

Beijing in the 'land of opportunity': assessing the Sino-African partnership

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Introduction

In this article we will analyze the various aspects of the Chinese presence¹ in Africa. Why this topic? It should be noted that the emergence of a world power (we focus, for this purpose, on the case of China) requires access to a range of resources and services, without which its rise would hardly be possible in the chessboard of world power. China needs - to be able to domestically operate its huge economic and industrial growth - to have access to a wide range of raw materials and energy resources, which it does not have. In addition to suppliers, the Middle Kingdom also needs partners and consumers that may absorb the Chinese production of goods and services, but also Chinese soft power. In fact, as Joseph Nye (2004) points out, a state is powerful not only due to its military power but also because of its ability to influence the decisions of another. In fact, a country will find much less resistance to legitimize its power over other actors if its ideas and culture are well received by them. Thus, the soft power² approach is based on a peaceful, indirect, subtle, more or less discrete solution, within the scope of the appeal of ideas; in the ability to persuade rather than win.

That said, the African continent, due to its dimensions, abundance in energy resources and raw materials, but also due to the sympathy that many political regimes manifest towards the ideas of the Beijing Consensus³, occupies, unquestionably, a privileged place in the strategy of consolidation and assertiveness of China's great power in the world.

Much has been written and said about the Chinese presence in Africa, but much remains unsaid. Aware of this hiatus, this article seeks to address the other side,

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- 1 It is important to distinguish between China's official strategy in Africa and what can be considered as a series of non-coordinated activities happening at the same time in the African arena, and which are carried out by agents from one nation state (i.e. China). Although this article aims to explore the main features of China's official strategy in Africa, one must take into account that the latter is often entangled with other Chinese actors' interests and objectives, which makes it often difficult to specify 'who did what, and with which consequences'.
- 2 Soft power is a term developed by Joseph Nye (2004, p. 6), which means "the ability of a state to get what it wants by the attractiveness of its culture, its ideas, its domestic policy and diplomacy". However, one must be very careful not to confuse soft power with influence. Although similar, 'soft power' is not restricted to the meaning of influence.
- 3 Contrary to the 'Washington Consensus', which holds that economic development results from the combination of economic, political and financial liberalization and the respect for human rights, the 'Beijing Consensus' focuses mainly on "innovation and growth through a market driven economy, without insisting on the need to adopt a democratic regime" (Tremblay, 2007).

perhaps less known, of a partnership between Africans and Chinese, which accuses tensions and problems of various kinds. Besides, this article aims to describe China's attempt to isolate Taiwan politically in the African continent.⁴

By addressing the several topics aforementioned, this article will try to demonstrate that China's African strategy is a multidimensional strategy, composed of several factors (economic, political, military - in which soft and hard power are also included) that contribute to underline the importance of Africa to China and vice versa.

Chinese presence in Africa: the contours of a partnership

As Serge Michel noted, "a growing country that is looking for markets and influence meets a continent rich in resources but with a lack of investors" (Michel, 2008, p. 39). It is not surprising, therefore, that Africa appears as a good option in the eyes of Chinese leaders. Moreover, according to Terence McNamee (2012), it is worth mentioning that "despite the obvious drawbacks, life in Africa still makes economic sense for Chinese traders, at least for now, as research suggests that traders in Africa are making about three times what they might theoretically earn in China".

In turn, the African continent seems to have every interest in diversifying cooperation with other regions throughout the world (Jaffrelot, 2008). As the African continent is the world's poorest continent with the largest number of developing countries, it is seeking allies to improve its own disastrous economic conditions. Most of its 53 states have frequently been hampered by instability, corruption, huge national debt, violence, and authoritarianism. Besides, the rates at which epidemics and diseases are spreading throughout the continent are the world's highest (Christensen, 2010, p. 15). This catastrophic situation and the need to overcome chronic underdevelopment have forced African leaders to seek new strategic partnerships to boost the continent's economic performance. In this endeavor, El Alami (2008, p. 3) notes that "the rancor that prevails towards the occidental powers, especially the former European colonial Empires, leaves China as untainted baggage in Africa", which makes the latter "the partner of choice for many of the African states".

Currently, we have witnessed a remarkable and rapid conquest of Africa by China, which surprises the West (mainly Europeans and Americans), which used to consider the African continent more like a "charity case", than "an investment opportunity" (Michel, 2008, p. 40). As Tanguy Struye (2010, p. 15) states "the continent is also at the heart of an increasingly aggressive game of influence and, quite often, to the detriment of African countries themselves". According to this author, "the African chessboard has become a real game of Go⁵, considering that every great power strives to gain a foothold there, including China" (Struye, 2010, p. 15).

4 According to Evan Medeiros (2006, p. 127), one of China's Top 4 Africa long-standing objectives consists in "reducing Taiwan's 'international space' and the ability of others to confer status and legitimacy on Taiwan". Likewise, as Greg Pollock (2007, p. 69) outlines, "in addition to its resource wealth, China is attracted to Africa because it represents an opportunity to deepen Taiwan's diplomatic isolation".

5 According to D. Lai (2004, p. 7) "In many ways, the game of go resembles the Chinese way of war and diplomacy". The game of go (in which two players compete for territories) has its origin in China about 4,000 years ago and is the oldest board game in the world. As Lai mentions (2004, p. 7) "the original Chinese name of this game is called weiqi; literally, encircling territory, an essential component of a nation state".

The economic issues

The figures witness the strength of trade between China and Africa: from 2000 to 2007, trade volume increased from 10 to 70 trillion dollars, with China becoming, in 2007, Africa's second largest trading partner, after the United States. According to estimates, China is currently Africa's biggest trade partner: "Sino-African trade has increased at an annual rate of 43.5 per cent; in 2011, bilateral trade soared to \$160 billion" (McNamee, 2012, p. 10). In addition, in 2011, "more than two thousand Chinese companies invested \$13 billion on the continent" (Qingmin and Wei, 2012, p. 27).

Among the sectors in which the Chinese are investing more in Africa, black gold is the main issue. The African continent provides about a third of the oil consumed by China because the large Chinese companies (CNPC, CNOOC and SINOPEC) are well represented there (Christensen, 2010). In addition to the contracts, production and exploration agreements concluded between Beijing and the African oil producers, it is certainly important to emphasize the construction of a 1500 km pipeline in Sudan. As a result of Beijing's Initiative, whose energy needs continue to grow, this pipeline carries oil from southern Sudan to the port of Marsa al-Bashair (on the bank of the Red Sea). If the diversification of energy partners is an essential factor for a rising power, it is mostly the way Beijing pays some of its State suppliers which arouses the indignation of the Western powers (Dent, 2011). If we think of the specific case of Sudan - rogue state - the international community is concerned with the fact that in exchange for imported oil, China "sells weapons (mainly combat aircrafts), to the Khartoum regime and defends it in the United Nations Security Council" (Struye, 2010, p. 16).

As stated by Valerie Niquet (2006, p. 5), "China has become, since 2004, the second largest importer of African oil after the USA and before Japan". In addition to the importance of countries such as Sudan, Angola and Nigeria (the largest oil exporters to China), we note that Gabon and Equatorial Guinea are also, increasingly privileged places in the Chinese offensive in Africa, especially in relation to the production of black gold. But it should be stressed that the Chinese companies operating in Africa "have, compared to the presence of domestic companies, a relatively small market share (less than 10%)", acting "in a partially independent way" and being "in competition, as other companies are, to gain market share" (Struye, 2010, p. 17).

In addition to investment in oil and gas, China's African strategy is highly concentrated in the exploitation of raw materials and minerals extremely necessary for its growth.⁶ Uranium, gold, iron, phosphate, lead, cobalt, copper, bauxite, cotton, are, among others, some of the materials that China can find in Africa. Some African countries are obviously more endowed than others in these areas (Christensen, 2010). That is why China strives to judiciously diversify its sources and partnerships in a continent so vast and rich in natural resources. For instance, 85% of the imported cobalt from the Middle Kingdom comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and almost all of Zimbabwe's tobacco production is exported to China, which has 350 million smokers (Jornal de Notícias, 2009).

6 It has been estimated that Africa holds 40% of the world's hydro-electric power supply potential, the bulk of the world's diamonds and chromium, 30% of uranium, 50% of the world's gold, 90% of its phosphates, 40% of its platinum, 7.5% of its coal, 8% of its known petroleum reserves, 12% of its natural gas, 3% of its iron ore, 64% of world's manganese, 13% of its copper, much of its bauxite, nickel, and lead deposits (Antwi-Danso, 2011).

Why can the Chinese presence in Africa be seen as ‘win-win’ for both partners? According to Serge Michel, China gains access to raw materials which are, in essence, the basis for the great economic revolution that the country is experiencing today. On the other hand, Africa takes advantage of the Chinese interest in the natural wealth of the continent to improve and/or create infrastructures, such as roads, schools and railways which it sorely needs (Dent, 2011). This means that the Chinese have the tools, the technology, the ability to mobilize thousands of workers as well as the “opportunity to achieve a leading position in Africa and to deeply transform the continent” (Michel, 2008, p. 41). The Chinese seem to actually harvest the potential to succeed where others had not been effective before.

Among the traditional sectors where Chinese cooperation is felt in Africa, let us stress the building of great infrastructures – such as football stadiums, sports complexes, cement works, buildings, hotels, Palaces of Culture and of the Senate, National Assemblies, housing, roads, railways⁷, air terminals, airports, ports, dams, power stations, and even an experimental nuclear reactor, and also (albeit to a less extent) civil aviation.⁸As regards academic cooperation “if Chinese teachers are not present in Africa, several Africans undertake their studies in China, especially in medicine, training that is quite popular in the majority of hospitals in Africa” (Tchunte, 2005).With respect to agriculture and fisheries, these encompass, for example, the creation of industrial fishing companies and others specialized in wood-processing.⁹Among the leading sectors, finance, telecommunication and tourism were the most popular sectors for Chinese investment. Chinese investments in telecommunications are quite enlightening. One example of 2011 is the introduction of the first service in Africa, in August 2011, that allows customers to make deposits in Yuan and withdraw Yuan from the tellers by a branch of the Bank of China in Lusaka, Zambia. Chinese telecommunication companies, for their part, have continued to be attracted by high telecommunication fees for Africans, lack of efficient telecom equipment and infrastructure for a better telecom network coverage in rural areas and 520 million mobile phone subscribers in Africa (Dent, 2011, p. 5). Telecommunication arguably also fits to another strategic policy goal: the 12th five-year plan that encourages Chinese companies to create their own innovative brands (Dent, 2011, p. 5).

Besides , it is interesting to note, on the other hand, that there is an increasing number of homes equipped with DVD players, color televisions, computers and hi-fi equipment, given that Chinese products arrive at a lower cost to local markets. To conclude, we can also mention that China “establishes special economic zones”; that “several initiatives are born in Chinese provinces and municipalities”¹⁰, that “the *Import-Export Bank of China* provides concessional loans”, and that “China also provides significant financial support” to African countries (Struye, 2010, p. 20).

7 It is worth mentioning in this regard that China finances, for instance, a 1300km railway line, which connects the East to the West of Angola.

8 For example, it is worth noting that China has provided Zimbabwe with civil transport aircraft (model Xinzhou 60, built in Xian).

9 Fifty per cent of the fishing vessels registered in Sierra Leone is Chinese. Furthermore, China consumes 96% of the raw African wood that is exported to Asia.

10 The Guangdong province, for example, signed contracts with the region of Katanga soon after L. Kabila came to power. Other examples include Nigeria and Angola (see in this respect...).

11 These are loans that are not subject to the conditions traditionally required by commercial banks and other creditors in terms of guarantees (see Alden, 2008).

The reactions in Africa: from enthusiasm to suspicion

There is an increasing number of visits at a ministerial and presidential level among Chinese leaders and leaders of several African countries. Although President Hu Jintao, during the speech he delivered on 16 February 2009 in Dar es Salaam, has ensured that China “will be a good brother and a good partner (of Africa) forever”, recent experiences have shown some tensions (Alden, 2008). Of course, even if African governments are able to benefit from the fact that Chinese competition breaks the monopoly of the former colonizers and that, “compared with Americans and Europeans, Beijing does not concern itself with ‘internal affairs’ (good governance, human rights, democracy...)”, feelings in Africa oscillate, however, between enthusiasm and distrust (Cheru and Cyril, 2010, p. 14).

In fact, as noted by Serge Michel “China is currently experiencing the same obstacles which the Westerners had to face for a long time” (Michel, 2008, p. 41). What are they? The social instability, the serious problem of corruption that undermines politics, the economy and society, and lack of interest of the population, mixed with its resistance to Beijing’s projects in the region. The Chinese are seen as foreigners who take jobs from local people, or that present negligent behavior towards the rights of African workers who are subordinated to them. In this regard, we note that “in the past, there have been tensions between Chinese and African countries, mainly in Senegal, Zambia and South Africa” (Brooks, 2010, p. 118). An anti-China feeling has been growing: “from Congo to Angola, taxi drivers, street vendors and even Africans who work with the Chinese criticize such an invasion” (Brooks, 2010, p. 120). But they are also seen as responsible for loss of profit of a local trade unable to challenge the Chinese competition. As T. Struye (2010, p. 23) notes, “Chinese companies are accused of flooding local markets with counterfeit or poor quality products, especially in the field of textile and mopeds, thereby causing harm to the companies of the continent”. Their presence has sparked outbreaks of xenophobic violence, led to increased competition with local businesses and prompted calls for tougher regulation and government intervention (Brooks, 2010). However, as McNamee (2012, p. 4) highlights, “Chinese traders have also afforded millions of African consumers the opportunity to purchase a range of goods for the first time; (...) whilst debate over their impact on Africa’s development escalates, they have remained a largely unknown newcomer, scarcely understood and rarely examined”. As Zhu (2010, p. 43) stresses, “resentments also starting to brew over some Chinese business practices in Africa”: for instance, “in August 2009, prosecutors in Namibia were investigating whether a Chinese company may have won a railroad-building contract through bribery”.

For all these reasons, Jean Servant raises a pertinent issue. The author questions whether “the Chinese model of *win-win* (for Africa and China) does not eventually prove to be a new form of neocolonialism disguised as the illusions of a South-South development” (Servant, 2005). Anyway, the author expresses concern with regard to the limits of Asia’s direct competition (ranging, for example, from textiles to steel) on the African economy. The case of South Africa (the first African partner of China) is quite symptomatic. According to Mbeki, (from the University of Witwatersrand,

Johannesburg), South Africa must cope simultaneously with a “desirable collaboration and a terrible threat given that in exchange for raw materials that we sell to the Chinese, we buy manufactured products from them” (Struye, 2011, p. 12). This has meant that from 24 million dollars in 1992, Pretoria’s trade deficit with Beijing exceeded 400 million dollars in 2005 (Alden, 2008).

In almost all of Africa dissatisfaction and criticism against the Chinese presence has been increasing. Although China has promised to be a ‘good brother’ in its partnership with Africa, the African trade unions (in Dakar or in Lesotho, for example) threaten to boycott the sales of Chinese products that contribute to the growth of unemployment. The complaints manifest themselves, among other ways, through murder and/or kidnapping of Chinese that work in Africa.¹² Without neglecting the complaints put forward by the Africans, J. Hellstrom (2009, p. 19) believes that such violence “is partly explained by the fact that Chinese companies have been inclined to take bigger risks than their Western counterparts and even looking for business opportunities in locations left vacant by others”.

Furthermore, many of the contracts signed with Beijing are canceled or cannot even get signed. But it also happens that African leaders announce spectacular contracts with Beijing just “to scare the Western partners and, thus, encourage them to make higher bids” (Davis and Jonathan, 2010, p. 3). It is also worth noting that “many Chinese contracts are accompanied by a requirement that 70% of the work be accomplished by Chinese workers (usually prisoners or conscripts), who practically live in closed camps, which reduces interaction and, therefore, trade with local people” (Davis and Jonathan, 2010, p. 5). However, there are also environmental issues that we must not overlook. In fact, Africa has been witnessing a repetition of very similar problems to those that occur frequently in China: deforestation, contamination of land and water, lack of respect for the environment, resulting from a search for unbridled productivity.

The other side of the partnership: the invisible strategy of China in Africa

In addition to economic issues, the ‘Beijing Consensus’ imposes itself smoothly: China boasts itself of presenting an alternative to the ‘Washington Consensus’ (Jaffrelot, 2008, pp. 224-226). But if China does not subject its partnership with Africa to any imposition on democracy and human rights, it strives, however, to persuade the African countries not to recognize Taiwan as an independent state.¹³ Curtailing Taiwan’s diplomatic influence was not a high priority on China’s Africa policy agenda until the early 1990s, when the competition between Beijing and Taipei to win diplomatic recognition from individual countries escalated drastically. The

¹² For instance, “in January 2007 five Chinese telecommunications workers were kidnapped by unidentified gunmen in Nigeria’s southern Rivers State. Though they were eventually released unharmed two weeks later, the incident rang a safety alarm bell for tens of thousands of other Chinese workers and business people in Africa” (Zhu, 2010, p. 43).

¹³ According to G. Pollock (2007, p. 57), “to restrain African countries from recognizing Taiwan as the legitimate representative of China, Beijing built large-scale infrastructure projects for several African countries, many of which the West had previously refused to support, including soccer stadiums, government ministries, and railways”.

official “China’s African Policy” *White Paper* issued in January 2006 is clear about this issue: “The one-China principle is the political foundation for the establishment and development of China’s relations with African countries and regional organizations”.¹⁴

It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1998 South Africa recognized the People’s Republic of China, severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan (although maintaining close trade ties with the island). Likewise, Liberia and Senegal restored their diplomatic relations with China recently. In general, we see that the strategy of China in diplomatically marginalizing Taipei in the African continent has worked well so far. In fact, “currently only six countries (of a total of 53) - of which Chad is the most important, and with which, exceptionally, China has developed informal relationships due to its potential in terms of energy reserves - still recognize Taiwan diplomatically” (Niquet, 2006, p. 1).

The African continent is also a useful piece with respect to the United Nations issue. African countries represent, by themselves, more than a third of the members of the United Nations, which means therefore that the African votes have an extraordinary importance for the People’s Republic of China. In fact, we have been witnessing a “real diplomatic battle between Beijing and Tokyo, with Africa as scenario” (Niquet, 2006, p. 2). As an example, Beijing is striving to gain the support of African countries at the United Nations concerning the definition of exclusive economic zones (an issue that puts it in conflict with Tokyo in the China Sea) (Lafarge, 2005). In turn, as stated by Pierre-Antoine Braud (2005, p. 1), China offers a “*package* of diplomatic, military and economic support to African regimes which are not seen in a positive light by the international community due to internal conflicts or bad governance”. In this context, V. Niquet mentions that “China makes use of its dual status as a developing country and a great power able to influence the major strategic directions of world politics - the example of resolution 1567 on Darfur, adopted in 2004, but strongly ‘sweetened’ thanks to China, is a good example” (Niquet, 2006, p. 2).

All this diplomatic, tactical, subtle and invisible game falls entirely within the sphere of *soft power*. Moreover, if China does not seek hegemony, this does not mean however that Beijing would not hesitate in using the economic (resources, energy) and political potential (African votes at the UN) of the African countries in its favor.¹⁵ The famous words of Deng Xiaoping, key to Chinese success, is still applicable (to the African Partnership): “Observe calmly, ensure our position, manage our business with a cool head, hide our capabilities and await our turn, let us keep a low profile and never claim leadership”¹⁶. To this approach, we must obviously add the indirect strategy of the game of *Go*: “Success is not achieved all at once, it results from a multiplicity of actions with different objectives; victory does not translate into an unchallenged domination, rather it is in an advantageous sharing of the territory” (Struye, 2011, p. 17).

14 Official Chinese government White Paper on China’s African Policy, 12 January 2006, Accessed 3 June 2012, http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-01/12/content_156490.htm.

15 D. Lai provides the reader with an example of how the Game of Go can be used as a metaphor to refer to some of China’s intentions in Africa. According to Lai (2004, p. 11), “during the 1960s, China made much effort to solicit African support for its quest to become a member of the United Nations (African countries formed a large voting block at the UN General Assembly); One of the Chinese efforts was to build sports stadiums in many African countries”.

16 Annual Report to Congress. Military Power of the People’s Republic of China (2007): Chapter Two - Understanding China’s Strategy. Accessed 26 June 2011. <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2007/2007-prc-military-power02.htm>>.

Besides the issue of Taiwan (whose claims of independence are known), or the issue of Japan and India (who aspire to the category of permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations), China's African policy covers another important dimension. According to V. Niquet (1996, p. 4), it involves, in fact, "the attempt to circumvent or weaken Western powers, primarily the United States and its partners, in all circumstances where the interests of Beijing are at risk". It involves, moreover, the resurrection of the 'South-South dialogue' "advocated by China with regard to the Third World, which dates back to the 1960s. The Middle Kingdom seeks to, thus, maintain its status of spokesperson for developing countries, as can be inferred from the White Paper on China's policy for Africa: "China is working to establish and develop a new type of strategic partnership characterized by equality and mutual trust in terms of politics and *win-win* cooperation in the economic sphere" (Niquet, 2006, p. 2). In practice, this is expressed by the multiplication of high level visits, the intensification of trade, the assistance to rogue states, and the defense of the role of Africa in the international arena. The idea of maintaining a constructive dialogue with Africa is, for example, visible through the *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation* (FOCAC), which is organized every three years (Cheru and Cyril, 2010).

Moreover, the fact that Beijing committed, in the last forum (in 2006), to creating a development fund for Africa and to forgive African debt of 1.4 billion dollars, attest to the vigor of its soft power, as well as the importance China attaches to its partnership with Africa. In this context, the significance that the *Beijing Action Plan* (2007-2009) has for both sides (China and Africa) is undeniable, since it highlights the methods, as well as the consultation and cooperation levels (economic, legal, regional and sub-regional organizations, education, infrastructure development, relations between peoples, health...) (King, 2010).

It is also worth mentioning here the importance of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-Speaking Countries (PSCs), with its headquarters in Macao. With the objective of promoting trade and investment and implement common projects in various domains between China and PSCs, the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation was created by the Chinese government in 2003. In a context in which Beijing is building an impressive presence in the lusophone world, this Forum is bringing China tremendous economic and diplomatic gains.¹⁷ Since the inception of the Forum, two-way investment between China and the Portuguese-speaking countries has rapidly expanded. By the end of 2009, Portuguese-speaking countries had set up over 700 companies in China with a total investment of more than \$500 million (Antwi-Danso, 2011, p. 18). In his speech at the opening ceremony (November 13, 2010) of the Third Ministerial Conference of the Forum, Wen Jiabao, admitted that "the ever-growing investment between the two sides has brought us the applicable technologies that we each need, supported our economic development and improved the lives of the people" (Antwi-Danso, 2011, p. 19). Chinese Premier W. Jiabao also stated that "this Forum has served as an important platform and bond for mutually beneficial and advantageous cooperation between the two sides; it has given full play to Macao's unique advantage as a bridge between the two sides and boosted our

¹⁷ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.(n.d.)Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China. Accessed 7 June 2012. <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zllt/eng/>>.

exchanges and cooperation with a focus on economy and trade; cooperation between the two sides has gradually extended from economy and trade to education, culture and other fields" (Loro, 2012, p. 4). Other examples of soft power are present, in particular, via the existing Confucius institutes in Africa, as well as through courses in Mandarin, increasingly organized by African universities through scholarships awarded to African students for them to undertake their studies in China.¹⁸ In addition, "more than 130 000 Chinese are currently living in Africa, mainly in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Angola and the Republic of Guinea", and it is also worth mentioning that "direct air links were established between Angola and the People's Republic of China, as well as between Zimbabwe and China" (Niquet, 2006, p. 1).

Alongside this soft power (independent of any political condition, as aforementioned), it is also important to talk about hard power. How does it manifest itself in the case of the Sino-African partnership? We can observe that economic issues have enabled Beijing to become a major arms supplier to Africa. China has signed agreements to supply military equipment to several African countries and opened, on the other hand, munitions and armaments factories (Servant, 2005). The "relative lack of competition" explains that China may make use of African order to "test a material that remains rudimentary" (Niquet, 2006, p. 3). Beijing offers its training planes 'K8', helicopters, light artillery, armored vehicles, military trucks, uniforms, communication equipment, speedboats, air defense batteries... But the Middle Kingdom offers, on the other hand, military training programs in China, or locally, in Africa, resorting for this purpose to Chinese instructors (Van Hoeymissen, 2010).

Such military cooperation is based around sensitive issues such as organized crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, intelligence, light arms... It is also important to mention the growing contribution of the Chinese army to peacekeeping operations (even if, indeed, Beijing is still very hesitant regarding the need to take sides), which take place primarily on African soil (Van Hoeymissen, 2010). For example, China sent troops to Sudan (UNMIS¹⁹), to Western Sahara (MINURSO²⁰), to the Ivory Coast (UNOCI²¹), to Ethiopia-Eritrea (UNMEE²²), Liberia (UNMIL²³) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC²⁴). However, it would be dangerous to see in this an unselfish or disinterested attitude, since, as already mentioned, Africa is an 'invisible' battlefield in which China seeks to marginalize Taiwan and politically weaken the candidature of India and Japan to the United Nations Security Council (as permanent members) (Struye, 2010).

¹⁸ It should be noted that China is currently the country with the largest diplomatic mission in Africa (diplomats, consulates, embassies).

¹⁹ UNMIS: *United Nations Missions in Sudan*.

²⁰ MINURSO: *United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara*.

²¹ UNOCI: *United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire*.

²² UNMEE: *United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea*.

²³ UNMIL: *United Nations Mission in Liberia*.

²⁴ United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or MONUSCO (previously known as United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo or MONUC, from the French: *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo*).

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