

## China's Public Diplomacy in Africa

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### Չինաստանի Հանրային դիվանագիտությունն Աֆրիկայում

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**Ամփոփում՝** Աֆրիկյան մայրցամաքը հանդիսանում է կարևոր հարթակ Չինաստանի յուրահատուկ Հանրային դիվանագիտությունն իրականացնելու գործընթացում: Նորագույն պատմության ընթացքում Չինաստանը շատ ինտենսիվ է զարգացնում իր փոխհարաբերություններն աֆրիկյան պետությունների հետ: Սակայն, չնայած, որ ՉԺՀ-ն շատ ակտիվ գործունեություն է իրականացնում Աֆրիկայում, մինչև նրա կան որոշ խնդիրներ, որոնք բացասական ազդեցություն ունեն Չինաստանի և աֆրիկյան պետությունների միջև բարեկամական հարաբերությունների վրա: Ավելին, արևմտյան պետությունների կողմից բացասական գնահատականը նույնպես բացասական ազդեցություն ունի Աֆրիկայում Չինաստանի ազգային կերպարի վրա, այդ իսկ պատճառով էլ Չինաստանն իր ազգային կերպարը բարելավելու նպատակով համապատասխան միջոցներ է ձեռնարկում:

**Վճռորոշ բառեր՝** Չինաստան, Աֆրիկա, «փափուկ ուժ», «խելացի ուժ», ազգային կերպար

### Публичная дипломатия КНР в Африке

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**Аннотация:** Африканский континент является важной платформой для реализации КНР своей уникальной публичной дипломатии. В новейшей истории Китай интенсивно развивает дружественные взаимоотношения с африканскими государствами. Однако, несмотря на столь активную работу КНР, определённые проблемы в торгово-экономических отношениях отбрасывают тень на дружественные взаимоотношения Китая со странами Африки. Более того, отрицательная оценка со стороны западных держав негативно влияет на национальный имидж Китая в странах Африки. Именно поэтому КНР необходимо принимать определённые меры по повышению своего имиджа среди африканских государств.

**Ключевые слова:** Китай, Африка, «мягкая сила», «умная сила», национальный имидж

During the course of China's peaceful rising, which was started in 1977 by Den Xiaoping, public diplomacy, specifically soft power, is directly related to the protection and expansion of China's national interest overseas. It also determines in some way and to what degree a rising China can be accepted and recognized by the international community. In recent years, Africa has become an important stage for China to enhance its soft power and shape its national image. The continuing development of friendly Sino-African relations and its worldwide influence have served as a touchstone of China's soft power in the new era. Therefore, it meets the urgent demand of China's foreign strategy to analyze the achievements attained and problems

still existing concerning the buildup of China's soft power and expansion of China's influence in Africa.

For over half a century, China and Africa have maintained a close historical friendship. During the period of African national liberation movements, China upheld the banner of support for African people's national independence movements and stood together with African countries to fight against imperialism, colonialism, hegemonism and racism. When Africa experienced a wave of national independence movements in the 1960s, Mao Zedong frequently received friends and organizations from Asia, Africa and Latin America, proclaiming China's "sincere sympathy and entire support for African people's fight against

imperialism and colonialism”<sup>1</sup>. From 1956 to 1977, China, despite its own great economic plight, offered economic aid amounting to \$2.476 billion to Africa countries, which accounted for 58% of China’s total foreign aid<sup>2</sup>. This manifested successfully China’s will and ability to help African countries, expanded China’s influence in the African continent and improved China’s position and prestige both in the Third World and in the international society.

Since the 1980s, China has introduced a new policy of reform and opening-up, pronouncing economic construction the most important work hereafter. Under these circumstances, China’s assistance to Africa mainly aims at helping African countries to realize political stability and economic development, which takes a number of forms such as more investments in Africa, personnel training, timely humanitarian assistance to some countries and writing off in its power debt owed by those heavily-indebted countries. As the statistics indicate, since the first Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, China has canceled debt totaling 10.9 billion Yuan (US\$1.4 billion) owed by the heavily indebted poor countries and the least developed countries in Africa that have diplomatic relations with China. At present, China is fulfilling its pledge of canceling debt of another 10 billion yuan owed by some African countries<sup>3</sup>. The above facts provide evidence that China is determined to help African countries to realize their common development. The essence of friendly Sino-African relations, “mutual help” and “win-win”, lay not only in helping and supporting each other on the world stage but more importantly, win-win cooperation for economic and social development lays a solid foundation for furthering development of future relations.

In recent years, in order to help other developing countries, explore a way suitable for their own development, China has enhanced human resource development and personnel training. As early as 2000, an “African human resource development foundation” was set up at the FOCAC. Under this framework, China has trained about 20,000 technicians and administration personnel for African countries. The Chinese government also actively advocated some international seminars to exchange experiences with other developing countries in economic development and poverty

alleviation. In May 2007, at the annual conference of the African Development Bank Council held in Shanghai, questions like African infrastructure construction, enterprise capability construction, debt management and poverty alleviation were discussed. That is another significant action taken by China to promote exchange and cooperation with African countries in aspects of development experience and state affairs management. After the Beijing Summit of FOCAC Thabo Mbeki, former president of South Africa wrote an article titled “At the Heavenly Gate in Beijing hope is born” highly praising China’s “Great achievements in development” and its practical significance to Africa’s development<sup>4</sup>. The World Bank also acknowledged, “China’s efforts created immediate opportunities for the economy of other developing countries as well as chances for them to acquire abundant knowledge and experience from China in regard to their own development.”



*China’s Confucius Institutes in Africa*

We think that China’s Africa foreign policy is characterized by “equality, respect and goodwill”. Since establishing diplomatic ties with African countries, China has been adhering to the principle of “equal sovereignty” and “non-interference of the internal affairs”. China endeavors to establish partnerships with all African countries except those who maintain “diplomatic ties” with Taiwan. At the Beijing Summit of FOCAC in 2006, China and African countries pledged to establish a “new type of Sino-African Strategic partnership” on the basis

<sup>1</sup> Xie Yixian, *Diplomatic History of China: 1949-1979*, Henan: Henan Renmin Press, 1988, pp. 306-307

<sup>2</sup> Li Anshan, *On the Adjustment and Transformation of China's Africa Policy*, *West Asia and Africa*, Vol. 8, 2006, pp. 11-20

<sup>3</sup> Luo Jianbo & Liu Hongwu, *On the Historical Evolution of China’s Aid towards Africa and Its Significance*, *West Asia and Africa*, No.11, 2007, pp.25-30

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/anctoday/2006/at44.htm>

of “political equality, mutual trust, economic cooperation, win-win, and cultural exchanges”<sup>5</sup>.

**Table 1. China’s Influence More Positive than America’s**

	China’s Influence (in percent)		U.S. Influence (in percent)		
	Good	Bad	Good	Bad	Gap
Kenya	95	3	71	22	+24
Ivory Coast	93	4	78	15	+15
Ghana	93	5	76	17	+17
Senegal	90	5	52	26	+38
Mali	88	6	59	30	+29
Nigeria	86	9	45	34	+41
Tanzania	82	8	28	56	+54
Uganda	81	8	57	31	+24
Ethiopia	73	21	28	59	+45
South Africa	52	24	54	9	-2

Cultural influence abroad comprises also a very important part of soft power and a significant manifestation of it as well. A big country with a culture bearing the marks of amicability and friendliness can exert certain influence on other countries’ cultures or even influence on the progress of humankind. Cultural exchange with other countries is an effective way to build up a country’s national image and step up its soft power. After the 1950s when China and African countries established diplomatic ties, culture played a very important role in promoting Sino-African relations. Up until the present time, China has entered into 65 cultural agreements and signed over 150 implementing plans of those agreements with African countries; more than 50 official cultural delegations and 170 various art groups have paid visits to Africa countries<sup>6</sup>. In 2004, China held an activity titled “Chinese Culture in Africa”, which involved organizing four art groups to perform and three art exhibitions to be displayed in African countries. This activity promoted Chinese culture and did a lot to enhance its appeal to African countries. In the new century, China began to establish Confucius Institutes in some African countries to promote the spread of Chinese culture. In August 2005, the first Confucius Institute in Africa was founded in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. Already about 50 Confucius

Institutes (including Confucius Classes) have been established in African countries.

Idea innovation is another manifestation of the charm of Chinese culture. To enhance soft power and shape a good national image, a nation should put forward values and political ideas conforming to the tide of the era, and hold its own viewpoints concerning international peace, development and the common interest of all humankind. At present, the notions of “peaceful rising” and “harmonious world”, which were welcomed by the African countries at the Beijing Summit of FOCAC in 2006, can best illustrate China’s innovation in ideas. Just as the Chinese government says, China will fulfill its development in a peaceful way and at the same time promote the long-lasting peace and common development of the whole world. In our view, this is a pledge made by the Chinese government to the world. The 2014 Pew Global Attitudes Project indicates that Chinese influence is perceived to be growing more than that of the United States, and that China’s influence is perceived in many cases as more positive<sup>7</sup>.

In an age of global interdependence, international or regional multilateral mechanisms constitute a platform for a nation to show its national image. This is an efficient way to build up a country’s good image and improve its international position and influence through active participation in the multilateral mechanism. Since the policy of reform and opening-up, China has tried to enter the international system and regional system and participate in international and regional affairs through multilateral diplomacy. At the international level, China participates in a more active and responsible way in the work of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and promotes UN reform; it successfully entered the WTO and plays an important role at present; and it attempts to constructively communicate with the Group of Eight. At the regional level, it actively promotes APEC integrity; it endeavors to propel the establishment and development of a China-ASEAN free trade zone; it promotes the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); and it has successfully established an all-round strategic partnership with the EU.

Multilateralism has become an important strategy and form of diplomacy for China, and the Chinese government seems to have realized that the practice of multilateral diplomacy is an important way to deal with foreign relations. For instance, China has begun to apply the multilateral cooperation mechanism to its foreign relations with

<sup>5</sup>中国国际关系学会主编：《国际关系史·第十一卷（1980-1989）》世界知识出版社2004年版，第414-415页

<sup>6</sup>罗建波：《构建中国崛起的对外文化战略》，载《现代国际关系》2006年第3期，第27-32页

<sup>7</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 27, 2014, pp. 44–46, <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/256.pdf>.

African countries and evidence shows this to be an efficient way to step up its soft power in Africa. This mechanism is illustrated by the following examples:

1. *China and African countries initiated FOCAC, a new pattern of cooperation which indicates China's special position and responsibility as a big power;*

2. *Under the UN framework, China in cooperation with the UN nations supports peace and development of African countries in a responsible way. As the only developing country of the five permanent members of the UNSC, China's responsibility lies first in protecting the interests of developing countries.*

So what challenges are to China's soft power in Africa? Because of geographical distance and limited historical relations, there is still a lack of cultural exchange between China and African countries. Most African people know about western civilization and Islamic civilization much better than that of Chinese civilization and this is predicted to be so for some time to come. There remains little existence of Chinese culture in Africa. On the contrary, western media is quite popular among people from African countries and through this media, western value systems and ways of living infiltrate into African culture. Influenced by European and American culture and public opinion, some Africans do not hold favorable attitudes towards China's fast development and reform, which results in prejudice against and misunderstanding of China's African policy. In this case, to build up soft power in Africa, China needs to conduct cultural diplomacy, so Africans can learn more about Chinese culture and build up a more favorable attitude. This will play an important role in further developing friendly Sino-African relations as will China's attempts to learn more about and respect African culture.

China's development mode to some degree is also questioned in Africa. Political differences concerning democracy and human rights are becoming more and more prominent. Since the 1990s, the practice of democratic reform and multi-party elections has been prevalent in most African countries and their political and economic systems have undergone great changes. These changes are different from China's political system and operation. Most of the new-generation of leaders of African countries were educated in western countries, therefore, they identify a great deal with the western notions of democracy, human rights, freedom, and good governance. In the increasingly active African civil society, China's political system and foreign policy in Africa is criticized for ignoring democracy, human rights and good governance,

among which the most often cited concern is China's close relations with Sudan and Zimbabwe<sup>8</sup>.

These increasing frictions in Sino-African trade impacts the mutual benefits brought forth by the economic and trade cooperation between the two sides. Since 1965, China had maintained a surplus position in the trade with African countries. In the 1980s the trade imbalance got even worse. In recent years, the Chinese government has taken many measures to increase imports from Africa and the trade imbalance between the two sides has been gradually relieved. In 2014, Sino-African trade amounted to \$196.5 billion<sup>9</sup>. Although the volume of trade between the two sides is marching towards balance on the whole, China still maintains trade surplus to some degree with most African countries apart from some energy exporters such as Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Sudan, Libya, Mauritius, Gabon, Chad and Nigeria. Another concern of African countries is that the mass flow of China's cheap goods, especially textile products, into African markets may impact the growth of their manufacturing and lead to enterprise bankruptcy and unemployment. Countries including South Africa and Egypt have begun to adopt anti-dumping measures against Chinese products (especially textile products). For example, by the end of December 2007, the South African authorities have initiated 41 anti-dumping investigations on Chinese exports, 4 of which took place in 2007. South Africa is among those nations that most frequently subject Chinese exports to anti-dumping investigations.

The negative appraisals and opinions of some academics toward Sino-African relations further worsen the public opinion environment China is faced with. They assert that China helps Africa only to scramble for strategic resources for its own domestic economic development; that China's exploitation of African resources is neo-colonialism; that China's trade with Africa is typical mercantilism; that the increasing amount of Chinese commodities in Africa weakens the ability of African countries to adjust their economic structure and to improve their industry; and that China only focuses on economic gains and ignores democracy and human rights in African countries. Most westerners are not antagonistic to China. They show their concern about the Sino-African relationship to compel a rising China to shoulder its international responsibility and together with the international society promote good governance and development in Africa. However, some misperceptions, suspicions and mistakes in their arguments exist,

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Deng Bul, *Afro-Chinese Relations: Past, Present and Future*, Cape Town: SED Printing Solutions, 2007, pp.175

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.customs.gov.cn/publish/portal0/tab7841/module24699/info106309.htm>

and I argue that many of these academics do not understand China's Africa policy. Here is an example. In July 2008, Albert Bergesen, a sociology professor in Arizona University in America even termed China's diplomacy in Africa as "the new surgical colonialism"<sup>10</sup>.

So are there any ways to further step up China's Public Diplomacy in Africa? African countries are important allies for China and Africa is the stage from which China can step into the international society in a more significant way. In order to consolidate the Sino-African relationship, promote China's peaceful rising and its policy of harmonious development of the whole world, the Chinese government should figure out ways to optimize and strengthen its Public Diplomacy in Africa. Based on the above analysis, the writers hereby bring forth the following suggestions:

- *The Chinese government should formulate a comprehensive and coherent grand strategy of soft power buildup in Africa.* For quite a long time, the government has focused on hard power more than soft power. However, the components of national power and the evolution of international competition make it necessary for China to propel the innovation of strategic thinking and strengthen the construction of soft power. To be a truly great power, China should possess a great culture that other cultures respect and admire and should shoulder more global responsibility. Under these circumstances, China, when making its Africa policy, must attach greater attention to the spread of its culture, enhance the attractiveness of its development mode and shape a responsible national image in the process of promoting mutual benefit cooperation and common development of the two sides;

- *China should strengthen cultural diplomacy to expand its cultural influence in Africa.* On the one hand, China can receive more African students and hold more training classes and seminars related to African countries, so as to increase cooperation in the field of human resource development. China pledged at the 2006 Beijing Summit of FOCAC that China would endeavor to increase scholarship quotas for African countries from 2000 people per year to 4000 people per year before 2009. It is encouraging to see that the government plans to train 15,000 technological and administrative personnel for African countries from 2006-2009<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, China can help African countries study Chinese by building more Confucius Institutes and holding Chinese cultural exhibitions in Africa, thus strengthening its cultural appeal;

- *China should increase international promotion and awareness of its African policy to optimize its national image.* It is true that facts speak louder than eloquence. However, in the era of global information, only facts with promotion can meet the demands of the reality of international politics and the field of diplomacy. China needs to frame timing and meticulous propaganda maneuvers to publicize the essence of its Africa policy. Meanwhile, China should expose and condemn malicious slander from the international society and African countries. The Chinese government should carry out dialogue and communication with those who bear prejudice against China through official or civil channels;

- *China should make full play of public diplomacy to enhance understanding and recognition by African countries of China's Africa policy.* China, for a long time, has placed great emphasis on official cooperation with African countries while ignoring the perception of China by African society. China's diplomacy has neither reached far into African civil society nor the African NGOs which possess enormous influence on public opinion. Chinese enterprises and the government should make friends not only with African governments but also with the African people. Thus, based on the experience of long-term civil diplomacy, China should speed up formulating a public diplomacy strategy with Chinese characteristics. First, we need to promote China's successful development and improve Sino-African relations. China can invite influential public figures from African civil society and NGOs to attend meetings, seminars and training. Second, China should encourage Chinese scholars, reporters and NGOs to go to Africa. China's Africa Policy Files carefully designate, "in reply to the urgent demand of African countries for humanitarian aid, China encourages the Red Cross and other NGOs to conduct exchange and cooperation with those of African countries", "encourage and guide civil exchanges between the two sides, especially exchanges between the youth and women, so as to enhance mutual understanding, mutual trust and cooperation." On October 26, 2005, the Chinese government supported the establishment of the China Civil Organization for the Promotion of International Exchange. Under this framework, China began to explore ways to propel Chinese NGOs to go to Africa and deal directly with African NGOs. In 2005, China began to dispatch volunteers to Ethiopia and planned to dispatch 300 volunteers to Africa from 2007 to 2009. The Red Cross of China made 2007 "the Year of Africa" and carried out activities of donating to African countries. Civil diplomacy has played a key role in new China's foreign relations and the Chinese government

<sup>10</sup> Albert Bergesen, *The New Surgical Colonialism: China, Africa, and Oil*, Boston, 2008, pp. 73

<sup>11</sup> "Speech Delivered by Chairman Hu Jintao at Beijing Summit of FOCAC", *People Daily*, Nov. 5, 2006

should continue to take advantage of this kind of Track II diplomacy in the future.

- *Chinese enterprises, the government and the Chinese people should be more concerned about Africa's development and African people's livelihood in the process of Sino-African economic and trade cooperation so as to leave no handles which can be utilized by African countries to attack China.* The problems arising in economic and trade cooperation are mainly due to the misconduct of individual enterprises or belong to normal trade frictions. However, misconducts of some enterprises easily lead to misinterpretation of China's African policy and disparagement of China's image by the outside world. To solve this problem, the Chinese government needs to take long-term interests and reality into consideration and reconcile conflicts caused by trade frictions between the two sides through consultation. This needs to be explained in detail. First, the Chinese government should encourage its enterprises to facilitate local development and improve people's livelihood in the course of resource development and extraction. They should contribute to local environmental protection, education, health and sanitation. The Chinese government should enact laws and regulations to supervise and restrict the conduct of some enterprises. Second, based on the principle of common development, China should take steps to protect Africa's pillar industries such as the textile industry. In June 2006, when visiting South Africa, Premier Wen Jiabao declared that China was determined to take measures to restrict exporting quotas of textile products so as to help related African countries adjust the structure of textile industry and improve the competitive power of their own products. Third, China should encourage enterprises to increase investment in Africa to foster the national industries of African countries. Through investment in Africa, cooperation with African enterprises and local personnel training, China can help African countries develop their capability to produce, promote diversification of their export products, and enhance their self-development. For that, China proclaimed in 2006 that it would build 3-5 economic and trade cooperation zones in Africa. The first one was founded in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, on February 4, 2007<sup>12</sup>. Its purpose is, through copper mining, smelting and processing, to bring along the development of Zambia's machinery, light industry, construction material and household appliances and improve its processing and exporting capabilities;

- *China should pay more attention to dialogues and consultations with African countries concerning democracy and human rights to enhance mutual political trust.* Frankly speaking, it is really a tough job at present to wipe ideological differences between the two sides. However, it is still possible to further the total diplomacy of both sides through regular and multi-level dialogues. China should convey such information to Africa that democracy, freedom and equality is the direction of the whole of human society, and explain how China is embarking on the construction of socialist democracy and committing itself to a democratic, just, equal and harmonious society. China is undoubtedly in accordance with African countries in pursuing good governance despite the differences of political systems and focus on human rights and democracy. Efforts should be made to promote the idea that China is striving to support African countries to realize political stability, economic development, social harmony and good governance and to improve the ability of the state to manage its affairs. This conforms to the will of the African people and does not conflict with western countries' Africa policies. As to the Darfur issue in Sudan, efforts should be made to show China's active role as a mediator. China urged the Sudanese government to accept the three-step peacekeeping scheme put forward in November 2006 by Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General. After the Sudanese government agreed to accept it in principle, China further promoted the UNSC to adopt unanimously Resolution 1769 deploying in Darfur a mixed peacekeeping force of 26,000 soldiers by UN and AU on July 31, 2007. In October 2007, China took the lead in dispatching a force of 315 engineers to Darfur, the first force in this peacekeeping activity, to prepare for the deployment of mixed peacekeeping force<sup>13</sup>;

- *China should lay emphasis on coordination with the international society concerning diplomatic activities in Africa so as to enhance its diplomatic say on the international stage.* On the one hand, China should continue to cooperate with the UN, World Bank and other international organizations. China can strengthen the construction of infrastructure in African countries, support their rural economic development and personnel training, participate in the UN's peacekeeping activities in Africa, and help them realize the UN's Millennium Development Goals and fulfill the rejuvenation of Africa. On the other hand, China should also coordinate with the United States and European countries concerning some diplomatic activities in

<sup>12</sup> 中国红十字会：2007年援非行动拉开序幕，载《世界知识》2007年第10期

<sup>13</sup> Liu Hongwu, "The Promoter of Peace and Development", *People Daily*, September 25, 2007

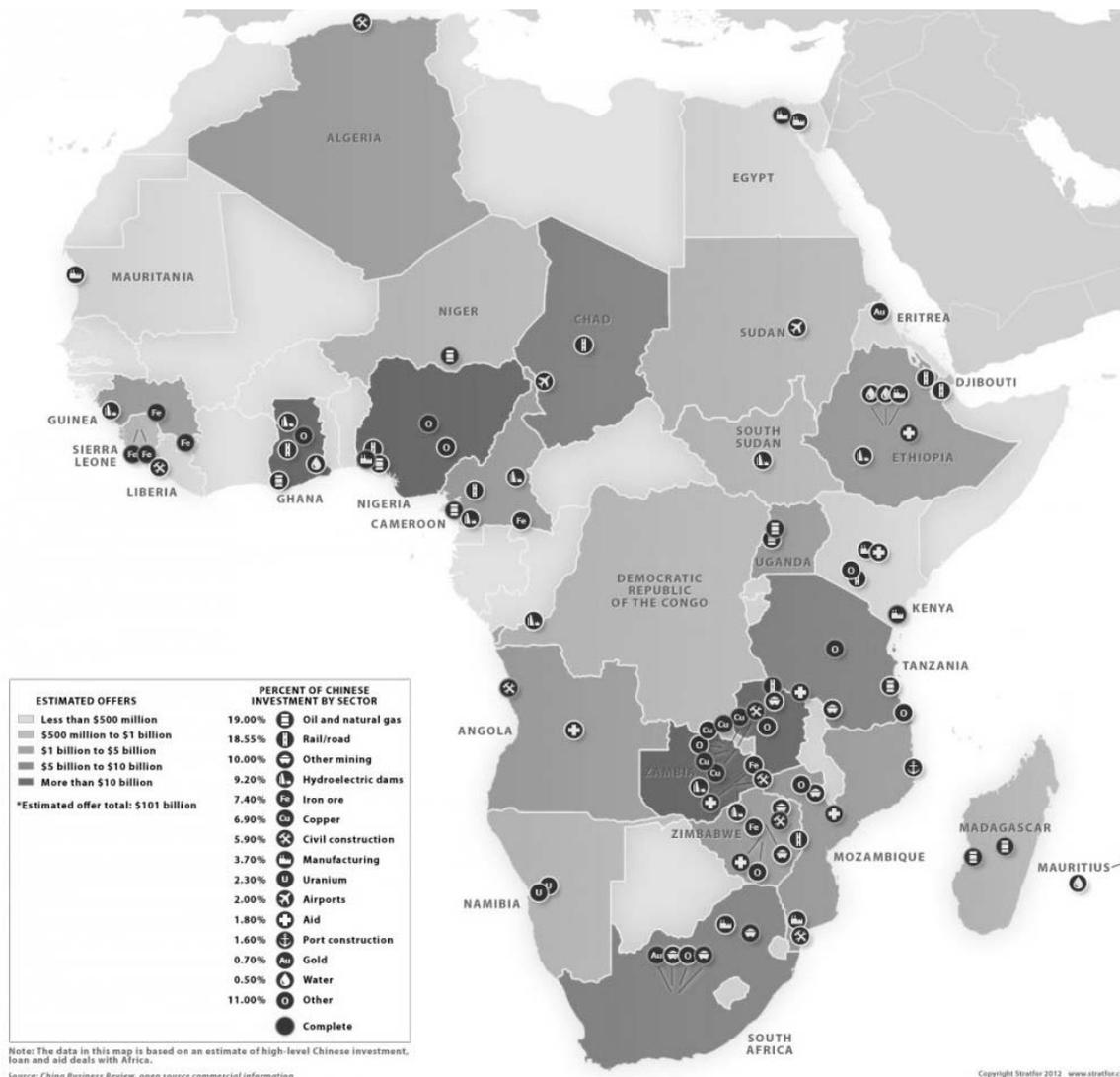
Africa. China should not ignore censures from western powers for its Africa policy, for those censures will increase cost and difficulty for China to build up its soft power in Africa and impact the smooth development of the Sino-African relationship. China needs to state clearly to the world that, although there exists certain competition with other powers in Africa, China does not bear any intention or the ability to crowd western countries out of the African market. China can have substantive talks with America and other western powers regarding humanitarian crisis (such as the Darfur issue in Sudan), and coordinate with them in aspects of oil and resource development. This kind of cooperation not only profits both China and the United States but also constitutes great benefit to the peace and development of Africa.

**Conclusion**

The optimization of China’s soft power lies not only in getting trusted by neighboring countries and western powers. As traditional strategic allies and increasingly important trade partners, African countries also play a key role in changing the

international political, economic and public opinion environment facing China. In the course of China’s peaceful rising, Africa constitutes a very important stage for China to expand its international influence and shape a responsible image. China’s political stance towards African countries should promote its political style and global responsibility. Accordingly, China should shape its national image and conduct soft power diplomacy from the strategic perspective of realizing its peaceful development and the harmonious coexistence of the whole world; as well as to propel innovation, and development forward and perfect the ways of diplomacy toward Africa in terms of the long-range development of the Sino-African relationship. In a word, China’s peaceful rising needs support from African countries and its expansion of international influence heavily relies on a more mature Sino-African relationship.

*China’s investment offers in Africa since 2010*



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