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THE ENERGY DIMENSION IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND ANGOLA

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Abstract. Energy profoundly shapes global politics and economic processes. This article examines the significance of energy in the evolving relationship between China and Angola, and evaluates the efficacy of this engagement. By comparing indicators across different periods of China's foreign policy, the study identifies a consistent increase in China's interest in the energy sector and a growing demand for imported resources. Angola possesses abundant natural resources and seeks to leverage these assets to stabilise its economic growth and expand international cooperation. Its withdrawal from OPEC has further intensified efforts to secure Chinese investment for modernising its oil infrastructure and refining capacity. This energy-centric cooperation is presented as mutually advantageous: Angola employs a strategy of securing Chinese finance, while China pursues a strategy of augmenting its geopolitical standing.

Keywords: energy security; Angola; China; Africa; petroleum industry; investment policy.

ЭНЕРГЕТИЧЕСКИЙ ФАКТОР В ОТНОШЕНИЯХ КИТАЯ И АНГОЛЫ

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Аннотация. Энергетический фактор непосредственно влияет на глобальную политику и мировые экономические процессы. Проанализирована значимость энергетического фактора в развитии отношений Китая и Анголы, сделаны выводы о результативности такого рода взаимодействия. При сравнении показателей за разные годы в пределах современного этапа внешней политики Китая обнаружен непрестанно растущий интерес Китая к сфере энергетики, запрос на ресурсы, ввозимые в страну из-за рубежа. В Анголе расположены богатые залежи природных ресурсов, которые, как показало исследование, она стремится использовать для стабилизации своего экономического роста и развития международного сотрудничества. Выход Анголы из ОПЕК сказался на повышении ее интереса к привлечению китайских инвестиций для развития национальной нефтяной промышленности и строительства нефтеперерабатывающих заводов. Сотрудничество в сфере энергетики является взаимовыгодным для обеих стран: Ангола использует стратегию привлечения китайского финансирования, Китай – стратегию усиления геополитического влияния.

Ключевые слова: энергетическая безопасность; Ангола; Китай; Африка; нефтяная промышленность; инвестиционная политика.

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Introduction

In international relations, the energy dimension refers to the establishment and evolution of bilateral and multilateral ties grounded in the mutual dependencies of resource-rich and resource-dependent states and their efforts to ensure energy security. Unevenly distributed energy resources among states directly influence their economic development trajectories. The international community recognises the critical importance of these resources in maintaining global economic stability. Consequently, energy considerations have become integral to global politics, shaping the nature of interstate relations.

Historically, access to energy resources and control over them have facilitated mutually beneficial cooperation, aligning national interests and fostering peaceful interaction. Conversely, competition for these same resources has, at times, precipitated military and political conflicts.

Amidst heightened global attention to the energy sector, states and international organisations are forging effective cooperative mechanisms. Key intergovernmental bodies include the International Energy Agency and the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). A notable example of informal yet influential governance is the International Energy Forum, headquartered in Riyadh, which facilitates dialogue between energy producers and consumers to harmonise global policy. By the turn of the 21st century, the regula-

tory responsibilities of oil-exporting states had evolved into formalised obligations under international frameworks.

The Global energy review – 2025 observes that «global energy demand grew by 2.2 % in 2024 – faster than the average rate over the past decade. Demand for all fuels and technologies expanded in 2024. The increase was led by the power sector as electricity demand surged by 4.3 %, well above the 3.2 % growth in global GDP, driven by record temperatures, electrification and digitalisation. Renewables accounted for the largest share of the growth in global energy supply (38 %), followed by natural gas (28 %), coal (15 %), oil (11 %) and nuclear (8 %)»^{1*}. These figures clearly illustrate the ever-rising global demand for energy resources.

As a leading global economy, China requires stable and abundant energy supplies to sustain its high rates of economic growth. According to early 2025 data, China is the world's largest importer of crude oil. To fuel its industrial development, China must establish partnerships with other nations to secure essential energy imports.

Angola, Africa's second-largest oil exporter after Nigeria, has become a key partner for China. Given the large number of Chinese-led development programmes contributing to Angola's economy, extensive Sino-Angolan energy cooperation warrants particular academic attention.

Materials and methods

This research draws upon pertinent academic literature from both Belarusian and international political scientists. Specifically, contributions from J. I. Malevich [1], Z. R. Bitieva, N. R. Tanov and I. E. Katkov [2], Yu. V. Borovskii [3; 4], among others, address the significance of energy resources in global politics. The works of these scholars examine various dimensions of energy within international relations, including its impact on the bilateral interactions of individual states. J. I. Malevich investigated the role of energy in Sino-Iranian relations, highlighting the significance of Middle Eastern resource transport for China's energy security. Z. R. Bitieva explored the potential for energy resources to act as influential factors in global politics. Furthermore, Yu. V. Borovskii's publications offer a thorough analysis of international rivalry in the energy sector, illustrating current trends in the modern energy market with specific examples. Despite this body of work, a systematic study of energy's role in Chinese-Angolan relations by Belarusian and international political scientists is notably absent. This research gap underscores the relevance of the present study.

This study draws upon official materials, statistical data, and statements from Chinese and Angolan re-

presentatives regarding energy cooperation. An examination of documents from specialised international organisations also contributes to an objective and comprehensive analysis of the topic.

Several political science methodologies were employed. Content analysis was utilised to examine trends in China's energy sector export and import indicators, and materials from official speeches by Chinese and Angolan representatives were studied. An institutional approach guided the incorporation of data from international energy organisations and provided insight into the main areas of work of these and other international bodies. A value-normative perspective was partially adopted to discern China's underlying principles in its energy cooperation with Angola. The findings suggest that such cooperation is not designed to exploit Angola's resources for China's exclusive benefit. Rather, it aims to foster mutually advantageous relations that benefit both countries and potentially the wider African region.

This article aims to determine the significance of the energy dimension in the evolving relationship between China and Angola.

^{1*}Global energy review-2025. Key findings [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-energy-review-2025/key-findings> (date of access: 11.03.2025).

Results and discussion

Professor Yu. V. Borovskii, head of the department of international relations and foreign policy at MGIMO University, observes that «energy issues are an integral part of modern international relations, as reflected in theoretical debates regarding the nature and role of energy in world politics» [4, p. 86]. He then raises a fundamental question regarding international energy relations: are they primarily driven by national interests and power balances, inherently leading to conflict, or can interdependence within global energy markets foster non-confrontational, mutually beneficial cooperation among all actors [4, p. 86–87]? In practice, establishing relations between states on the basis of shared interests in energy resource supply can both foster long-term positive dynamics and serve as a mechanism for containment and maintaining the balance of power at regional and global levels.

Africa's expanding role in global energy markets reflects its economic resurgence, partly fuelled by oil sector growth and petroleum exports. The African energy chamber's «State of African energy – 2025 outlook» projects that «Africa is expected to contribute about 8 % to the global oil supply in 2025», a figure indicative of sustained growth in both its regional output and its contribution to global production^{2*}.

Chinese-Angolan energy cooperation offers a compelling example of productive, mutually beneficial interaction. In recent years, China has prioritised infrastructure development in overseas oil extraction and transport, with projects like the China – Central Asia gas pipeline demonstrating tangible outcomes. Official data reveal that over 14 years, this pipeline supplied over 500 bln m³ of natural gas to China. By substituting 666 mln tonnes of coal, the project reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 731 mln tonnes^{3*}.

Statistical data from 2013 show that in 2012, China produced 204 mln tonnes of oil, imported 280 mln tonnes, and exhibited 58 % of an external dependence rate of approximately^{4*}.

According to the National Energy Administration, China's combined crude oil and natural gas produc-

tion exceeded 400 mln tonnes of oil equivalent for the first time in 2024, with crude oil production reaching 213 mln tonnes – an increase of 24 mln tonnes from 2018 levels^{5*}. As the world's largest crude oil importer, China received 11.1 mln barrels per day (b/d) in 2024, a slight decrease from 11.3 mln b/d in 2023^{6*}. These evolving statistics underscore China's escalating focus on the energy sector and its rising demand for imported resources.

Angola possesses substantial natural resource endowments, which it aims to leverage to foster economic stability and enhance international cooperation. The nation holds abundant untapped oil and gas resources^{7*}, with proven crude oil reserves estimated at 9 bln barrels and proven natural gas reserves at 11 trln ft³. These extensive reserves position Angola as a significant participant in global economic affairs.

Since joining the OPEC in 2007, Angola has aligned its national oil production policy with the organisation's principles and standards. This membership entailed responsibility for ensuring stable oil supplies to numerous countries worldwide. The OPEC Statute articulates its primary objectives: «The principal aim of the Organisation shall be the coordination and unification of the petroleum policies of member countries and the determination of the best means for safeguarding their interests, individually and collectively»; furthermore, «the organisation shall devise ways and means of ensuring the stabilisation of prices in international oil markets with a view to eliminating harmful and unnecessary fluctuations»^{8*}. Angola endeavoured to uphold these guidelines, coordinating its oil policy with fellow OPEC nations.

However, by late 2023, Angola expressed dissatisfaction with OPEC's production quotas and subsequently withdrew from the organisation. When questioned about potential implications for Chinese-Angolan relations at a press conference on 22 December 2023, Wang Wenbin, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, stated: «China is committed to practical cooperation with Angola in various fields on the basis of equality and mutual benefit»^{9*}. Through this statement, China affirmed its

^{2*} Angola and Nigeria to lead Africa's oil output growth by 2025 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://furtherafrica.com/2025/01/14/angola-and-nigeria-to-lead-africas-oil-output-growth-by-2025/> (date of access: 03.03.2025).

^{3*} China – Central Asia pipeline delivers over 500 bln m³ of natural gas [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20241119/ee87dc0ad84a408b995856140aea1086/c.html> (date of access: 12.03.2025) (in Russ.).

^{4*} China is becoming the world's largest oil importer [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://russian.people.com.cn/95181/8184336.html> (date of access: 12.03.2025) (in Russ.).

^{5*} China's oil and gas production exceeds 400 mln tonnes for the first time [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20250128/7b014e1a54df4ae9a830bdbc1aa82fe/c.html#:~:text=Добыча%20нефти%20и%20газа%20в%20Китае%20впервые%20превысила%20400%20млн%20тонн,-2025-01-28&text=Объем%20добычи%20сырой%20нефти%20в,лет%20превысил%2013%20млрд%20кубометров> (date of access: 12.03.2025) (in Russ.).

^{6*} China's crude oil imports decreased from a record as refinery activity slowed [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.eia.gov/to-dayinenergy/detail.php?id=64544#> (date of access: 12.03.2025).

^{7*} Angola country commercial guide [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/angola-oil-and-gas> (date of access: 19.03.2025).

^{8*} OPEC Statute [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/media/downloads/publications/OPEC_Statute.pdf (date of access: 19.03.2025).

^{9*} Another press conference on 22 December 2023 held by the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Wang Wenbin [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/rus/mtfw/ce_cgw_chn/lxjzhzhdh/202312/t20231224_11210191.html (date of access: 23.03.2025) (in Russ.).

position on future energy cooperation, without directly associating Angola's departure from OPEC with the ongoing development of bilateral relations in the energy sector.

Official statistics for the first three quarters of 2024 indicate Angola's average daily oil production reached 1.134 mln barrels, a 4 % year-on-year increase. This rise followed Angola's withdrawal from the OPEC on 21 December 2023, and surpassed its OPEC production quota of 1.11 mln b/d^{10*}. Angola sought to further boost its oil output. However, this ambition has been constrained by ageing infrastructure and insufficient modernisation of production facilities, limiting Angola's potential to sustain its status as a major oil exporter. Foreign investment in the hydrocarbon sector remains critical, without international partnerships, Angola will struggle to maintain its significant position in global oil markets regardless of its OPEC status.

In February 2024, P. Jeronimo, chairman of the board of directors of the National Agency for Oil, Gas and Biofuels, announced a planned 71 bln US dollars investment in Angola's petroleum sector between 2024 and 2028. He stated that the industry had attracted nearly 50 bln US dollars in the previous five-year period, and projections for 2024–2028 indicated approximately 71 bln US dollars in forthcoming investments, excluding additional capital for enhancing production at existing fields^{11*}. Such pronouncements signal a clear intent from the Angolan leadership to continue developing the nation's oil economy.

The growth of energy cooperation between China and Angola directly correlates with the strengthening of their political relationship. Political dialogue and discussions about cooperative prospects across various domains have continued since diplomatic relations were established in 1983. Economic ties have expanded alongside increasing political trust. During a state visit to China in March 2024, Angolan President Joao Lourenco and Chinese President Xi Jinping elevated bilateral relations to a comprehensive strategic cooperation and partnership^{12*}. Xi Jinping characterised Chinese-Angolan cooperation as «South–South cooperation and cooperation among developing countries, mutual assistance between good friends, [and] mutual benefit and win-win cooperation»^{13*}.

In August 2023, the second meeting of the Steering Committee on China – Angola Economic and Trade Cooperation was held in Luanda, Angola. Wang Wentao, Chinese commerce minister, said that «under the strategic guidance of the leaders of China and Angola, fruitful results have been achieved in economic and trade cooperation between the two countries. China is willing to work with Angola to formulate a strategy for the next stage of bilateral economic and trade cooperation, expand the scope of trade and investment cooperation, consolidate the achievements in the infrastructure partnership, and intensify cooperation in sectors such as energy, mining, manufacturing, agriculture and fisheries»^{14*}.

Angola continues to welcome Chinese investment in its oil industry. At the 2024 Angola–China business forum on oil, gas, mineral resources and agriculture, President Joao Lourenco underscored this, stating: «We are building in Lobito the largest oil refinery that will have an associated important petrochemical industry, and Chinese entrepreneurs are invited to invest in this major project as shareholders from this construction phase»^{15*}. An agreement for the joint implementation of this Lobito project was reached in 2023, with reports indicating that Angola would contract China National Chemical Engineering Co. (CNCEC) for the 6 bln US dollars plant^{16*}. Diamantino Azevedo, Angola's minister of mineral resources, petroleum and gas, later confirmed that «the processing capacities of the Lobito refinery remain at 200 000 barrels per day and the estimated cost of the investment is around 6 bln US dollars», following a meeting between Joao Lourenco and CNCEC chairman Wen Gang^{17*}. At the same forum, Joao Lourenco also expressed a broader aspiration: «We want [China] to cooperate with us in the process of transforming Angola into a prosperous and modern country, capable of providing its people the best living conditions»^{18*}.

The Lobito oil refinery represents a critical component of Angola's energy sector. This facility in Benguela province is projected to process up to 200 thsd b/d upon completion. According to the proposed corporate structure, private investors will hold a 70 % share, while the state oil company «Sonangol» will control the remaining 30 %. Beyond Lobito, Angola is also constructing two new refineries in Cabinda and Soyo and is refurbishing and expanding the existing Luanda refinery. The nation targets

^{10*} One year after OPEC exit, Angola's oil production sees modest growth [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://english.news.cn/africa/20250101/b6c419fa236447fc9e5392b6e9059648/c.html> (date of access: 25.03.2025).

^{11*} Angola to invest over 70 bln US dollars in oil sector over next five years [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/20098497> (date of access: 23.03.2025) (in Russ.).

^{12*} Xi Jinping holds talks with Angolan president, upgrades bilateral relations to comprehensive strategic cooperation partnership [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://russian.people.com.cn/n3/2024/0318/c31521-20145890.html> (date of access: 23.03.2025) (in Russ.).

^{13*} Ibid.

^{14*} China and Angola held a meeting on economic and trade cooperation [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20230814/d9e9f5edb1c648daa887c6501f925164/c.html> (date of access: 23.03.2025) (in Russ.).

^{15*} PR spells out at the Angola–China business forum [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://namibia.mirex.gov.ao/web/noticias/pr-discursos-no-forum-de-negocios-angola-china> (date of access: 25.03.2025).

^{16*} China National Chem to build Angola's \$6 billion Lobito refinery [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-19/china-national-chem-wins-angola-deal-to-build-lobito-refinery?srnd=premium-africa> (date of access: 28.03.2025).

^{17*} Ibid.

^{18*} PR spells out at the Angola–China business forum [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://namibia.mirex.gov.ao/web/noticias/pr-discursos-no-forum-de-negocios-angola-china> (date of access: 25.03.2025).

an overall local processing capacity of 360 thsd b/d^{19*}. Based on Joao Lourenco's statements, these refineries are intended to stimulate Angola's economic growth, attract Chinese investment, and strengthen Chinese-Angolan cooperation in the energy sector.

In a shifting international environment, Angola's strategic emphasis on energy within its dialogue with China brings clear advantages. Given China's reliance on external oil supplies, Angola can leverage its energy resources to sustain engagement with Beijing. This foundation of amicable and reciprocal energy relations can then be extended to other domains. China prioritises stability when fostering cooperation with foreign nations. Indeed, L. Corkin observes in the journal «Re-

vista Brasileira de Política Internacional» that stability, as a precondition for economic growth, underpins China's development strategy both at home and internationally [5, p. 54].

For Beijing, Angola has emerged as a significant African partner. Contemporary China, under Communist Party governance, considers Africa a significant priority within its multidirectional foreign policy framework. The party's effectiveness in establishing broad international contacts has significantly strengthened China's relationships with partner countries. By advocating for peaceful, reciprocal partnerships, China has demonstrated a commitment to equitable international relations and mutually advantageous cooperation [6, p. 230].

Conclusions

The energy dimension remains central to global economic and political strategies, with states increasingly recognising their role in shaping international finance and trade. This analysis reveals that Chinese-Angolan energy relations are reciprocal, with dialogue founded on principles of equality. China's investment in Angola's oil industry not only secures energy supplies but also enhances its strategic presence across the African continent.

Analysing this partnership (between a rising global power and a resource-endowed African state addressing socio-economic challenges) reveals clear synergies.

China gains stable energy access and broader diplomatic support, while Angola accelerates economic growth through infrastructure development and strategic alliances.

Since withdrawing from OPEC, Angola has demonstrated a heightened interest in attracting Chinese investment to develop its national oil sector, including the construction of refineries. This energy cooperation appears mutually advantageous: Angola seeks to secure Chinese financing for these developments, while China aims to strengthen its geopolitical standing through this engagement.

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^{19*} Angola seeks investors for 200 000 bpd Lobito refinery [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.africanews.com/2021/07/12/angola-seeks-investors-for-200-000-bpd-lobito-refinery/> (date of access: 28.03.2025).