

China Steadily Continues to Promote Influence on the African Continent

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Every day the news about Chinese investments in the Africa are highlighted in newspapers around the world. On the one hand, western critics believe that Beijing is seeking to expand its area of influence outside Asian territory, and on the other, pro-China analysts say the country is only looking at a space forgotten by world powers. Neither view is entirely right or wrong, but Chinese action in Africa deserves further investigation.

In the past week, Kenya celebrated a thousand days of installing the train line connecting Mombasa, Nairobi and Naivasha, financed and built by China. The Chinese rail project has proved to be profitable, as repeatedly stressed by Kenyan **President Uhuru Kenyatta** himself, significantly boosting tourism and investments in the communications area, according to data from [Reuters](#). The benefits for China are clear and indisputable, when lending is absolutely profitable for investors. However, as Liu Yun, a researcher at the University of Zhejiang, explains, “China’s investments in African rail projects are not just about lending, but working together on the basis of mutual benefits and common gains (...) Furthermore, construction of railway lines is in line with the strategy of modern industrialization in Africa”.

This case perfectly illustrates what has generated the Chinese advance in Africa: a sum of factors in which the struggle for expansion, profit and resources undertaken by the Chinese finds the desire for growth, modernization, investment and development of Africans. China seems to be paying attention to an area hitherto forgotten or unduly treated by the other economic powers. Recently, the American Secretary of State, **Mike Pompeo**, visited several African countries in an attempt to bring the United States closer to Africa. Without major resolutions and agreements, the American visit was basically summarized by exaggerated criticisms from Pompeo to the rapprochement between the countries he visited and China, without presenting new projects of interest that could arouse interest higher than that aroused by Beijing.

“They [the US and China] are great competitors... The US has recently neglected its main partners, but that does not mean they are abandoning them. On the contrary, China has increased and continues to strengthen its presence - in different countries and in different directions. This creates discomfort in the US. In addition to the fact that China’s investment volume in some sectors is dozens of times greater than that of the United States”, said Georgy Scherbakov, professor at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Another point to be highlighted is the issue of the investment strategy. The western bet on Africa is generally made in the private and commercial sector, paying attention to particular interests and generating little result in social issues concerning Africa.

On the other hand, China seeks to invest heavily in state-level agreements with African countries, operating mainly in the sectors of infrastructure and industrial production. Also, U.S. exports to Africa grew from U\$22 billion to U\$26 billion between 2017 and 2019, while trade between China and Africa reached an incredible U\$208 billion last year.

Clearly, China's interest in Africa stems from the need for resources to feed its current economic potential. Spanish researcher **Sebastián Ruiz Cabrera** points out that "effectively, China, as a great power, needs resources to maintain its current growth wave. And these resources are found, above all, in the African continent". Certainly, China is not the only one interested in African resources, however, it seems to be the most shrewd in establishing strategies that allow it to satisfy its interests. In addition to seeking to invest in sectors where African countries are most in need, China does not impose an ideological agenda on these countries as a condition of existence for their economic relations, unlike European embassies, which prioritize the effectuation of the human rights when establishing businesses.

There is also a minor factor that helps China to build good relations with African countries, which is the history of international cooperation between developing countries that was established during the Mao Tse-Tung years.

"Especially in the 1960s, with the cultural policy of Mao, there was a massive sending of teachers, doctors and cultural agents (...) [it's a kind of] South-South cooperation relationship. I mean, more 'equal to equal', and not only in economic terms. And that still lasts",

emphasizes Ruiz Cabrera.

In general, this record also favors the priority given to China over European countries – former colonial powers that have exploited Africa for centuries – and the USA – global hegemonic power.

For China, in addition to the search for resources and profits, operations in Africa and cooperation with poor countries generate a highly positive political image on the international scenario. Having reached the status of a world economic power, China starts to undertake humanitarian and welfare projects, which strengthen its international image. In short, China invests in Africa in pursuit of its own interests, however, it does so by seeking to meet the main needs of African countries, which has attracted more attention from them in relation to Beijing than to Western countries. The Chinese project is promising and really seems to serve mutual interests, being an example to be followed by other emerging powers.

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