

CHINA'S TIES WITH AFRICAN POLITICAL PARTIES

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Abstract. *This article is devoted to an important aspect of Chinese “soft power” policy in Africa. The research shows that Beijing actively uses its “soft power” tools to convince African countries to support Chinese policy. In the framework of this policy, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is developing and strengthening contacts with political parties of different countries. Now the CCP has established relations with more than 600 political parties and organisations around the world in over 160 countries and territories. These relations are most active in Asia and Africa. The Communist Party of China has set up ties with 170 political parties in 51 African countries out of 54. Although CCP strives to establish ties with political parties in all countries despite their forms of government – authoritarian or democratic. Although the CCP cooperates with not only ruling but also opposition parties, the studies show that it prioritises relations with ruling parties. The frequency of Chinese visits to Africa affirms it. African political parties are not going to import China’s model. However, their officials are often ready to borrow the Chinese governance formula and refrain from criticism of some aspects of Chinese policy in Africa. African groups have begun to establish Party-to-party relations with the CCP in the 50s. These relations are successfully developing now and allow Beijing to enhance its political influence in Africa. But the obstacle to such ties development is the Western countries’ ideological activity directed at hindering China-Africa party-to-party cooperation.*

Keywords: *China, Africa, Chinese Communist Party (CCP), party-to-party relations, visits, seminars*

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After the creation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began to seek international recognition for the ruling regime. The CCP promoted anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism as common conceptions of Afro-Asian solidarity and developed ties with political parties in different countries, including African political parties. Between 1949 and the First Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955, the CCP worked to win diplomatic partners. In the early 1950s, the small number of independent African countries, coupled with the emergence of anti-colonial political groups, led the CCP to create a variety of political outreach organisations to engage them. Long distances, few worthy vessels or aircraft, limited telephone lines, and weak knowledge about the continent limited Sino-African interactions. Nevertheless, in the 1950s, the CCP was actively building the institutional infrastructure to facilitate political interaction with African organisations. Chinese and African delegates attended international meetings, and the CCP hosted African leaders in China. For example, in 1953, Walter Sisulu, Secretary General of South Africa’s African National Congress (ANC), and Félix-Roland Moumié of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) visited China. These early contacts with an opponent of the white-ruled government in South Africa and a Cameroonian leader opposing the French colonialists were harbingers of future CCP support for African fighters against colonialism and racial discrimination. In the 1950s, the CCP created numerous front groups to expand its relations

with African political organisations. Party-led groups known as ‘mass organisations’, ‘united front groups’ and ‘people’s organisations’ worked to expand and enhance CCP relations with African political organisations and liberation movements. After Cameroon got independence in 1960 under the Cameroon National Union Party, the CCP continued to support the UPC as an opposition party (Eisenman 2018). In 1951, Mohammed Makin, a graduate of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, teaching Arabic in Beijing, addressed the Chinese People’s Institute for Foreign Affairs on how to enhance political relations with Muslims. In 1953, Makin helped establish the China Islamic Association, headed by a Chinese Uighur and CCP loyalist Burhan Shahidi. In accordance with its mandate to ‘support the CCP leadership,’ the Association used Islam as an entrée to enhance collaboration with Muslim groups both inside China and internationally. After contacts with Egypt began in 1955, it became an important conduit for political outreach in North Africa, which by 1956 had an independent bloc of Muslim countries. During the 1950s and 1960s, Shahidi and other leaders led delegations to Africa and hosted visitors from Muslim countries.

The 1955 Bandung Conference played an important role in CCP political relations with African political parties. Premier Zhou Enlai, who led the Chinese delegation, interacted with delegations from Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, and soon-to-be-independent Sudan and Ghana. At Bandung, the CCP supported African independence movements’ fight against colonialism and imperialism. Beijing began providing financial support and arms to independent states, including Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, and Ghana, as well as to African independence movements. In Algeria, for instance, the CCP provided arms to the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), which trained its fighters in China. China’s embassy in Cairo became a forward base for the CCP to spread its influence and assistance. Cairo was home to the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) and several African liberation groups. A CCP delegation attended the first AAPSO Conference in Cairo in 1957. Before the Conference, a rally was held in Beijing to support African national liberation movements. The Chinese Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity was established to administer relations with African political organisations via the AAPSO. The CCP had contacts with African political organisations and gave financial support to them. In December 1958, the CCP delegation met with African leaders in Accra, including Patrice Lumumba of the Mouvement National Congolais, Félix-Roland Moumié of the UPC, and Holden Roberto, then of the Angolan People’s Union.

Throughout the early 1960s, the CCP used the AAPSO as a venue to expand contacts with African political organisations. At the second AAPSO conference in Conakry, Guinea, in 1960, the Chinese delegation enhanced its relations with the growing number of independent African countries and called for an international united front against imperialism. In the early 1960s, as the CCP’s network of African comrades grew, it expanded existing front groups and people’s organisations and created new ones to transmit its support to them. For instance, the aforementioned China Islamic Association, together with the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and the Asian Solidarity Committee of China, provided funds to the FLN via the AAPSO Secretariat in Cairo. CCP-led organisations also hosted the members of African political parties in China. The MPLA (Angola) participants visited Beijing upon the invitation of the Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs. CCP continued to use Islam as a means to develop relations with political organisations in the Muslim world. African Muslims were invited to China for Islamic festivals and to worship in Chinese mosques. The China Islamic Association paid particular attention to the hajj, the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca. From 1955 until 1964, CCP sent at least one delegation each year. Pilgrimage trips regularly travelled to Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and/or Sudan but could range as far as Guinea, Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Nigeria. The China Islamic Association worked with party-controlled

publishing houses to prepare propaganda for distribution to African Muslims. Books were published in Arabic, English, and French. In August 1960, China hosted representatives from African political parties of some countries. For example, the Moroccan guests in Beijing included Ahmed Balafrej, former Prime Minister of Morocco and the founder of the Istiqlal Party, which split into the National Union of Popular Forces (Premier Zhou... 1959). Two Angolan and Guinean delegations also arrived in Beijing. In the early 1960s, the CCP increased support for revolutionary groups in countries under Portuguese control (i.e., Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé) and those under oppressive white minority governments (i.e., Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa). Between 1958 and 1964, Beijing sent 144 missions to African countries and received 405 African delegations (Eisenman 2018). These contacts gradually expanded, culminating in 1963, when 55 CCP missions touched down in Africa, and 131 African delegations visited Beijing (Eisenman 2018). By 1964, political outreach and host diplomacy had paid dividends, with 15 of 35 independent African countries choosing to recognise Beijing rather than Taipei – up from only seven in 1960.

Chinese experts in guerrilla warfare trained fighters from Guinea-Bissau. Trainers arrived in Ghana in 1964 and remained until a coup in early 1966 ended the program. In Tanzania, the CCP supplied arms and trained Eduardo Mondlane's Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) and later hosted FRELIMO fighters in China. CPC also trained Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) forces in Tanzania and assisted the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO) in Zambia. The CCP also provided military training for African revolutionaries via the Organization of African Unity.

CCP's deteriorating relationship with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) influenced China's relations with African national-liberating organisations. In Angola, the CCP provided arms and training to the MPLA in the early 1960s, but as the MPLA grew closer to Moscow, Beijing expanded support to its rivals – the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). In 1964 UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi met Mao and Zhou and received military training in China.

During the Cultural Revolution, China almost severed relations with many countries, and activities in many areas were suspended. Zhou's speech paved the way for the CCP to build ties with several conservative African governments. For instance, in October 1971 and January 1973, Mao hosted Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie and Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, respectively. CCP stopped supporting parties seeking to overthrow independent African governments but continued to assist liberation movements fighting colonial and white-ruled governments. From 1970 to 1976, more than 20 African countries established diplomatic ties with the PRC. Since 1979, China no longer used ideology (communist, socialist, capitalist) to determine its relationship with political parties in Africa. Instead, it has developed broad relations with all countries with all African countries that embrace the One China policy and with the political parties of these countries (Yun Sun 2014).

In the 2000s, China intensified its relations with Sub-Saharan African political parties. Local parties officials were invited to make "study tours", attend seminars or follow training sessions in China more often. These tasks are decided by CCP International Liaison Department (ILD). The ILD major mission is to cultivate relations with communist and non-communist parties worldwide. Officially, the CCP-ILD is not going to export the "Chinese model" but rather promote the Chinese "form" of governance and economic organisation. Beijing uses this instrument of "soft power" to convince more African countries to support Chinese international policy in general, and in Africa in particular. Later the CCP adopted a catch-all strategy aimed at reaching out to every meaningful political force.

The number of African political parties with which the CCP has set up relations increased rapidly. In 2018 (as in 2012), their number was 81, compared to 40 in 1988 (Nadegu 2022).

The Deputy Director General of the African Affairs Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Ms Gao Xiangyang, has indicated that the CPC appreciates its fruitful relations with Ghana's two major political parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). According to Ms Gao, the CPC's relations with political parties in Africa premise on equality, mutual respect of opinions and non-interference in country or party affairs or imposition of ideologies. She listed some of the advantages of the relations that had metamorphosed from a strategic partnership to a strategic economic partnership as the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the many exchanges between the two sides. Ms Gao grouped the exchanges into high-level exchanges involving two-way visits by high-powered delegations (Scott 2021). There are also multilateral exchanges involving conferences and visits which have resulted in significant meetings such as the China Africa Young Party Political Forum, a joint initiative of the CPC and the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), and the China Africa Political Parties Theoretical Seminar; a collaboration with the Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

Ms Gao, who spoke to the journalists on the successful and effective party-to-party relations between the CPC and about 60 political parties in 40 African countries South of the Sahara, said: "Spurring development is the key issue now in Africa". She, however, stated that the relations with African political parties suffered a jolt at the beginning of the 1990s with the advent of multiparty democracy spurred on by the fall of the Soviet Union, which "brought mixed reactions in China". Ms Gao explained that the misgivings were because when parties with which the CPC had relations failed in elections, there were interruptions as the new parties did not have an understanding of the socialist ideals. "So multiparty democracy brought a negative impact on CPC – party relations," she said but added that the situation did not last long as many of the political parties with which the CPC had relations stabilised themselves in the mid-1990s. While stating that the objective of the CPC's relations with African political parties was to support party building and exchange governance experience, Ms. Gao urged African countries to explore their own path of development, depending on their peculiar situation (Smith-Asante 2017).

On 17-18 July 2018, the Communist Party of China (CPC) held a High-level Meeting in the framework of the Dialogue with World Political Parties. This conference followed the CPC Dialogue with World Political Parties High-level meeting in Beijing in December 2017. More than 600 leaders from 300 political parties from 120 countries attended the High-level Meeting in Beijing. As Xinhua News Agency reported, about 40 leaders of African political parties and organisations participated in the peace and development problems discussion in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania. Sun Tao, Head of the International relations Department of the CPC Central Committee, attended the opening ceremony, as well as John Magufuli, Chairman of the Revolutionary party of Tanzania and that state President. Sun Tao noted that the political parties of China and Africa should become supporters and performers of the Sino-African cooperation in the new era, promote the construction of a community of common destiny of China and Africa, and make a contribution to it. John Magufuli stressed that the meeting of the parties of Africa and China is devoted to Africa's special session of the CPC. Dialogue with the political parties of the world at a high level on the eve of the opening of the Summit of the Forum on Chinese-African cooperation in Beijing will certainly give powerful driving forces to the exchange and cooperation of Africa with China at an even higher level.

The conference explored the theory and practice of the road to the development of African countries that conforms to national conditions. "The CPC and African political parties will learn from each other in terms of peace and development," Su Wei, a professor at the

CPC Chongqing Committee's Party School, told the Global Times. – "China is a step ahead when it comes to reform and development so that Africa can learn a lot from China," Su said, adding that China is not exporting the Chinese model. African political parties are willing to have a conversation with China because China treats every country and political party equally. He added that China and African countries have a history of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, so China's road to development is attractive to Africa. As Chinese experts said, African countries without diplomatic relations with China may also attend such events (Frey 2018).

China's determination to pursue its opening-up policy, together with its "political firmness" on socialism highlighted at a special session of the CPC's high-level dialogues with world political parties. The session, held from May 26 to 28, 2018, in Shenzhen, South China's Guangdong Province, was hosted by the CPC's International Department of the Central Committee. "The CPC exchanges with political parties from other countries, including African political parties increased significantly since the 19th CPC National Congress," Professor Su said. "The choice of Shenzhen, known as the frontier of China's opening up efforts, as the host city shows that China will firmly pursue the policy and contribute more to global prosperity," Su noted (CPC 2018). The event included a conference discussing Guangdong's practice of Xi Jinping Thoughts on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and a seminar to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx. "The agenda shows that China's ideology and governing philosophy will not be weakened with the opening-up policy," Song Luzheng, a France-based scholar and research fellow at Fudan University China Institute, said (CPC 2018).

China-CELAC Political Parties Forum, the fourth Africa-China Young Leaders Forum and the first political parties forum of countries from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are also held. "The forums show that China is expanding its cooperation and that the country is attaching great importance to non-Western countries, whose voices are often ignored," Song said. "Inter-party exchanges have become a unique diplomatic practice in China as Western countries continue to adopt the inter-government or people-to-people paradigm for diplomatic exchanges," Song added. "Compared to inter-government exchanges, inter-party exchanges focus more on values and governing philosophies, which are crucial to prevent misunderstandings," Su added. He stressed that such exchanges are not limited to ruling parties but also involve opposition parties to allow more diverse voices to be heard.

When delegates gathered in the Chinese capital, Beijing, for the 19th CPC National Congress, leaders from across the continent expressed optimism that the forum would benefit their nations. South Sudanese presidential advisor for economic affairs Aggrey Sabuni has hailed the Communist Party of China, saying it had achieved a lot for the people of China and the world at large. "This is a party that has achieved a lot for the people of China and for the rest of the world, a party that has a clear Vision as to where to take the Chinese people, China and the rest of the world," Sabuni said. Sabuni also praised President Xi Jinping's administration. "I have great confidence in the leadership of the party led by president Xi, I wish him well, I wish the leadership of the communist party well, I wish the Chinese people well as they move forward in serving the welfare problems of Chinese people and that of the rest of the world," he said. South Sudan benefits from China's contribution to peacekeeping efforts worldwide, with hundreds of troops.

On November 24 2017, the International Liaison Department of the CCP held a press briefing on the upcoming meeting. This meeting has allowed the Department to take centre stage. Guo Yezhou, Vice-Minister of the Department, said that the theme of the meeting was "working together towards a community with a shared future for humanity and a better world: responsibilities of political parties." As "The Diplomat" reported, "to build a community of

shared future for mankind” is Chinese President Xi Jinping’s signature concept for China’s foreign policy. That specific slogan has been repeatedly employed by Chinese authorities at various international events (Gao 2017). Xi Jinping delivered a keynote speech at the meeting opening ceremony. Guo explained the reasons for the CCP to hold such a meeting: to “comprehensively introduce the spirit of the 19th Party Congress, deeply expound on Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and systematically introduce the CCP’s proposition on building a community with a shared future for mankind.” “The CCP is open and inclusive,” Guo added. “The CCP not only introduces its experience and methods to the world but learns from the world.” Guo emphasised that the meeting had “meaning in the CCP’s history” as well as “ground-breaking significance in the history of world political parties.” Guo revealed that more than 200 political parties and leaders of political organisations from over 120 countries worldwide have signed up for the meeting so far. In October, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said: “To make new and greater contributions for mankind is our Party’s abiding mission, which highlights Chinese Communists’ historical consciousness, international vision, and care for the world. This is an important distinction between the CPC and political parties of other countries, as well as an international image the CPC has fostered. The construction of a new type of international relations... is not only the historical duty that China, as a big socialist country, should undertake for the development of human society, but also the historical mission that the Chinese Communists should advance for the progress of human political civilization.” Wang clarified that the CCP aims to set an example to the world, proving that its unique model, different from those of traditional Western powers, can lead humankind, too, while the other hidden agenda for the CCP is to demonstrate its success through this meeting to its domestic audience (Gao 2017).

On 29 November 2017, the Communist Party of China (CPC) held a seminar with African political parties to explore the mission and role of parties in building a China-Africa community with a shared future. Over 60 representatives of political parties from some 20 African countries attended this seminar. Song Tao, Director of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, addressed the opening ceremony. He briefed the attendees on the new thoughts and development strategies that were decided at the 19th CPC National Congress on the concept of building a community with a shared future of mankind. In the process of exploring paths towards modernisation, China and Africa shall deepen communication of ideas and promote the development of their respective undertakings, Song said. Acknowledging that political parties exert great influence in the development of countries and their engagement with other countries, Song said that the CPC is willing to maintain close relations with African political parties and join efforts to build a China-Africa community with a shared future (Sumaira 2017). It is the first time for the CCP to hold such a high-level meeting with various parties worldwide, signalling the CCP’s ambition to have a louder voice in the international sphere.

In July 2018, Tanzanian President John Magufuli laid a foundation stone for the Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy, named after the nation’s founding president. The \$45-million worth project, funded and built by the Chinese government, will provide leadership training to emerging leaders from countries governed by the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa (FLMSA). The decision to build this school was made at the biennial FLMSA summit in May 2017, which brought together the African National Congress of South Africa, Chama Cha Mapinduzi of Tanzania, Popular Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, Movement for the Liberation of Angola, Southwest African Peoples Organization of Namibia, and Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front. All had received Chinese backing during their fight against apartheid and colonialism (Nantulya 2018).

In 2016, China increased the number of annual scholarships granted to African government leaders from 200 to 1.000. Its leadership training now includes parliaments, local governments, politically neutral groups and even opposition parties. The training covers the theory and practice of party building, cadre training, and the management of interactions between the party, government, and military (Nantulya 2018). While stating that the objective of the CPC's relation with African political parties is to support party building and exchange governance experience, China urged African countries to explore their path of development, depending on their peculiar situations.

In 2022 the CCP-ILD established relations with more than 600 political parties and organisations around the world in over 160 countries and territories. In Africa, it has set up relations with 170 political parties in 51 of 54 African countries, according to the White Paper issued by the Chinese government at the end of the 8th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Dakar in November 2021. Only three African political parties remained out of the reach of the CCP. As White's book shows, Africa is in priority of this aspect of Chinese "soft power": 18% of political parties and 32% of territories with which CCP has established ties are African. The important features of today's Chinese strategy: it has relations with political parties in all countries: both with authoritarian and democratic forms of government and cooperates with ruling opposition parties (Nadegu 2022). Nevertheless, CCP prioritises relations with ruling parties. The frequency of Chinese visits to Africa affirms it. In 2021 alone, the CCP-ILD held online seminars or video talks with the ruling party leaders of Mauritania, Burkina-Faso, Angola, South Sudan, Madagascar, Benin and Gabon.

China also focuses on party-to-party relations with the countries that play a more active role in China-Africa economic ties. Among them are such countries rich in mineral resources, as South Africa (ores, iron, copper, diamonds, nickel), Angola (oil), Congo (oil), Mozambique (timber), Sudan (oil) and from 2011 – South Sudan (oil), Zambia (copper). While economic partnership remains the foundation of – and entry point for – China's relations with African countries, Beijing is increasingly involved in political and electoral processes in African democracies, intentionally or coincidentally. In Africa, as elsewhere, China deploys modes of influence that can have a compounding impact on democracy in targeted countries (Scott 2021).

China is developing very active party-to-party ties with African communist parties, whatever their size and relations with the government. It also cooperates from the colonial times with the parties that headed the struggle against colonialism and apartheid for national independence: African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, SWAPO in Namibia, FRELIMO in Mozambique, ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe, MPLA in Angola. CCP also has contacts with religious, Islamist, parties. For example, it cooperates with Omar al-Bashir's National Congress Party (Badmus 2017).

China's "soft power" and CCP relations with African political parties and groups have become a very important tool of Chinese policy in Africa, which allowed Beijing to enhance its political influence on the continent. Yet, although China is successfully developing party-to-party relations in Africa, some factors limit its opportunities. African political parties are open to propaganda and ideology of such states as the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, and other countries of the Western Block, which are not interested in developing China-Africa party-to-party relations and try to hinder them.

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СВЯЗИ КИТАЯ С АФРИКАНСКИМИ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИМИ ПАРТИЯМИ

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***Аннотация.** Статья посвящена такому важному инструменту китайской политики в Африке, как «мягкая сила». Исследование проблемы показывает, что Пекин активно использует данный инструмент в интересах укрепления своего влияния в странах континента. Одной из его составляющих является развитие связей между Коммунистической партией Китая (КПК) и политическими партиями стран Африки. На 2022 г. КПК установила отношения с более, чем 600 политическими партиями и организациями в свыше, чем 160 странах и территориях мира. Китай особенно активен в Азии и Африке. Так, в Африке, по данным Белой книги, изданной китайским правительством к 8-му Форуму китайско-африканского сотрудничества в Дакаре в ноябре 2021 г., он установил связи с 110 политическими партиями и организациями 51 страны.*

***Ключевые слова:** Китай, Африка, Китайская коммунистическая партия (КПК – ССР), межпартийные связи, визиты, семинары.*

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