Beijing offers little room for flexibility with any country regarding topics it has identified as among China's "core national interests"

Still, China-Africa relations are not completely trouble free, and China has experienced real challenges when African civil society and opposition political parties have been unwilling to accept its position on these sensitive issues.

This article is divided into three sections. The first examines the two key guiding political principles of China's engagement with African countries: state sovereignty and non-interference; the second reviews and explores the two concepts that have been deployed under Xi and their relationship to Africa—"The Chinese Dream" (???) and "The Community of Shared Future" (???????); and the third section examines each of China's "core national interests" and how Beijing seeks support for them from African countries. To be clear, these interests are distinct from China's goals and objectives in Africa, which we have examined in our prior writings.

Evolving Principles: State Sovereignty and Non-Interference

Two long-standing hallmarks of China's foreign policy are its conjoined principles of *state sovereignty* and *non-interference* in the internal affairs of other countries. The corollary is that other states must not involve themselves in China's domestic affairs. Both principles date back to the preamble to the 1954 Sino-Indian Agreement on Tibetan Trade and Interchange, known as the Panchsheel, which subsequently became part of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence." Sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs are closely linked, and both play well with most African governments. The borders of many African countries are arbitrary, and most have many different ethnic groups, giving rise to a number of secessionist movements, such as the unsuccessful effort to create an independent Biafra in Nigeria, and the successful secessions of Eritrea from Ethiopia and South Sudan from Sudan. China's focus on economic development as a means to resolving peace and security challenges in Africa is consistent with these two principles.

An emphasis on state sovereignty encourages the acceptance of existing borders, a key principle of the African Union. It also supports the interests of countries, such as Morocco and Somalia, which seek to prevent the separation of the Western Sahara and Somaliland, respectively. China's support for state sovereignty thus strengthens its relations with Morocco, and helps explain its close ties with Somalia. Somaliland foreign ministers have acknowledged that while Chinese companies are active in their self-declared independent country, the government of China has no formal relationship with the capital, Hargeisa, and pursues a "hands off" policy. Putting a premium on state sovereignty, in turn, reinforces China's policy of asserting full control over Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang, and gaining control over Taiwan.

China's professed adherence to the principle of state sovereignty remains consistent, but there have been sharp swings in implementing non-interference in the internal affairs of African countries. There were several egregious cases throughout the 1960s, when China interfered in countries, such as Niger, the Congo (now Democratic Republic of the Congo), Burundi, Rwanda, and Cameroon. For example, in Niger in 1964, an antigovernment group known as Sawaba (Freedom Party), which was based in Ghana and Mali, tried to overthrow the conservative government of President Hamani Dori, who charged that China had organized and financed Sawaba. The government of Ghana subsequently released compelling evidence of Chinese involvement with Sawaba. In Cameroon, Beijing supported a Marxist revolutionary group that tried to overthrow President Ahmadou Ahidjo's government throughout the 1960s. Cameroon, which had recognized Taipei, crushed the group in 1970. The following year, Ahidjo made peace with Beijing and switched recognition from Taiwan to the People's Republic. China's Africa policy moderated beginning in the early 1970s, and blatant instances of political interference ended. Meanwhile, a pragmatic arms policy was adopted such that China sold arms to both sides during the 1998-2000 Eritrea-Ethiopia border war. But, as China's interests and physical presence have expanded in Africa during the twenty-first century, Beijing's interpretation of non-interference has also evolved.

The crisis in Darfur during the first decade of the twenty-first century opened the door for the first important shift away from China's traditional policy of non-intervention in Africa. China persuaded Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to accept a joint African Union-United Nations peacekeeping force, invited Sudan's rebel groups to visit Beijing, supported UN sanctions against Sudan, and coordinated with Western powers. The subsequent 2011 crisis in Libya produced a confusing Chinese interpretation of non-intervention. Beijing condemned Western efforts to remove Muammar Gaddafi from power, but also supported multilateral intervention and recognized the Libyan opposition even while Gaddafi was still the leader of Libya. Moreover, the evacuation of almost 36,000 Chinese from Libya underscored the need for China to design more robust policies to protect its nationals, even if it meant reevaluating the parameters of its long-held non-intervention principle. China's efforts to mediate the conflict in South Sudan and the dispatch of a combat battalion as part of the UN peacekeeping operation were also watershed moments in Beijing's evolving conception of non-interference in Africa. Like the Libya case, both decisions were largely motivated by threats to Chinese interests and personnel.

Zimbabwe offers a more complicated case, one not directly tied to the security of Chinese nationals in the African country. In early November 2017, Zimbabwe's former Vice President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, who was wanted in Harare on charges ranging from murder to money laundering, took refuge in China after his long-time ally (and China's old friend) President Robert Mugabe removed him from office. Zimbabwe's Defense Forces commander, Constantino Chiwenga, was visiting China simultaneously, and met with Defense Minister Chang Wanquan, who apparently assured him that China would not object if he took temporary control of Zimbabwe and removed Mugabe. In mid-November, Chiwenga and the army orchestrated the removal of Mugabe from office and arranged for the return from China of Mnangagwa, who was subsequently elected president. Whatever China's role in this affair, Beijing has since maintained excellent relations with the Mnangagwa government.

China's decision to open its first overseas military base in Djibouti, in August 2017, is another example of Beijing's increasingly elastic non-interference principle. China had long eschewed overseas bases as symbols of hegemonic ambition. The military base in Djibouti is located close to bases operated by the United States, France, and Japan and is equipped with maintenance facilities for ships and helicopters, weapons stores, and a contingent of military guards. According to China's 2019 defense white paper, "To address weakness in its ability to operate overseas and in its logistical support, the PLA [People's Liberation Army] is developing overseas logistical facilities and enhancing its capability to accomplish diversified tasks." Alessandro Arduino, co-director of the Security & Crisis Management International Centre at the Shanghai Academy of Social Science, argues that establishing a military base in Djibouti "represents a pivotal point in the Chinese attitude towards the four decades-old policy of non-intervention." In an interview after the inaugural China-Africa Defense and Security Forum in 2018, Gao Zhikai, Director of the China National Association of International Studies, suggested that China might establish a base on the west coast of Africa.

Despite these developments, Chinese officials publicly insist that there has been no change in China's interpretation of its non-interference principle. Still, even in official circles in China, there is a growing appreciation that it has now come to constrain Beijing's actions at a time when there is increasing public pressure to protect Chinese interests and nationals. He Wenping, at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, has acknowledged that Chinese thinking on the non-intervention principle has evolved over time. She believes there must be a balance between non-interference and the responsibility to protect Chinese nationals and interests. There is a lively discussion taking place in China regarding "constructive engagement" and "constructive interference," she said.

Beijing's growing self-confidence and presence in Africa has prompted Chinese policymakers and scholars to explore more innovative approaches that stretch the previous understanding of non-interference. Chen Zheng of Shanghai Jiao Tong University explains that because China has deepened its international engagement there is growing tension with its traditional interpretation of non-interference; however, Beijing is still unlikely to ever use the term "intervention" to describe its policies in Africa. Pang Zongying at Renmin University argues that China is combining non-interference with *conditional* intervention, and Beijing has sought to clarify terms, such as "creative involvement" and "constructive intervention." Xue Lei of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies believes that the non-interference principle is based on absolutist doctrine and has become outdated, and instead recommends the term "persuasive diplomacy." Chinese policymakers seem to have realized the limitations of the traditional non-interference principle, but rather than jettison the principle entirely, they have instead adopted a strategy of gradual pragmatic adaptation.

While the views of Westerners have little or no impact on China's policies towards Africa, Beijing does consider the views of African leaders, many of whom might welcome greater Chinese intervention if it is used to counter terrorist or dissident groups. African scholars, whose opinions Beijing also considers, have noticed changes in China's non-intervention policy. Ghanaian Sigli Mumuni writes, "China's move towards mediation and conflict resolution in both Sudan and South Sudan highlights a significant shift away from its non-intervention policy. China's role in the conflict is a point of reference for Chinese innovation in balancing its policy of non-intervention to changing situations." Zimbabwean Obert Hodzi, an International Relations scholar, has concluded that China's intervention in Libya, Mali, and South Sudan reflects a gradual revision of its non-intervention policy. He predicts that where and when its interests are materially affected, China will be increasingly proactive and assertive, but where its interests are not significantly affected, China will remain passive and reactionary.

Western authors also have taken note of China's evolving approach to non-intervention. Mathieu Duchâtel, Richard Gowan, and Manuel Lafont Rapnouil, researchers at the European Council on Foreign Relations, conclude that "Chinese security involvement in Africa is part of a shift towards a more flexible and pragmatic understanding of its traditional support for non-interference." Harry Verhoeven, at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, concurs that China is slowly giving up its policy of non-interference as a logical response to security crises in Africa and China's re-emergence as a global power.

Over time, China increasingly will feel the tension between long-standing precedent and the need to protect Chinese nationals and interests in Africa. China's naval buildup and increasing number of port calls around Africa will only add to the pressure to continue to reassess, and perhaps one day end, its long-standing adherence to non-interference. If so, that process would mirror the evolution of China's policy regarding overseas military bases.

Guiding Concepts: "The Chinese Dream" and "The Community of Shared Future"

Since the turn of the century, every Chinese leader has elucidated at least one foreign policy slogan to define China's interaction with the world, including with Africa. For reasons of habit or dogmatic consistency, successors continue to reference some of these older themes, while other terms tend to disappear or evolve. Jiang Zemin, President of the People's Republic (1993-2003), for instance, was fond of the phrase "all weather friend" (????), which is still used regularly. Hu Jintao, General Secretary of the People's Republic (2003-2013), adopted "harmonious world" (????) and "peaceful rise" (????), which evolved into the less threatening "peaceful development" (????), intended to hearken back to Deng Xiaoping's concept of "peace and development" (????). Although its origin is unclear, the term "win-win" (??) remains a favorite, and the one emblazoned on the walls of the entrance to the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Beijing.

Xi has adopted the concepts "Chinese Dream" (???) and "The Community of Shared Future" (???????), which also has been translated as "The Community of Common Destiny." The Chinese Dream was first articulated in November 2012, as a domestically focused rejuvenation campaign for the Chinese nation, complete with four parts—a strong China, a civilized China, a harmonious China, and a beautiful China. It is a strong nationalist vision focused on building a wealthy and powerful China and perpetuating the rule of the CCP. The concept soon became part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Xi's signature initiative, which now encompasses nearly all of Africa and is a constant reference point for most of China's interactions with the continent.

Initially, at least, there was considerable skepticism in Africa concerning the relevance of the Chinese Dream. That skepticism persists in many quarters; for example, a South African director of a Confucius Institute who travels frequently to China and throughout Africa commented that the Chinese Dream does not resonate in Africa. Others, however, take a more charitable view. South African China scholar Paul Tembe argues that the Chinese Dream has found fertile ground in Africa in the form of the (as-yet undefined) "African Dream." Tembe concedes, however, that when placed in context of the Chinese Dream the emergence of the term African Dream only further underscores the vast power asymmetries in the China-Africa power relations. For their part, Chinese interlocutors insist the Chinese Dream concept is relevant to Africans because it represents rapid development, and that is what Africans want to achieve. In this way, associating the Chinese Dream with the African Dream is yet another effort to take a concept created for a Chinese audience and twist it to fit African sensibilities.

The Chinese Dream includes a distinct military component as well. China's official military strategy calls on the country's armed forces to "take their dream of making the military strong as part of the Chinese Dream." To realize the Chinese Dream, China needs to secure imports of energy, food, minerals, and technology. This effort requires a strong navy and the ability to ensure access to certain sea lanes, including the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, Suez Canal, and Mediterranean Sea. This naval aspect constitutes the security component of the BRI, and links cooperation with African militaries directly to the Chinese Dream. In 2019, the PLA launched a photographic exhibit titled the "PLA: A Force for World Peace" at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa. Colonel Pan Qinghua, a PLA delegation member, described the event as "the Chinese Dream connecting the African Dream."

During a 2013 visit to Tanzania, Xi defined China-Africa relations as "a community with a shared future," featuring "common historical experience, common development objectives and common strategic interests." Subsequent visits to Africa by senior Chinese officials, and trips to China by senior African officials, have usually included a reference to the concept. The theme was expanded to include all developing nations and ultimately the rest of the world when Xi reiterated it at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2017. It has since become a three-tiered framework for reforming the existing international order: cooperative security, common development, and political inclusiveness. Later in 2017, during the 19th National Congress of the CCP, Xi elevated the concept to the "strategic" level, and Foreign Minister Wang Li explained: "The building of a community with a shared future for mankind make[s] it necessary for China to make practical efforts and set an example, as well as unswervingly pursue a road to a great nation which is different from that of traditional powers."

Like the Chinese Dream, the community of shared future has been closely tied to the BRI and operates on the supposition that China is the leader of the developing world. In 2017, at a meeting of the CCP and leaders of political parties from around the world, Xi explained that the community of shared future is being transformed into action by linking it to the BRI, with the goal of turning the planet into a "harmonious family." The community of shared future has since become an integral part of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. It has had more resonance in Africa than the more exclusive Chinese Dream concept.

There is also a security dimension to the community of shared future. China's 2019 defense white paper emphasizes that its strong military is a force for world peace, stability, and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind and concludes that armed forces make a positive contribution to building this community. Lei Yu at Liaocheng University argues that Africa's strategic significance has risen dramatically, and China views the relationship as "invaluable" at the global level. China's expanding security involvement in Africa, therefore, is the consequence of creating a Sino-African community of shared future, and of Beijing's growing influence in the region as it rises to the position of a global power.

Core Interests: Taiwan, Tibet, Human Rights, Mistreatment of Muslim Minorities, South China Sea, and Hong Kong

China's relations in Africa should be understood in the context of its stated "core national interests." While there are various formulations of this concept, all assume three basic overlapping objectives: to ensure the CPC will continue to rule China, to maintain and defend China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to promote a stable international environment that is conducive to China's continued economic growth. The second category includes several controversial issues (i.e., Taiwan, Tibet, human rights, mistreatment of Muslim minorities, South China Sea, and Hong Kong) that have not been criticized publicly and probably are rarely, if ever, addressed privately by African government officials. While these issues are not particularly salient in Africa, it is, nevertheless, noteworthy that not a single African government that recognizes Beijing has publicly commented negatively on any of them in more than a decade. In fact, some governments have supported publicly China's position on one or more of them. But while China wields considerable power over what Africa's governments say on these topics, African civil society organizations, opposition political parties, and former government officials have occasionally criticized China on these issues.

If an African government crosses China on one or more of these sensitive domestic matters, Beijing's response can vary widely. For any country, large or small, recognizing Taipei means an end to official engagement with Beijing, as well as all aid or support. Beijing's responses to African transgressions on the other issues are less clear and depend on the severity of the "offense" and the country's relationship with China. This ambiguity of response serves as a deterrent in and of itself. An important country, say South Africa or Egypt, has more leeway than a small one like Togo. Consequently, even the visit to South Africa by exiled Tibetan president Lobsang Sangay, detailed below, did not significantly disrupt bilateral relations. Had this happened in Togo, however, Beijing's response may well have been different. The most important conclusion from this analysis, however, is that African governments take extraordinary steps to avoid offending China and, in fact, go out of their way to ingratiate themselves with Beijing on these issues.

Taiwan. The "One China Principle," which is Beijing's policy that there is only one China, and Taiwan is a part of China, was hugely important in the development of the China-Africa relationship, and is a prime example of China's ability to exert influence. In 1971, Beijing received the support of 26 African states (34 percent of the total vote) in the United Nations General Assembly to serve as the sole legitimate representative of China, ousting Taipei from the seat. Ten of the 15 countries that had supported Taipei subsequently recognized Beijing over the next few years. Since Xi came to power in 2012, Gambia, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Burkina Faso have switched their recognition from Taipei to Beijing. Today, only Eswatini in southern Africa still recognizes the Republic of China (Taiwan), and there is no indication that any African country that has diplomatic relations with Beijing intends to switch its recognition to Taipei. In response, Chinese officials routinely express appreciation to African governments for their near universal support for the One China Principle.

Beijing insists that Taipei's engagement in Africa be confined to commercial activities. As is the case in other parts of the world, the Taiwan government has semi-official, government-sponsored Taiwan Trade Centers in Africa. There are currently five, located in Johannesburg, Algiers, Cairo, Nairobi, and Lagos. China itself has significant commercial engagement with Taiwan, and does not object to these trade offices so long as they do not engage formally in diplomatic activity. The Taiwan trade office in Nigeria has experienced considerable controversy in this regard. It was located in Lagos from 1991 to 2001, and then moved to the new political capital in Abuja, where it came under pressure from Beijing to be returned to the commercial capital of Lagos. In 2017, Beijing succeeded in convincing the government of Nigeria to force Taipei to relocate the office back to Lagos, which it did at the beginning of 2018.

Taiwan's relationship with South Africa, which follows the One China Principle, is more developed than with any other country in Africa, except Eswatini. In addition to the trade office in Johannesburg, there are Taipei Liaison Offices in Cape Town and Pretoria – which maintains a sister city relationship with Taipei. An estimated 7,000 to 8,000 Taiwanese reside in South Africa, and there are about 800 Taiwan businesses there. Due to South Africa's importance and the unique history of the Taiwanese community, China seems to accept more flexibility in its application of the One China Principle than it might tolerate from other African countries.

Tibet. Tibet is far from Africa, and generally attracts little interest. It is an easy topic for African governments to ignore, save for occasional invitations by civil society groups and political parties to the Dalai Lama and the exiled president of the Tibetan government. The issue has arisen on several occasions in South Africa. In 2009, South African opposition parties invited the Dalai Lama for a visit. But, under pressure from China, the South African government denied his visa. In 2011, the Dalai Lama was invited to attend the 80th birthday of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and to give several public lectures. The South African government again denied the visa. In 2014, the Dalai Lama hoped to attend the 14th world summit of Nobel Peace laureates in Cape Town, South Africa, but the government denied his visa a third time, for which China's authorities expressed appreciation.

In 2018, South Africa permitted the visit by the exiled president of the Tibetan government, Lobsang Sangay, who travels on a United States passport. After his arrival, however, all public events were canceled as a result of protests by South Africans and members of the local Chinese community. The Chinese embassy issued a strongly worded statement that Sangay's visit "undermined the political trust between China and South Africa" and would discourage Chinese investment, angering the South African government in the process. Sangay returned to South Africa in 2019 and met with former president of South Africa, F.W. de Klerk.

In 2017, Botswana had its own controversial interaction with China when the Dalai Lama was invited by the U.S.-based Mind and Life Institute to address a human rights conference and was scheduled to meet President Ian Khama. China pressured Botswana to cancel the visit; the Dalai Lama bowed out, citing fatigue, and an angry President Khama, whose cabinet was divided on the issue, invited the Dalai Lama to visit Botswana in the future. Khama completed his ten-year term early in 2018, and there is no indication that his successor has issued an invitation.

Human Rights. China's approach to human rights differs in important ways from the Western interpretation of the concept, which is based on the principles of the universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of all human rights. China, by contrast, has what it terms "human rights with Chinese characteristics," which prioritizes economic development over individual civil and political rights. Rather than universal human rights, Beijing insists on a relativistic approach based on each country's unique history, culture, values, and political system. Although African elites were exposed to Western conceptions of human rights during and after the colonial period and many continue to accept these values, the less judgmental Chinese definition does appeal to many Africans.

The reasons are understandable. From a Western perspective, both China and many African countries have poor human rights records. African countries facing Western criticism and even sanctions for human rights abuses routinely look to China for support both in the UN Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council. China, for its part, enlists the support (or at least silence) of African members of the UN Human Rights Council and of the three rotating African members on the UN Security Council, on issues such as its suppression of the media, the detainment of human rights activists, mistreatment of Christians, and mass surveillance. While the issues of Tibet, mistreatment of Muslim minorities, and Hong Kong have significant human rights implications, we address them separately because of the high importance Beijing attaches to them.

Mistreatment of Muslim Minorities. China has worked hard over the years to establish good relations with Muslim countries and has largely succeeded. More than half of Africa's 54 countries are predominantly Muslim or have large Muslim minorities. Beijing has made clear that it does not want any country to interfere with its policies toward Muslim minorities in China, including the establishment of "re-education centers" for the Uighur population in the Xinjiang region. That message has been received; no African country has joined Western nations and a few others (Turkey and Japan) in criticizing China's treatment of its Muslim minorities. Nor has the issue resonated with African publics and African governments; even leaders in overwhelmingly Muslim countries, like Egypt and Djibouti, have made no public criticism. One Moroccan analyst explained: "What is the incentive to criticize China's policy towards the Uighurs? There is none."

The only official reaction from African countries has been a *defense* of China's policy toward its Muslim minorities. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) adopted a resolution in March 2019 that commended China for "providing care to its Muslim citizens" and looked forward to more cooperation between the OIC and China. Half of all African countries are members of the OIC. The Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of the OIC, which met in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in April 2019, issued a press release that encouraged Uighurs and the government of China "to continue to engage positively" on all issues of mutual interest, including protection of the rights of Uighur Muslims. Yet, the same report also called for sustained international pressure on the government of Myanmar to ensure that it fulfills its obligations under international law to respect the rights of the Rohingya Muslim minority. A Djiboutian foreign ministry official confirmed that his country supported the condemnation of Myanmar for its treatment of the Rohingya because, among other things, Myanmar, unlike China, has little influence in Africa.

In July 2019, the ambassadors of 22 mostly Western countries sent a letter to the president of the United Nations Human Rights Council urging China to stop its arbitrary incarceration of Uighurs and members of the country's other Muslim minority communities. China quickly organized a response; the ambassadors of 37 countries—17 of them African—sent a letter to the Council stating that security had returned to Xinjiang and the fundamental human rights of people of all ethnic groups there had been safeguarded. More countries subsequently signed the letter. Many countries, including predominantly Muslim ones, likely signed on in order to demonstrate solidarity with the non-interference principle and not to jeopardize access to China's aid and financing.

In October 2019, China's foreign ministry circulated documents on the issue to African media houses, including a white paper titled, "The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang." The following month, 23 predominantly Western countries submitted a joint statement at the United Nations that was highly critical of China's persecution of the Uighurs. China orchestrated another response, this one signed by 54 countries, including 28 from Africa, that praised "China's remarkable achievements in the field of human rights by adhering to the people-centered development philosophy and protecting and promoting human rights through development," while also citing the "challenge of terrorism and extremism" in Xinjiang.

South China Sea. China's construction of contested islands in the South China Sea has led to tensions with the United States, and with those Asian nations that claim the same territory and waters. The controversy, however, has no resonance in Africa. While it is unsurprising that Africans would ignore the issue, that has not stopped China from soliciting and obtaining African support for its position. In May 2016, 10 African countries signed the "Doha Declaration" of the 7th ministerial meeting of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, which expressed appreciation for China's efforts to resolve territorial and maritime disputes with neighboring countries through dialogue and negotiation. The declaration added that signatories of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea should have the right to choose their own approach to resolving the issue, a stance that ran counter to efforts by the Philippines to turn the matter over to a UN arbitration panel.

Countries that did not sign the "Doha Declaration" made separate statements, and several countries did both. Some statements, such as those made by Kenya and Gambia, explicitly supported China's position. Most African countries, including South Africa, Lesotho, and Ethiopia, supported half measures that called for resolving the disputes through consultations and negotiations, while also following the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. By mid-2016, 39 African countries had made at least one public statement supporting China's position on the South China Sea, according to a survey done by Renmin University of China.

Hong Kong. Recent protests in Hong Kong over the possibility of diminished local rights and freedoms have posed a challenge for Beijing. To press its case, China went on a global media blitz that stressed its absolute sovereignty over Hong Kong via the "one country, two systems" principle and called out any country that supported the protesters. Yang Jiechi, Xi's special representative and Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Office, visited Kenya, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone to discuss trade issues and presumably the situation in Hong Kong as well. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi subsequently visited South Africa, where this issue came up.

Most African countries have not publicly supported China's position on Hong Kong, but neither have any been openly critical. In October 2019, Uganda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement saying it "firmly supports the one country, two systems policy of the People's Republic of China on the matter of Hong Kong and other areas." The statement added that "Hong Kong is part of China. Hong Kong's affairs are China's domestic affairs." The following day, Tanzania's chief government spokesperson, in an interview with *Xinhua News*, stated that Hong Kong is an internal matter within China and that Tanzania supports the one country, two systems approach. He added that the steps taken by the Hong Kong government are the best approach, and other countries should support China. In January 2020, Namibia's minister of land reform commented, at the Chinese Spring Festival dinner in Windhoek, that his country is closely following developments in Hong Kong and fully supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China, which includes Hong Kong.

During a visit to Lusaka in 2019 by a Chinese assistant foreign minister, Zambia's foreign minister reportedly backed China's position on Hong Kong. China's ambassador in Lusaka thanked Zambia for its support on Hong Kong, which demonstrated the "high level of bilateral friendly cooperative relations." A member of China's National People's Congress Standing Committee on a visit to Liberia stated that senior Liberian officials supported China's position on Hong Kong. In a meeting with Ghana's minister of foreign and regional integration, China's ambassador to Ghana expressed appreciation for the minister's support of China's one country, two systems policy on Hong Kong. When the coverage on these meetings comes only from China's official media, it raises questions whether liberty has been taken when reporting the African interlocutors comments.

The reasons for African support, however, are apparent. For Uganda and most African governments that champion Beijing's core interests, doing so represents an easy way to strengthen ties with China without compromising their own priorities and interests. Opposing China's positions on these issues would jeopardize billions of dollars in Chinese financing, aid, and investment, for no gain. As one prominent member of Uganda's parliament explained, President Yoweri Museveni "has mortgaged Uganda to China."

Will Africa Continue to Toe the Line?

China has been successful in securing African support, or at least silence, on topics it considers its core interests. Today, only one African country recognizes the Republic of China (Taiwan); none is willing to host the Dalai Lama; and dozens have publicly supported China's positions on human rights issues, mistreatment of Muslim minorities in China, the South China Sea, and Hong Kong. For China, these are "core interests," while they have little salience for Africans. This asymmetry of concern, which is compounded by a vast asymmetry of power, means that China's ability to secure African governments' support, or at least silence, should come as no surprise.

Through its extensive economic investments and political engagement, China has successfully neutralized African governments' willingness to publicly criticize issues that Beijing views as vital to its sovereignty, global status, and territorial integrity. China's appeals to state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs are well received by African governments. Yet, it remains to be seen whether the ongoing evolution in Chinese views on these "principles" will diminish their appeal to Africans. If China becomes more interventionist, then its calls for reciprocity on these principles, which have long bolstered its support on issues of core concern, may well begin to erode.

Many of the African governments that support China's position on these core issues have serious human rights problems of their own, and some have autocratic governments. Most of them rely heavily on China for financing, aid, investment, and political backing. Their support or inaction is thus a consequence of their own vulnerability to criticism, lack of concern about far-flung issues that China has chosen to emphasize its dominion over, and relative weakness in the face of overwhelming Chinese economic strength.

China's conceptions of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference will continue to evolve apace with its expanding interests on the African continent. Looking forward, it will be important to watch how they are adapted to accommodate China's expanding international interests and the presence of significant numbers of Chinese nationals in Africa. Similarly, the evolution of the Chinese Dream and the Community of Shared Future concepts, which have received a range of responses from Africans who sometimes struggle with their relevance, will serve as another indicator of China's ability to adjust its strategy in the face of a less enthusiastic African response.

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