CHINA, EU AND AFRICA: A TRILATERAL PARTNERSHIP IN THE MAKING?¹

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RESUMO

Constitui objectivo deste artigo considerar a hipótese de relações triangulares da China e da Europa com a África, sem pressupor, nem inevitabilidade desta situação nem a sua total impossibilidade. Considerando os diferentes pontos de vista na União Europeia sobre o que a China está a fazer em África, e os inerentes défices na compreensão mútua e no conhecimento mútuo das relações UE-China, será difícil que se verifique qualquer esforço cooperativo entre os três lados, a menos que seja desencadeado por iniciativa africana.

PALAVRA-CHAVE
China, UE, África, relações, Forum Macau

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to address hypothetical China and European triangular relations with Africa without assuming, neither the inevitability of such outcome nor its complete impossibility. Considering the current different perceptions in the EU of what China is doing in Africa, and the inherent deficits in mutual understanding, communication and mutual knowledge in EU-China relations, any cooperative effort of the three sides will be difficult unless mobilized by Africa’s initiative.

KEY WORDS
China, EU, Africa, relations, Macau Forum
I- Introduction

Chinese presence in Africa is traditionally associated with Admiral Zheng He’s XV century admirable voyages down the Eastern coast of the Continent and the efforts of the newborn People’s Republic of China (PRC) to engage with African countries, to the point where support to the Continent’s national liberation movements became one of the most prominent legacies of New China’s foremost diplomat Premier Zhou En Lai.

As recently as at the turn of this new millennium, however, China’s engagement, as an emerging global economic and political power, with the African continent took new overtures, sailing away from the limited framework of donor-recipient relations and solidarity among developing nations to new dimensions, featuring development aid, trade, investment and Chinese Diaspora. The inception of the China-Africa Forum in 2000 opened a new era in Chinese-African relations, which, though still unfolding, has attracted worldwide attention as much as suspicion from the Western powers, that grew accustomed to seeing Africa as their traditional client/recipient backyard.

It is alleged, for instance, that EU’s normative conditionality, linking aid and investment to improved human rights records of their African counterparts, is no match to Chinese efficiency and “no strings attached” approach, allowing those undemocratic and corrupt regimes new maneuvering space as opposed to the normative strait jacket imposed by traditional donors and counterparts. The simple existence of those alternative ways to financing, away from peer review and best practices established by international organizations such as the IMF, World Bank and the OECD, would turn groundless all efforts of Western donors to introduce better governance and improved human rights standards in the “Forgotten Continent”3. Some commentators would call those different approaches huge perceptual differences4 while others would argue, “China’s foreign policy foray

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2 Financial Times Special Report China-Africa Trade, 24/1/2008, p.6
3 There are numerous reports and articles voicing this type of concern. For an interesting general review see Martine D. Huse and Stephen L. Muyakwa China in Africa: lending, policy space and governance 2008, pp10-30, Norwegian Campaign for Debt Cancellation and Norwegian Council For Africa
into Africa has been primarily centered on capturing the elites and the resources under their control\(^5\). Moreover, faced with this new reality some scholars are also advocating that as China’s soft power is increasing, the Beijing Consensus was proving to be a more adequate paradigm in dealing with Africa than the Washington Consensus\(^6\). On a different dimension, China’s efficient governance approach is also measured against the western ideals of good governance\(^7\), opposing two concepts that should be symbiotic.

As a result of China’s new assertiveness in Africa and the challenges it poses to Europe, the EU Parliament and Commission initiated a process of discussions and consultations resulting in two documents on EU-China-Africa relations: the parliamentarian resolution on “China’s Policy and its effects on Africa”\(^8\), and the policy paper “The EU, Africa and China: Towards trilateral dialogue and cooperation”\(^9\). China was invited to attend EU-Africa Summits in Lisbon in 2007 and in Tripoli in 2010 with observer status and Africa became part of the EU-China Summit’s agenda since 2007.

The aim of this paper is to address hypothetical China and European triangular relations with Africa without assuming, neither the inevitability of such outcome nor its complete impossibility. Considering the current different perceptions in the EU of what China is doing in Africa, and the inherent deficits in mutual understanding, communication and mutual knowledge in EU-China relations, any cooperative effort of the three sides will be difficult unless mobilized by Africa’s initiative and based upon African ownership. It must be the Africans, through their regional and sub-regional organizations or on a country level to trigger Sino-European cooperation in the continent. Africa is in need of all the help it can get in the shape of development aid, public and private investment, infrastructure buildup, market access and better governance. As Mthuli Ncube, Chief Economist and Vice-President of the African Development Bank (AfDB) said in Lisbon recently\(^10\), “Africa is growing but there are risks. Urgent attention is needed to foster growth, to improve political accountability, and address the youth bulge”. According to the same institutional source, current levels of 5.6 to 6% growth are not enough to absorb the demographic dynamics of the continent where two thirds of the population is under 25 year of age and youth unemploy-

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\(^8\) European Parliament 2008

\(^9\) European Commission, 2008.

ment is reaching as high as 35% in some regions. Hence, the sad and consequential bleeding of energy, creativity and hope Africa suffers every time one of its youngsters struggles to get across to the other side of the Mediterranean trying to get away from poverty and despair. Heavy investment in transportation infrastructure and electricity are needed to bring the continent closer, make it more accessible and foster GDP growth. Boosting agricultural productivity for small farmers, the majority of whom are women will help create jobs, entrepreneurship and gender equality. Support for small and medium enterprises (SME), including the informal sectors, which are the real creators of wealth, will turn good statistical growth into more inclusive, people centered growth. Moreover, public goods such as quality education, health care, access to water and sanitation are to be supplied to families and communities in urban and rural areas, as tangible signs of development. There can be no world-wide sustainable development and peace while the second most populated continent with almost 1 billion people is still plagued with misery and death by malnutrition and transmissible diseases, infant mortality, war, unemployment, piracy, corruption and all other instances of disregard for the human being and gross disrespect for human rights. In such a scenario there must be room for every willing country and institution to be actors of change. However, as one African scholar asked could a potential Sino-Europe-Africa win-win-win formula, turn out to be “an (un) intended collusion between China and the West that can scupper a rare chance for African development in the 21st century”\(^\text{11}\). It will depend on the effort of all parties involved but, foremost, it will be Africa’s ownership of these processes that will definitely remove all suspicions and turn those opportunities into successes.

II- China’s Policy in Africa

China’s engagement with Africa since the early days of the People’s Republic, particularly from the onset of the Bandung Conference in 1955, has been influence with the notion they are held to be united because they belong to the same club\(^\text{12}\) regardless of its designation- Non-Aligned Movement, Third World, South-South- of countries at a developing stage and share a similar past of having been under colonial domination and subjected to victimization by foreign powers.

At Bandung, China and the 29 African and Asian countries presented and approved the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence consisting of: (1) mutual re-

\(^\text{11}\) Adams Bodomo, at the University of Macau during a Jean Monnet Seminar which included a speech by former President of the EU Commission Romano Prodi, dedicated to EU-China-Africa relations, 22/1/2011.

spects for sovereignty and territorial integrity; (2) mutual non-aggression; (3) non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; (4) equality and mutual benefit; and (5) peaceful co-existence. Those principles became, ever since, one of the cornerstones of PRC’s foreign policy and a pillar of the so-called “Beijing Consensus”.

As a senior partner of that developing club, China’s de facto leadership role has taken different tones and shapes, but has always been consistent in one aspect: China never tried to export its own way to socialism into Africa. Nevertheless, the Chinese experience showed the world that there is an alternative way for coming out of poverty and the underdevelopment trap while keeping an independent stand in international relations: If China can do it, so can Africa, is as popular today as with the first generation of post-colonial African leaders. When China started offering aid to Africa, her per-capita income was way below that of Sub-Saharan Africa, and, therefore, Chinese people was actually sacrificing what they could not even have, in a gesture that could be interpreted, simultaneously, as internationalism, on one hand, and, on the other Mao’s China obsession to their self-elected leadership role of the world of excluded and oppressed.

In the first 20 years after Bandung under Mao and Zhou EnLai, China’s economic, infrastructural and military aid to African countries had political and ideological content serving both her vision of anti-colonial struggles as well as China’s own foreign policy purposes against her self-defined enemies which, according to different periods were, at turns, the United States, former Soviet Union and, consistently, all the way throughout, Taiwan (ROC). The “one China policy” was and actually still is, the only condition China imposes on her African partners to fully cooperate with them. According to those principles, China gave military assistance, mainly in the shape of supply of armament and training in guerilla warfare to several pro-independent movements including, as is well documented, some of those fighting against the Portuguese colonial regime. In regard to the newly independent African countries, Chinese support was first directed towards Anti-US sentiments and later, in the 60’s and 70’s, redirected against the Soviet Union — as, in China’s view of world politics, the former USSR became identified as China’s main security threat and the most dangerous superpower.

China’s assistance to Nasser’s Egyptian government, in 1956, with 20 million Swiss Francs in cash, as financial grant to support their fight for the rights over the Suez Canal, was an early example of South-South solidarity. The first assistance offered by China in Sub-Saharan Africa was to Guinea, under President Sekou Touré in 1960, for the country to build match and cigarette plants. In

13 Phillip Snow, op. cit.
14 Although the norm is the recognition of the one China principle, there are some specific cases when PRC will consider some sort of cooperation with nations holding diplomatic relations with Taiwan such as in cases of humanitarian disasters.
1964 and 1965 premier Zhou Enlai toured Africa twice and set forth the principles of Chinese aid. Those principles were: equality between partners, mutual benefit, respect for sovereignty, the use of grants or zero-interest loans and easy rescheduling, emphasis on building self-reliance of the beneficiary and respect for obligations. Famously, Chinese experts were not allowed to have special treatment and they would have to endure the same standards of living of the experts in the recipient country. Those Spartan principles set Chinese cooperation aside from the western standards of behavior, rendering them respect and popularity. China’s assistance, which included sending medical teams to several countries, including Tanzania, Mali, Somali and Congo; support to agriculture development with emphasis on small projects, building roads and hospitals and engaging in education, was a pledge to care for the common people and not only the elite, seemingly the main beneficiaries of Western and Soviet aid. Large public buildings, sports stadiums and other symbolic projects across Africa remains an important part of Chinese cooperation from that period. They were, however, more the exception than the rule. Altogether it is estimated that 700 turnkey projects in 49 countries were realized with Chinese aid in the 60’s and 70’s. The most famous of all projects supported by China during this period is the Tanzania-Zambia (TAZARA) railway, completed in 1976, which was built by 15,000 Chinese in five years and at an estimated cost, of 450 million USD, that allowed Zambian Copper to reach the port of Dar-es-Salaam. It was during that period (1973) that China’s aid reached 5.5 billion RMB, a staggering 2.05% of GNP at that time. Although figures of China’s aid are still covered in mystery, it is reasonable to assume, according to different authors, that most of the aforementioned sum went to Africa.

Diplomatically, it paid off, since the PRC’s return to the United Nation Security Council in 1971 to the seat that was taken by Taiwan, counted with massive support from African and other least develop countries (LDC). In 1972, with Nixon’s visit to China, Sino-US relations began to normalize and China’s foreign policy was more clearly redirected against what she called social-imperialism. Its Theory of the Three Worlds presented to the international Community at the United Nations General Assembly in 1974 by Deng XiaoPing, after Mao announcing it to President Kaunda from Zambia while he was visiting Beijing a few months earlier, was the last grand attempt by China to place herself at the center of the anti-imperialist struggle, almost a last declaration of Maoism in the domain of foreign policy.

After Deng XiaoPing’s inauguration of the “reform and opening up” in 1978, China’s attitude towards Africa, and her aid policy in general, became more restrained, since the main focus was on internal change. In the new political and economic context of the Four Modernizations, huge resources were needed to correct China’s status as a poor developing country with increasing social contradictions, as such, the drainage of substantial amounts as aid to third countries

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16 Referred by Li Xiaoyun, op. cit.
for political and ideological reasons was considered unsustainable by its leadership. China, as well, became an aid recipient from international organizations and countries, particularly from Japan, initiating a new stage as simultaneous recipient and donor of foreign aid. The amounts dedicated, per year, to aid projects fell consistently from its peak to levels of under or around 1 billion RMB\(^{17}\) picking up again very slowly from 1983 onward with a new set of rules and under a new foreign policy framework.

China adjusted its foreign policy in 1982 towards an “independent” stand from US and USSR, seeking an international peaceful environment and a new world economic order favorable to its central goal of internal economic modernization and development. In his visit to Africa the same year Zhao Ziyang announced new rules of engagement focusing on: equality and mutual benefit; emphasis on practical results; diversity in form; and economic development. The emphasis on mutual benefit meant also that China was building relations among equals\(^{18}\). China trade with Africa grew from USD 300 million to USD 2.2 billion from 1976 to 1988s and the first debt-equity swaps with textile firms in Mali were realized during this period.

China’s latest policy adjustment towards Africa was inaugurated with the first Forum for China-Africa (FOCAC) in Beijing in the year 2000, as the Chinese leadership under Jiang Zhemin was defining a new international position for the country. The celebratory mood was evident, as the 50\(^{th}\) Anniversary of the PRC was being celebrated and the retrocession of Hong-Kong and Macau had been completed with success. China was seeking the status of a great power and further economic internationalization. In 2003 China used Macau’s (MSAR) connection with the Portuguese Speaking countries to start a new platform called the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation with headquarters in Macau. The 2000 FOCAC went almost unnoticed to the international community but when leaders from China and 48 African countries, including 35 heads of state and 6 heads of Government gathered on Beijing in November 4\(^{th}\) 2006 for the second FOCAC, media and politicians all over the world realized that this new form of summity diplomacy meant real business. Earlier in the year, China published its first African Policy Paper, enlisting all areas of mutual cooperation under four main headings: political; economic; education, science, culture, health and social aspects; and, peace and security.

The motivations of the Chinese’s new engagement, with Africa, according to Medeiros are: 1) Securing and diversifying access to energy supplies and other strategic resources for China’s development; 2) Expand access to African markets: back door to Western export markets; 3) Reduce Taiwan’s international space and

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\(^{17}\) Li Xiaoyun, op. cit.

\(^{18}\) According to Kissinger’s latest book on China (H. Kissinger, 2011), the State Department welcomed China’s affair with the Third World in order to lead it away from USSR’s influence.
recognition: long-standing objective; 4) Coordinate foreign policy strategies in multilateral forums and build common vision of global affairs. The size of the African market of 900 million people and huge needs in infrastructure development is, per se, an extremely good reason for the increasing presence in Africa of Chinese business interests and businessmen and women. Between the 90’s and 2000 Africa’s trade volume with China kept growing at 18% a year, reaching by the turn of the millennium US 6.5 billion and continuing to do so in exponential fashion for the next ten years, reaching by 2010 over US 100 billion dollars, while Chinese FDI was flooding in at an average amount of US 50 billion a year

The main features for this new engagement policy are the diversity of objectives, modes and actors. In regard to the objectives, as seen above, there is an integration of elements of pure economic rational, which are fostered by the international development of the Chinese state own enterprises (SOE) and private companies, issues of energy security, the desire to increase Chinese “soft power” in the continent and issues of international politics, in the sense of affirming China’s role as a global power and its long term strategic interest. In regard to modes, there is still a strong presence of aid in the form of grants, loans and concessional loans but also direct investment as well as growing trade; in such context, it is only natural that new actors have come into play along with the traditional Ministry of Foreign Trade and Cooperation (MOFTEC) or the Ministry of Commerce as it now called, the central government agency in charge of trade, investment and international cooperation (aid), but also several official and private provincial bodies, SOE’s and private enterprises, in a fashion that some scholars describe as uncoordinated. According to Chinese official sources (State Council), aid proposals are channeled to that ministry from other government departments where they are compiled and submitted to the State Council (SC) and the National People’s Congress (NPC) for their formal approval. Aid is comprised of grants, interest free loans and concessional loans. The Export and Import Bank of China (EXIM) plays the role of financial arm of government approved projects. China Construction Bank (CCB) and International China Bank of Commerce (ICBC), both state owned financial institutions, are instrumental for Chinese enterprises’ ventures into Africa. As a result of this variety of modes, Chinese engagement in that continent is currently multi-dimensional and consisting of: a) Aid, with about US 2 billion annually covering 900 projects and involving 17,000 staff and 300,000 technicians in Africa. It also provides training to 30,000 persons; b) Trade, with two way reaching US 106 billion in 2008, with a 35% annual growth rate over the last 10 years, becoming Africa 2nd largest partner (after US); c) FDI with US 8 billion (stock) combining 1,000 companies; and,

20 Zhang Hayian, 2010, China’s Involvement in Africa: Recent Data, Characteristics and Perspectives, PPT. Presentation provided by the Zhang Hayian to the author.
d) Service and labor accounting for US 70.98 billion in accumulated value by the end of 2008 and covering 22% of the total of China’s overseas projects.

III- European approach to EU-China cooperation in Africa

In the meantime the EU had its first EU-Africa Summit also in 2000, under the rotating presidency of Portugal with António Guterres as prime minister. Portugal, as a former colonial power, wanted to underline its special role as a go-between the EU and the Forgotten Continent. However, progress from the summitry diplomacy was slow and a similar event that was due in 2003 was postponed. In 2005 the EU released its new Africa Strategy after issuing a similar one in 2003 for China.

EU tried to put Africa on the agenda of the 2006 Helsinki EU-China summit, raising some eyebrows from their Chinese counterparts. However, the Joint Statement issued after that meeting did say, for the record: “Leaders also stressed the importance of their relations with Africa, and stated their commitment to work together on behalf of Africa’s peace, stability and sustainable development”21 The Chinese side also accepted to establish a regular senior official level dialogue on African issues. Recognizing the moment Javier Solana, then the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, published an article in the Chinese media praising China’s commitment to Africa. In his words “Africa is an important focus for EU’s comprehensive strategic partnership with China. The EU and China are both committed to helping deliver peace, stability, development, prosperity and good governance in Africa”22.. At the EU-China Beijing Summit in 2007 both sides agreed to ramp up cooperation in the continent and China was invited to observe the 2nd EU-Africa Summit that took place in Lisbon on December 2007.

However, notwithstanding the rhetoric, not much has happened since then. “China has increasingly regarded Africa as an opportunity, while Europe has long regarded the continent as a burden. In truth, both external development approaches are lacking, and neither can competently deal with the rising issues on the continent alone”23. In 2008, “a year and a half after beginning structural dialogue on the subject of Africa it would seem that not much has been achieved. Differences in the assumptions underlying Chinese and EU policies with regard to Africa are still a major problem... and trilateral cooperation- is merely an EU’s idea and, for the time being, is still at the conceptual stage”24.

21 Final statement of the 9th EU-China Summit, Helsinki 9 September 2006
24 Beata Wojna, 2008, in Trilateral Relations between the EU, China and Africa: The
In fact, within the EU there are, still, too many strings attached to a cooperative engagement with China in Africa and the whole concept is still unclear. The European Parliament (EP) felt the need to open a debate on the subject, holding a discussion in November 2007 at the Committee on Development. The resolution which came out from it calls for the need “to strengthen the impact of EU policies in Africa, namely by ensuring delivery of promises and commitments” and encourages a [EU] coordinated response to the emergence of new “donors in Africa, such as China... [However] such response must not attempt to emulate China’s methods and aims, since that would not necessarily be compatible with EU values, principles and long-term interest”. Moreover it pledges the EU to “encourage China to assume its responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, including the “responsibility to protect”, acknowledging that China’s presence in Africa, by itself, regardless of any “non-interference policy” intentions, does have real impact on host countries, including politically”; and, also “stresses that China’s “no-conditions” investment in those African countries misgoverned by oppressive regimes contribute to perpetuating human rights abuses and further worsen governance...”\(^\text{25}\). It continued by giving account of how the Chinese presence in Africa is branded by some western commentators (“China’s scramble in Africa”, “Beijing Safari”, “Neo-Colonialism”) as a reminder of how difficult it would be for the EU and China to work together in Africa. In typical style when it comes to debate about China, the EP report while recognizing flaws with some EU practices and failures in its approach to Africa, continues withholding the high moral grounds of EU policies telling China that “yes we want you to join us, but on our terms...”. Notwithstanding, the report sent an “important message...showing an important shift in perceptions within the European Union”\(^\text{26}\), calling for the EU to stop “romanticizing its relationship with Africa” and admitting the “existence of double standards in the European Africa policy: [the] declaratory policy and action often do not match. The oil sector, for instance, tends to ignore the moral dimension usually present in the European policies\(^\text{27}\).

The EU remains the strongest trading partner of Africa, representing 44.3% of total trade of this continent in 2009, followed by China, a distant second, with 13.9% slightly over the US with 13.1%. Ten years ago, traditional partners of Africa had a 77% stake in the continent’s total trade with 78.3% for exports and 75.4% for imports. The emerging economies only accounted then for 23%, 21.7% and 24.6%, respectively. In the short time of a single decade, the ratio is now 63.5% (OECD) for the traditional partners against 36.5 % for the emerging economies.


\(^{27}\) Carmen Amado Mendes, 2009, in Europe and the Chinese presence in Africa, Temas de Integração, 1&2 semesters 2009, N. 27 & 28, Almeidina Coimbra, 2009

Carmen A. Mendes, op. cit.
showing a trend of continuous re-balancing of trade relations between Africa and the world. Chief among those new trade partners of Africa is China, followed by India, Korea, Brazil and Turkey.

IV- EU and China difference in views- Washington Consensus v.s. Beijing Consensus?

According to two leading Chinese scholars of international relations the disagreements between China and EU (and US) in regard to Africa include these three aspects: whether African policies should insist that Africa accept Western liberalism and integrate it into its socio-political life or stay respectfully away from African internal affairs; whether China is practicing colonialism or neo-colonialism in Africa; whether China's African policy harms the interest of Europe and the US in commercial areas. Those authors also proposed to lead the discussion into the theoretical controversy asking whether the Washington Consensus or Beijing Consensus is more adaptable to African realities. Following those authors, Washington Consensus core principles are deregulation, privatization, "opening up", unrestricted capital flow and lower taxation. On the other hand, Beijing Consensus is the "Chinese Development Model" with innovation and experimentation; protection of national boundaries and interest, accumulation of tools of asymmetric power, and the overall objective is to realize growth while maintaining independence. China's distinctive way of development, rapid economic growth through well-disciplined one-party system, has become a role model for African countries. Notwithstanding the theoretical arguments about which "consensus" fits better Africa, the authors also acknowledge that behind this discussion lies interest that are different, eventually conflicting and in competition with each other. Europe (and the US) is feeling the bite of Chinese competition and, therefore, is reacting. However, the arguments presenting the Chinese way of development as a role model for Africa, the so-called Beijing Consensus as an exportable idea or an element of the Chinese soft-power, is dangerous as well as controversial. On one hand, what is happening in Northern Africa with the fall of authoritarian regimes, one after the other and general unrest, is an urgent reminder that generalizations are too dangerous, people do like to live in regimes where they are dignified and have rights, whether economic, social or political rights and that dictators which embezzled and slaved their own people are dictators whether they adhere to the Washington Consensus or the Beijing Consensus.

Jian J. and Chen. Z. M. op. cit., p. 162. China’s attitude towards Africa is also changing reflecting its own learning curve. The case of Libya, where Chinese interest was harshly affected by the long battle for Khadafy's fall and ultimate death, was a remainder about the dangers of relying on despotic leaders and regimes.
Moreover, they do not last forever!

Another way to popularize and generalize the Chinese experience is to oppose the concept of “good governance” to “effective governance” 30. According to this viewpoint, the Chinese way and its approach to Africa is to get business done, since China has the urgency of economic development, the same as Africa. Therefore, Chinese pragmatism on the terrain means that development aid and investment of Chinese origin into Africa get materialized in a timely manner, with good outcomes and benefit to the host country and its people. On the other side, Western, and in particular, European aid and investment with all its strings attached are non-effective, leaving Africa to lose patience and to seek alternatives. Empirical evidence tells us that there is no good-governance without efficiency and that government efficiency does not exist in abstract. There are governments that are efficient in providing public goods to their people and others in exploiting and extracting surplus from them for the benefit of very few.

However, those Chinese authors also are in agreement that there is room for Europe and China to have a positive dialogue and to cooperate in regard to Africa. Furthermore, they admit that China have also made mistakes, namely in the case of Zambia, where “China’s negative impact on domestic industries, environment, fair labor practice and resource sustainability” 31, was used by Michael Sata, opposition leader and presidential candidate, to inflame his electoral agenda with anti-Chinese propaganda. In the same token, those authors also agree that China must pay attention to deterioration of human rights in partner countries and “should actively use multilateral approaches to fulfill international obligations and maintain international morality and justice” 32. In regard to EU, China could learn from the experience of Europeans in dealing with Africa, since its own record is still quite recent. As a matter of fact, although China and Africa have traded for over 2000 years their relations have been intermittent. This is what an interesting account of the historical difference between China-Africa and Europe-Africa engagement is telling us. Both China and Europe need to adapt to a changing Africa 33.

The opportunity for cooperation might be coming sooner than expected, considering all the existing controversy and prejudices. As a matter of fact, recently, in November 2010, specialized media dedicated to international development was spreading news that the UK government was looking to “partner with China to help end poverty in Africa” 34. The U.K. Secretary of State for International Development told BBC “We are looking to work very closely with China...
And those discussions have already started... In partnership with China, we will be able to do much more to speed up development in Africa”.

V- Africa’s view

And what does Africa think? Among African commentators there is a positive feeling in regard to the infrastructural effort done by the Chinese in their continent, especially when it comes to roads and railroads, hospitals and schools, the provision of facilities that can translate into real benefit for the general public and helps to fight poverty and diseases. They also welcome the surge in demand of their commodities from emerging economies such as China and India, because it helps to stabilize prices and create an alternative to Western markets, thus providing a better and sounder environment. Rob Davis, former South African deputy minister of industry and trade once said “China and India, due to their industrialization, offer developing countries higher prices for natural resources, they do not force us to lower our tariffs, contrary to Europe”35. There is also widespread resistance to the new European Partnership Agreements (EPA’s) proposed by the EU as the foundation stone of their trade relations as previewed in the Cotonou Agreement,36 “The EU has also recently addressed the issue of a new partnership with the EPA’s which have not met the consensus amongst the African nations. EU has also sent a shockwave with the cuts of 37% in the price of sugar thereby denunciating a Sugar Protocol which has been a formidable tool of economic cooperation for decades”37. In a meeting held at the Rwandan capital of Kigaly early in November 2010, African trade ministers adopted a declaration opposing the EU’s model of the EPA’s. The African Union Commission and the continent’s five regional economic commissions covering Eastern, Central Western and Southern Africa, also published a position paper detailing the many problems the EPA’s will cause. According to them under the proposed model, Africa would have to open up its economies to European goods, services and companies, jeopardizing the fragile and uncompetitive small industries and service operators as well as the artificially cheap prices of the heavily subsidized agricultural products38. At the Tripoli Summit39 between EU and Africa, later in

36 The Cotonou Agreement replaced the successful Lome Convention giving preferential access to the European Community market to African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, was revoked because of its non-compliance with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.
38 The China Post, 11/23/2010
39 Summit hosted by the late Kaddafi, a sober reminder of the political turmoil and regime
November the only reference to the EPA was a "commitment to conclude" them.

Another point that is referred by Africa commentators is the need for the African Union to define what "African interest" is, in their engagement with the EU and China, as well as to be able to speak with a unified voice. The same could be said about single African countries. How much "ownership" do they have in dealing with donors and investors and how can they cope with asymmetric relations that are the norm in bilateral relations between African individual countries and their gigantic counterparts such as US, EU and China?

An African Union official, made interesting compilations of arguments against and in favor of China’s current posture over Africa:

Arguments against:
- Shipping resources out of Africa, importing raw material with little or no processing value
- Securing access to energy and raw materials as cheaply as possible
- Unethical support for some African states with poor human rights record
- Unconditional aid and loans have undermined European and multilateral accountability and good governance
- "Free riding" on Western debt relief efforts and undermining individual country’s external debt sustainability and disregard multilateral framework for debt sustainability
- Self-interest strategies in dealing with developing countries, trying to assert its influence and using its soft-power in order to support its own development without any assistance from Western countries
- Neglect of the environment and social standards
- Aid tied to Chinese companies and labor; the marginalization of African producers in domestic and overseas markets (particularly textile industries)

The forum on China and Africa cooperation (FOCAC) is suspiciously seen by many as China’s means of obtaining political power in multilateral forums like the UN.

Arguments in favor:
- African leaders have found alternative ideology to "western hypocrisy" and double standards
- China’s massive investment in infrastructure development into Africa where many western powers have neglected
- China’s assistance in providing loans and debt relief to many African countries has been a beacon of hope to the continent
- China has provided external market opportunities for African economies. In doing so it has provided the preconditions for African nations to establish self-sustaining economies

The inauguration of the FOCAC in 2000 was seen by many African countries as a positive direction to get Africa out of the dependent cycle.

VI- Conclusions

A- Changing perceptions and the way forward.

We could summarize this review by stressing that notwithstanding Europe’s long run engagement with Africa and its position as its most important trading partner and donor, both sides are not happy with the limited results achieved and the current state of affairs of their bilateral as well as inter-regional relations. On the other hand, China as the dragonhead of other also emerging presences in Africa, namely India, Brazil, Russia and Turkey, presented Africans with alternative solutions to their traditional partnerships with Europe and the United States. Moreover, from the pure economic point of view, increasing demand for commodities and natural resources triggered by the fast growth of those economies contributed to better prices and conditions for the African suppliers. However, Africa needs all the help it can get from everywhere. Hence, there must be room for trilateral EU-China-Africa cooperation among other seemingly desirable partnerships eventually involving additional emerging economies, chiefly to contribute to capacity building of African economies providing them with tools to break the vicious circle of poverty and underdevelopment. It can only be done with Africa at the center stage, empowering itself to be able to make the best of all aid and investment in favor of its people. It will require good and efficient governance.

Declaratory intentions are important but ineffective if not complemented by actions and projects. Europe and China must be able to work together and start building up their partnership with Africa on an incremental approach, with projects that are feasible and meaningful to their host.

In its most recent report “Africa Economic Outlook 2011”\(41\) recognizes that “the rise of Africa’s emerging partners has been widely analyzed in terms of scramble for African resources. The overall picture is more complex and more positive, however”. This Paris based organization underscores the complementarities between South-South and North-South development cooperation, in products traded, in technology and innovation as well as in geographical focus.

In regard to trade imports of affordable consumer goods from Asia, their availability help African consumers increase their purchasing power and improve living standards. More affordable and more adapted production goods help African firms increase productivity and move up the global value chain. China is an atypical case as its wide range of products compares favorably with Europe and North America. Where competition is strongest is in the larger economies.

\(41\) OECD, 2011
traditional and emerging, sourcing of African resources. Oil, minerals and raw materials are the main tradable goods of the continent and the continuous hike in prices of those goods in the international market are a strong remainder, on one hand of their relative scarceness and, on the other the transfer of income resource rich African countries are benefiting from, allowing, in theory, the design of new public policies able to improve the livelihood of the peoples in those countries.

Cooperation among developed and emerging countries to help Lower Income Countries (LICs) reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDC) and “help them build the capacity to achieve and maintain their maximum economic growth potential” saw new light during the G20 meeting in Seoul on 11-12 November 2010. Leaders of the G20 endorsed their development agenda focusing in nine pillars such as “infrastructure, human resource development, trade, private investment and job creation, food security, and growth with resilience, financial inclusion, domestic resource mobilization and knowledge sharing”\(^{42}\). In the meeting they also recognized the “potential for faster growth in Africa which could be unlocked by African plans for deeper regional economic integration. We therefore commit to support the regional integration efforts of Africa leaders, including helping realize their vision of a free trade area through the promotion of trade facilitation and regional infrastructure”. Under this renewed cooperative interest of the G20 and the principal of African ownership, fruitful trilateral EU-China-Africa cooperation could take place on learning by doing approach, focusing on capacity building with regional significance in infrastructural projects, sustainable urban upgrading and poverty alleviation. As such, the scale of the projects could be diverse, from mega projects on infrastructure aiming at improving transportation and access within the continent to facilitate market integration, as well as micro projects in cooperation with local administrations, which could provide immediate amelioration to ordinary people’s livelihood.

B- The Forum for Trade and Economic cooperation between China and the Portuguese Speaking Countries (Macau Forum)

“The model [of relations] between China and Africa might not be the most perfect one but so far it has been the one achieving most results”\(^{43}\).

The Macau Forum is a new and imaginative platform for dialogue and cooperation created by China in 2003 and addressing the community of Portuguese Speaking countries. Its rationale, firstly, is Macau- where Portuguese is still one of the official languages- and the relations between China and Portugal that remained at a very high level during and after the transition of Macau from the


\(^{43}\) Manuel Amante da Rosa, Ambassador from Cape-Verde, former Deputy Secretary General of the Forum between China and the Portuguese Speaking countries, interview given to Jornal Tribuna de Macau on 23/6/2011
Portuguese administration to full Chinese sovereignty. The second rationale is Sino-Brazilian relations which is, nowadays, one of the most promising and relevant international partnerships between the biggest emerging economy – China – and the richest - Brazil. Last but not the least, Portuguese Speaking countries in Africa with Angola as the most prominent of them, not only because of its size - geography matters - but also because it became recently the largest supplier of oil to China. Angola in the West and Mozambique in the East as well as Cabo-Verde at the middle of the Atlantic would give China strategic support and access to that immense Southern Atlantic middle sea, with Brazil on the other side.

The Macau Forum has, until the time of writing, realized in Macau, where the Secretariat of this organization is based, three Ministerial Conferences (MC) presided by high profile Chinese leaders: Me. Wu-YI, vice premier in 2003, Minister Bo Xilai, Minister of Commerce in 2006 and last but certainly not the least, Premier Weng Jiabao in 2010. This last conference was attended by all its members at the highest level of government and state, with the exception of Brazil, represented at a lower level, due to the transition of power from Lula da Silva to Dilma Rousseff. It has provided through its triennial Action Plans44, grants, low-interest loans and concessional loans to its poorest members, market access to China, training and exchange of experiences in many different fields, from agriculture to tourism and even culture. The Forum has also created some synergies between the members of CPLP - The community of Portuguese Speaking Countries - that otherwise would not exist, and enhanced the role of Macau and the use of the Portuguese language in this former Special Administrative Region of the PRC formerly administered by Portugal.

The Macau Forum, which is based on practical dialogue leading to feasible solutions based on common interest and mutual respect, seems to be a positive experience in how China can effectively cooperate with other countries with different point of views and eventually generate some competing interest in Africa such as Portugal and Brazil- to produce positive outcomes in dealing with some of the most demanding and urgent needs in Africa.

44 Which are approved at the MC and negotiated previously between the Ministry of Commerce, the permanent representatives of the Forum membership based in Macau and the Ambassadors of these countries in Beijing, in a multilateral (or quasi) way.