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THE EVOLUTION OF CHINA'S APPROACH TO AFRICA: TOWARDS A COMMUNITY WITH A SHARED FUTURE FOR MANKIND

AN NAN^a

^aBelarusian State University, 4 Niezaliezhnasci Avenue, Minsk 220030, Belarus

Abstract. This article examines the historical evolution of China's engagement with African states and its progression towards building a community with a shared future for mankind. The analysis focuses on two main questions: how China's approach to Africa has changed over time, and how the shared future vision has been advanced in practice on the continent. The study identifies four stages in the evolution of China – Africa relations: political support and assistance, economic cooperation and joint development, institutionalised cooperation, and the current focus on building of China – Africa community with a shared future. The article further shows that this vision has been advanced in Africa primarily through regional China – Africa cooperation and only subsequently through bilateral relations. This process has already produced substantial results in the political, economic and social spheres. Ultimately, the movement of China and Africa towards a shared future represents an important practical contribution to the consolidation of the Global South and to strengthening its role in global governance.

Keywords: China – Africa relations; evolution of the China's approach to Africa; community with a shared future for mankind; Forum on China – Africa cooperation; Global South.

ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ПОДХОДОВ КИТАЯ К ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЮ СО СТРАНАМИ АФРИКИ: НА ПУТИ К ПОСТРОЕНИЮ СООБЩЕСТВА ЕДИНОЙ СУДЬБЫ ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСТВА

АНЬ НАНЬ¹⁾

¹⁾Белорусский государственный университет, пр. Независимости, 4, 220030, г. Минск, Беларусь

Аннотация. Рассматривается эволюция форм взаимодействия Китая со странами Африки. Анализируется способ последовательного развития данного процесса для построения сообщества единой судьбы человечества. Выделяются следующие основные направления в данной сфере: трансформация подходов Китая к взаимодействию со странами Африки и практика продвижения построения сообщества единой судьбы человечества в африканском регионе. В результате исследования устанавливается, что китайско-африканское взаимодействие прошло четыре ключевых этапа: этап политической поддержки и помощи, этап экономического сотрудничества и совместного развития, этап институционализации сотрудничества, этап формирования китайско-африканского сообщества единой судьбы. Определяется, что продвижение концепции сообщества единой судьбы человечества в Африке реализуется преимущественно через развитие китайско-африканского взаимодействия на региональном уровне с последующим распространением на двусторонние отношения (таким образом были получены положительные результаты

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Автор:

Ань Нань – аспирантка кафедры международных отношений факультета международных отношений. Научный руководитель – кандидат политических наук, доцент И. А. Чувилов.

Author:

An Nan, postgraduate student at the department of international relations, faculty of international relations.
ann21471@gmail.com

в политической, экономической и гуманитарной сферах). Делается вывод о том, что стремление Китая и стран Африки к построению сообщества единой судьбы человечества представляет собой важную практику консолидации стран Глобального Юга и их совместного участия в глобальном управлении.

Ключевые слова: китайско-африканские отношения; эволюция подходов Китая к взаимодействию в Африке; сообщество единой судьбы человечества; Форум китайско-африканского сотрудничества; Глобальный Юг.

Introduction

The concept of a «community with a shared future for mankind» has become a central element of China's contemporary foreign policy. It is presented as a model of global governance that differs from traditional Western-centred approaches. The concept emphasises extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. By advocating a more equitable and rational international order, it has found particular resonance among states of the Global South.

As a priority region in China's foreign policy, Africa plays an important role in the practical realisation of this vision. At the 2024 Beijing summit of the Forum on China – Africa cooperation (FOCAC), Xi Jinping announced that China's bilateral relations with all its African diplomatic partners would be elevated to the level of strategic partnership. He also stated that China – Africa relations would be raised to the level of an all-weather community with a shared future in the new era¹. This was the first time China had elevated the concept to the continental level and framed it in terms of «all-weather» cooperation.

Solidarity and cooperation with Africa have long been priorities of China's foreign policy. Since the Bandung conference in the mid-1950s, China – Africa engagement has deepened steadily.

Four broad stages can be identified in this evolution: 1) political support and economic assistance; 2) economic cooperation and joint development; 3) institutionalised engagement; 4) the building of a China – Africa community with a shared future.

This historical trajectory reflects not only changes in China's broader strategic outlook but also shifts in the global political and economic order and Africa's growing demand for deeper engagement with Beijing.

In Belarusian scholarship, dedicated studies of China – Africa relations remain limited. Existing work addresses China's foreign policy strategy, its engagement with African states and international organisations, and the shared future concept. For example, R. O. Yesin and O. P. Rubo note that the building of a China – Africa community with a shared future in the new era is becoming an increasingly important strategic direction for Beijing [1]. J. I. Malevich examines the early stage of China – Africa cooperation [2], while O. P. Rubo analyses the mechanisms of China's engagement with the African Union in multilateral formats [3]. I. A. Chuvilov, in turn,

offers a broader assessment of the shared future concept within contemporary Chinese foreign policy strategy [4]. A. V. Selivanov emphasises Africa's importance for Belarus' own international cooperation, underlining the need for deeper regional expertise [5, p. 22]. Other scholars, including A. M. Baichorov [6] and Jiang Yumeng [7], explore various aspects of China's strategy in Africa and provide essential context for the present study.

Chinese scholarship on China – Africa relations is more extensive and systematic. Li Anshan, a leading specialist in the field, argues that China's policy in Africa is integral to its global strategic positioning [8, p. 52]. Zhang Zhongxiang offers a systematic interpretation of the China – Africa shared future framework [9, p. 224]. Meanwhile, Zhang Ying and Pan Jingguo compare Chinese and Western approaches to humanitarian aid in Africa in order to highlight the distinctive features of the China – Africa model [10].

African scholars have also devoted considerable attention to the subject, often from a more critical perspective. Ghanaian researchers N. K. Nkrumah and D. D. Kipo-Sunyehzi analyse China – Africa engagement through the lens of South – South cooperation and observe that structural imbalances persist despite significant developmental potential [11]. R. Aidoo from Ghana and S. Hess from the United States examine the evolution of Beijing's principle of non-interference in Africa and conclude that it has gradually adapted to complex local political realities [12]. In addition, a volume edited by A. Oqubay from Ethiopia and J. Yifu Lin from China brings together African, Chinese and Western perspectives on China's role in Africa's economic transformation [13].

Although the existing literature provides a solid theoretical foundation, most studies focus on specific aspects or sectors. What remains lacking is a comprehensive account of how China's overall approach to engagement with Africa has evolved over time.

This article seeks to address that gap by systematising the main stages of this evolution and analysing, from a political science perspective, the practical implementation of the shared future concept across the African continent.

More specifically, the article aims to identify the principal stages in the evolution of China – Africa engagement and to examine the regional and bilateral practices through which this vision has been advanced.

¹Main speech by Chairman Xi Jinping at the opening ceremony of the China – Africa forum in Beijing (full text) // Ministry of National Defence of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: https://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/sy/tt_214026/16336248.html (date of access: 20.03.2026) (in Chin.).

Results

A retrospective analysis of China – Africa relations reveals four main stages. The first stage (1955–1978) was defined by political support and economic assistance. During this period, China's cooperation with African states focused primarily on supporting national liberation movements in Asia and Africa, consolidating the sovereignty of newly independent states, and providing economic and technical assistance within its limited means.

In the early years of the People's Republic of China, the country faced diplomatic isolation as a result of Western containment policies. Strengthening solidarity and cooperation with African states therefore became an important priority of Chinese foreign policy. Africa, meanwhile, was undergoing the rapid collapse of the colonial order, and newly independent states faced the urgent tasks of consolidating statehood and advancing economic development. Under these conditions, China and African states gradually developed political ties grounded in shared experiences of anti-colonial struggle and resistance to external pressure.

The 1955 Asian-African conference in Bandung (Indonesia) is widely regarded as the starting point of modern China – Africa relations [14, p. 279]. There, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai presented the five principles of peaceful coexistence: 1) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; 2) mutual non-aggression; 3) non-interference in internal affairs; 4) equality and mutual benefit; 5) peaceful coexistence [15, p. 27].

These principles became a cornerstone of Beijing's diplomacy. After the Asian-African conference, China's diplomatic ties with African countries expanded steadily. In May 1956, Egypt became the first African state to establish diplomatic relations with China. As decolonisation advanced across Africa in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, China had established official diplomatic relations with 41 of the 48 independent African states by the end of 1976 [16, p. 27].

Beijing's operational principles for engagement with Africa [15] also took clearer shape during this period. During Zhou Enlai's visits to African countries between December 1963 and February 1964, he set out the five principles guiding relations between China and African and Arab countries and the eight principles for China's foreign economic and technical assistance.

The five principles guiding relations between China and African and Arab countries included the following points:

- support for the peoples of Africa and the Arab world in their struggles against imperialism and colonialism and in their efforts to achieve and defend national independence;
- support for policies of peaceful neutrality and non-alignment;
- support for the aspirations of African and Arab peoples to achieve unity and solidarity along development paths of their own choosing;

- support for the peaceful resolution of disputes;
- affirmation of the sovereignty of African and Arab states and the inadmissibility of external interference.

The eight principles for China's foreign economic and technical assistance stated, among other things, that aid should be based on equality, oriented towards joint development, and free of political conditions [15, p. 28].

In 1974, Mao Zedong's three worlds theory explicitly placed Africa within the third world [17, p. 605], thereby underlining the strategic political significance of China – Africa relations. This framework provided an ideological basis for cooperation grounded in sovereignty and condition-free partnership.

China adhered to these principles consistently over an extended period. Between 1956 and 1977, China provided African states with economic assistance totalling more than 2.476 bln US dollars, approximately 58 % of its total foreign aid [18, p. 14], despite serious domestic economic difficulties.

The most emblematic project of this era was the Tanzania – Zambia Railway, which helped overcome the legacy of the colonial economic system and became a powerful symbol of solidarity and cooperation between China and African countries.

African states, in turn, provided crucial support for the restoration of the seat of the People's Republic of China in the UN and for the defence of China's core interests. Despite external pressure, many newly independent African countries repeatedly sponsored resolutions in the UN General Assembly calling for the restoration of China's legitimate rights. In October 1971, when the relevant resolution finally passed, 26 African states voted in favour, accounting for nearly a third of the supporting bloc. As Mao Zedong acknowledged, it was «the African brothers who helped China enter the UN» [19, p. 36].

China – Africa relations at this stage had several distinctive features. First, both sides developed a shared commitment to peaceful coexistence and to seeking common ground while reserving differences, which formed the diplomatic basis of the relationship. Second, political support was the core of cooperation: China – Africa relations rested on a shared political identity shaped by resistance to colonial domination and external pressure.

In sum, the early model of political support and economic assistance laid the groundwork for the later development of a China – Africa community with a shared future.

The second stage (1978–2000) was characterised by economic cooperation and joint development. As China deepened its reform and opening-up policy, and as most African countries consolidated their political independence, China – Africa cooperation increasingly focused on promoting economic development on both sides.

In 1983, on his visit to 11 African states, Premier Zhao Ziyang set out the four principles of China's economic

and technical cooperation with African countries: 1) equality and mutual benefit; 2) emphasis on practical results; 3) diversity of forms of cooperation; 4) joint development [15, p. 54].

These principles reflected China's adaptation of its approach to Africa under new domestic and international conditions and marked a shift from solidarity-driven assistance towards a stronger emphasis on mutual development.

During this period, China – Africa relations retained the tradition of mutual political support. On human rights issues in the UN, African states generally supported China's positions, reflecting broadly convergent approaches to international affairs. Between 1990 and 2001, during ten major diplomatic confrontations between China and the United States, African states formed Beijing's most reliable voting bloc [20, p. 36–38]. The deepening economic dimension of China – Africa relations did not displace political trust, rather, the two reinforced one another.

The ideological content that had been prominent in the first stage lost much of its earlier salience. Economic cooperation moved to the forefront, as reflected clearly in trade figures.

During this period, bilateral trade between China and African countries increased² from 0.78 bln US dollars in 1978 to 10.6 bln US dollars in 2000. This growth reflected the increasing emphasis on mutually beneficial economic cooperation, a reorientation that proved foundational for the later stages.

The third stage (2000–2013) centred on the institutionalisation of cooperation. The beginning of the 21st century saw an increasingly multipolar international system, which heightened Africa's need for coordinated collective action in the context of globalisation. China's cooperation with Africa expanded across multiple sectors, creating a need for a unified platform capable of coordinating increasingly complex political, economic and social initiatives.

The establishment of FOCAC in 2000 provided this institutional framework, moving China – Africa relations towards a more coordinated model.

In 2006, Beijing published its first policy paper on Africa, formally committing itself to a new type of strategic partnership across the continent. The document

set out the goal of building such a partnership on the basis of political equality and mutual trust, mutually beneficial economic cooperation, and cultural exchange and mutual learning³. Cooperation was no longer limited to traditional aid or trade. It increasingly took place through institutional platforms that coordinated activity across different fields. This improved the effectiveness of cooperation and helped move China – Africa relations towards a more comprehensive model.

FOCAC thus emerged as the principal platform for coordinating China – Africa cooperation and subsequently as the main vehicle through which the shared future vision was advanced.

The fourth and current stage (2013–2026) centres on the building of a China – Africa community with a shared future. Rooted in traditional Chinese philosophical ideas such as great unity and harmonious co-existence, the shared future concept was introduced internationally by Xi Jinping in a 2013 speech at MGIMO University in Russia⁴.

In the years that followed, the concept was further elaborated and applied at different levels of cooperation, including bilateral, subregional and regional formats.

Also in 2013, during a visit to Tanzania, Xi Jinping stated that China and African countries had always formed a community with a shared future. This formulation gave the idea more specific meaning in the context of China – Africa relations and presented it as a framework for regional cooperation. During the same period, Xi Jinping also articulated the core principles of China's Africa policy. These included the approach of «sincerity, real results, amity and good faith» and the idea of «upholding justice while pursuing shared interests, with priority given to justice»⁵. These formulations set out the foundations of China's contemporary Africa policy.

Within this framework, strategic ties continued to deepen. The 2015 FOCAC summit in Johannesburg established a comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership. The 2018 Beijing summit set the goal of building a closer China – Africa community with a shared future⁶. In 2024, the Beijing summit of FOCAC redefined China – Africa relations as an «all-weather China – Africa community with a shared future in a new era», thereby consolidating this vision as the strategic framework of China's Africa policy⁷.

²China – Africa economic and trade cooperation has achieved positive results, 2023 // Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: <https://m.mofcom.gov.cn/article/bg/200312/20031200158324.shtml> (date of access: 19.03.2026) (in Chin.).

³China's African policy // State Council of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2006/content_212161.htm (date of access: 20.03.2026) (in Chin.).

⁴Full text of Xi Jinping's speech at Moscow State Institute of International Relations // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/oz_678770/1206_679110/1209_679120/201303/t20130324_9337073.shtml (date of access: 20.01.2026) (in Chin.).

⁵Xi Jinping's speech at the Nyerere International Conference Centre in Tanzania (full text) // Ibid. URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/fz_677316/1206_678574/1209_678584/201303/t20130325_9325510.shtml (date of access: 10.03.2026) (in Chin.).

⁶China – Africa cooperation in the new era // State Council of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-11/26/content_5653540.htm (date of access: 10.03.2026) (in Chin.).

⁷On the Beijing declaration «On jointly building an all-weather China – Africa community with a shared future for the new era» (full text) // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202409/content_6972562.htm (date of access: 11.09.2025) (in Chin.).

This conceptual framing also functions as a response to external criticism. As cooperation has deepened, some outside observers have characterised China's presence in Africa in terms of neo-colonialism or unequal exchange. In this context, the China – Africa community with a shared future serves both as a policy concept and as a discursive framework through which Beijing defines the principles of its engagement. As T. L. Deitch notes, soft power plays an important role in shaping China's

international image and in responding to the notion of a «China threat» [21, p. 45].

Overall, the evolution of China's Africa policy mirrors China's broader transition from relative international isolation to a more active role in global governance. In pursuing a shared future with Africa, Beijing has moved beyond conventional bilateral and regional formats and increasingly frames its continental engagement as one of the foundations of a wider international order.

The practice of building a community with a shared future for mankind in Africa

Significant differences among states in levels of development, cultural traditions and foreign policy orientation make it necessary to advance the shared future vision gradually and strategically, taking regional and sectoral specificities into account. Chinese scholar Luo Jianbo argues that the most effective approach is to cultivate bilateral and regional partnerships first with states that already maintain stable and friendly ties with Beijing [22, p. 54]. This can generate a positive demonstration effect and encourage other states to join the process. In this sense, Africa, with its long record of stable and friendly cooperation with China, is one of the key regions for the practical implementation of this vision.

At the 2018 Beijing summit of FOCAC, Xi Jinping stated China's readiness to work with African peoples to build a closer China – Africa community with a shared future that could serve as a model for broader global efforts⁸. This position reflects Africa's high priority in China's foreign policy strategy.

However, managing relations with more than 50 highly diverse African states requires an institutional framework. A purely bilateral approach can be fragmented and vulnerable to external pressure. FOCAC therefore serves as the central coordinating mechanism. The 2024 Beijing summit's declaration of an all-weather community further confirmed Africa as the principal region in which this model is being implemented at the continental level⁹.

Against this regional backdrop, the shared future framework has also been extended to bilateral relations. As of 2026, China is developing bilateral engagement under this concept with a number of African states, including Egypt, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Senegal, the Republic of the Congo and Kenya.

In practical terms, these bilateral relationships take three main forms: 1) formal codification in official diplomatic documents, such as joint statements and action plans; 2) public declaration by heads of state at summits; 3) articulation at ministerial level or through diplomatic contacts [23, p. 2].

Strictly speaking, only the first category involves fully formalised bilateral relationships of this type, while the other two remain transitional. Given the rapid development of Chinese diplomacy in this area, however, these forms of cooperation may subsequently evolve into formally codified arrangements [23, p. 2].

According to this classification, Egypt falls into the third category. During the China – Egypt strategic dialogue in January 2020, the two foreign ministries expressed an intention to explore a bilateral shared future community¹⁰.

The other six countries belong to the first category, in which the relevant provisions are embedded in official diplomatic documents. For example, during Xi Jinping's visit to South Africa in August 2023, a joint statement formally committed the two sides to building a high-level China – South Africa community with a shared future¹¹.

In September 2024, China and Zimbabwe issued a Joint statement on further deepening and raising the level of the comprehensive strategic partnership and building a high-level China – Zimbabwe community with a shared future. The statement affirmed the goal of creating a model of cooperation in political relations, economic and trade ties, security, people-to-people exchanges and international cooperation. The parties also expressed their intention to promote modernisation and to contribute to the broader advancement of a shared

⁸On jointly building a community with a shared future and promoting common development – keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the 2018 Beijing summit of the Forum on China – Africa cooperation // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zyjh_674906/201809/t20180903_9870267.shtml (date of access: 21.03.2026) (in Chin.).

⁹On the Beijing declaration «On jointly building an all-weather China – Africa community with a shared future for the new era» (full text) // Ibid. URL: https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202409/content_6972562.htm (date of access: 21.03.2026) (in Chin.).

¹⁰Wang Yi and Egyptian foreign minister Shoukry jointly held the China–Egypt strategic diplomatic dialogue (full text) // Ibid. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjbzhd/202001/t20200109_360263.shtml (date of access: 10.03.2026) (in Chin.).

¹¹Joint statement of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa (full text) // Ibid. URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zyxw/202308/t20230823_11130465.shtml (date of access: 10.03.2026) (in Chin.).

future for mankind¹². China subsequently signed comparable joint statements with Nigeria, Senegal, the Republic of the Congo and Kenya¹³.

Even among formally codified bilateral relationships, differences in priorities and political positioning remain. Notably, in April 2025 China and Kenya published a Joint statement on building a model China – Africa community with a shared future in the new era of all-weather character, designating China – Kenya relations as a model for implementing the concept. This wording illustrates the flexibility with which the framework is applied in practice, adapted to the particular features of each bilateral relationship.

China's promotion of a China – Africa community with a shared future appears to follow a model in which regional cooperation is established first through FOCAC, with bilateral frameworks subsequently developing on that basis. This approach differs from China's promotion of a China – ASEAN community with a shared future, where bilateral relations served as the starting point for the subsequent development of regional cooperation. Nevertheless, both approaches are based on the principle of gradualism, ensuring that regional and bilateral levels of engagement remain interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

In operational terms, this vision is advanced through platforms such as FOCAC and the Belt and road initiative (BRI). African states have responded positively to the BRI. By the end of 2024, China had signed memorandums of understanding on BRI cooperation with 52 African countries and the African Union Commission¹⁴.

The outcomes of China – Africa cooperation and of the joint effort to build a shared future are visible in the political, economic and social spheres.

In the political sphere, high-level diplomatic exchanges and inter-party dialogue have deepened mutual

trust. Meetings between leaders address both bilateral relations and major international and regional issues, providing political support for cooperation at all levels. Inter-party and inter-parliamentary exchanges have also expanded. FOCAC continues to strengthen the partnership and promote comprehensive cooperation.

China's coordination with the African Union and subregional organisations such as Economic Community of West African States and Sudden Arrhythmia Death Syndrom Foundation has also deepened¹⁵. China and African states frequently coordinate positions within the UN, BRICS and the G20 in order to advocate the right to development, broader African representation and closer cooperation among countries of the Global South.

In the economic sphere, cooperation continues to advance. China has remained Africa's largest trading partner for 16 consecutive years since 2009. In 2024 according to data of Chinese ministry of commerce¹⁶, Chinese exports to Africa reached 178.8 bln US dollars, up 3.5 %, while imports from Africa reached 116.8 bln US dollars, up 6.9 %.

In investment, China's accumulated direct investment in Africa stood at 42.115 bln US dollars by the end of 2023, compared with 1.595 bln US dollars in 2005, representing an average annual growth rate of 27.43 %. China ranks among the leading developing-country investors in Africa, with more than 3000 Chinese enterprises operating on the continent¹⁷.

In infrastructure, Chinese companies have signed contracts in Africa worth more than 700 bln US dollars over the past decade, with completed works exceeding 400 bln US dollars¹⁸, covering transport, energy and social infrastructure. China also supports the development of industrial parks, the expansion of investment, and trade policy reform in order to advance industrialisation

¹²Joint statement of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Zimbabwe on further deepening and elevating the comprehensive strategic partnership and building a high-level China – Zimbabwe community with a shared future (full text) // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zyxw/202409/t20240904_11484698.shtml (date of access: 10.03.2026) (in Chin.).

¹³Joint statement of the People's Republic of China and the Federal Republic of Nigeria on establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership and building a high-level China – Nigeria community with a shared future (full text) // Ibid. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/1179_674909/202409/t20240904_11484700.shtml (date of access: 10.03.2026) (in Chin.); Joint statement of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Senegal on deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership and building a high-level China – Senegal community with a shared future (full text) // Ibid. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/1179_674909/202409/t20240904_11485222.shtml (date of access: 10.03.2026) (in Chin.); Joint statement of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of the Congo on deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership and building a high-level China – Congo community with a shared future (full text) // Ibid. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/1179_674909/202409/t20240906_11486777.shtml (date of access: 10.03.2026) (in Chin.); Joint statement of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kenya on building a model of an all-weather China – Africa community with a shared future for the new era (full text) // Ibid. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/1179_674909/202504/t20250424_11603289.shtml (date of access: 15.03.2026) (in Chin.).

¹⁴Report of the Advisory Committee of the Belt and road forum for international cooperation for 2025 // Ibid. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjbxw_new/202601/P020260128557870720024.pdf (date of access: 21.03.2026) (in Chin.).

¹⁵China – Africa cooperation in the new era // State Council of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-11/26/content_5653540.htm (date of access: 15.03.2026) (in Chin.).

¹⁶China has remained Africa's largest trading partner for 16 consecutive years // Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: https://www.mofcom.gov.cn/tj/sjtj/art/2025/art_74ba4ff41e634c20bafd5c99fd84e8f4.html (date of access: 21.03.2026) (in Chin.).

¹⁷Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment for 2023 // Ibid. URL: https://cif.mofcom.gov.cn/cif/html/upload/20240926142744007_2023%E5%B9%B4%E5%BA%A6%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%AF%B9%E5%A4%96%E7%9B%B4%E6%8E%A5%E6%8A%95%E8%B5%84%E7%BB%9F%E8%AE%A1%E5%85%AC%E6%8A%A5.pdf (date of access: 21.03.2026) (in Chin.).

¹⁸The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China held a press conference on trade, economic and development cooperation in the framework of the 2024 Beijing summit of the Forum on China – Africa cooperation // China International Development Cooperation Agency : website. URL: <https://www.cidca.gov.cn/20240820/8b994ec886c04a6f8a75218572fb63a3/c.html> (date of access: 20.03.2026) (in Chin.).

and strengthen African states' capacity for autonomous development.

To further expand access for African products to the Chinese market, a ministerial meeting in Changsha in June 2025 introduced an initiative granting zero-tariff treatment on 100 % of tariff lines for the 53 African states maintaining diplomatic ties with Beijing¹⁹.

In the humanitarian sphere, deepening societal ties provide the foundation for this new model of relations. China actively promotes educational and cultural exchange²⁰ through vocational training programmes, Luban workshops and Confucius institutes, the latter numbering 79 across 49 African countries as of October 2025. In public health, China – Africa cooperation has similarly evolved from traditional medical aid towards structural capacity-building. During the COVID-19 pandemic,

in addition to supplying vaccines and epidemic-control materials, China pledged to provide African states with 1 bln vaccine doses and supported the expansion of local production. China also announced ten health projects and the deployment of 1500 medical personnel and public health experts to Africa²¹. The designation of 2026 as the year of China – Africa people-to-people exchanges is intended to strengthen this cooperation further and broaden its social foundations.

Finally, the growing Chinese diaspora in Africa provides an additional source of grassroots momentum. Through everyday commercial and cultural interactions connected with the BRI, these communities build durable people-to-people networks, bridge cultural divides and strengthen the societal ties necessary for a shared future.

Conclusions

This article has systematically analysed the evolution of China's Africa policy alongside the practical implementation of the community with a shared future concept on the continent. It has identified four stages in this evolution: political support and economic assistance, economic cooperation and joint development, the institutionalisation of ties, and the contemporary drive towards a shared future. This progression reflects the deepening of China – Africa relations and suggests that, under current conditions, the community building project has become one of the central strategic orientations of their cooperation.

This trajectory is consistent with China's broader foreign-policy transformation. Moving from relative diplomatic isolation to a more active international role, Beijing has increasingly presented itself as a peaceful and responsible power committed to defending the interests of the Global South.

Building a community with a shared future for mankind is a long and complex process. China's relations with African states in this area are developing gradually. Regional cooperation within FOCAC constitutes the ini-

tial level, creating the conditions for the expansion of bilateral cooperation. Bilateral relations framed by this vision vary in scope and degree of formalisation, which demonstrates the flexibility of the concept in practice.

Ultimately, the joint Sino-African pursuit of a shared future represents an important strategy for consolidating the Global South and amplifying its voice in global governance. Further development of China – Africa engagement can therefore be expected across an expanding range of fields.

China's experience in Africa is also of interest to Belarus, which seeks to diversify the directions of its foreign policy. Belarus can make use of multilateral platforms, including those created with China's support, to deepen its engagement with African partners. For Belarusian ministries and other state institutions, it may be practically valuable to develop partnerships with African states gradually, drawing on existing experience of institutionalised cooperation through FOCAC. Belarus may also consider opportunities for trilateral cooperation with China in Africa. This would broaden its participation in cooperation among Global South states.

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