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Communist China's aid to africa 1956-1980

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CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

A survey of Communist China's aid policy to Africa during the past 25 years indicates that Communist China's aid activity in Africa above all pursued specific aims during different periods. It is subordinate to, and an instrument of, its global policy. Whenever Peking's foreign policy changes, its aid activity follows suit. During the period 1956-1965 the main objective of Peking's foreign policy was to break out of isolation that had been imposed by the West and the Soviet Union, in order to seek an unfettered diplomacy and to promote ideological progressiveness. Hence its aid efforts to Africa were significantly stepped up. The Great Cultural Revolution which erupted on the scene in 1966 brought about a major contraction of Peking's global diplomacy, with the exception of its involvement in Tanzania. Communist China's aid to African countries declined during the period 1966-1969. To cope with the crisis arising from the aftermath of the Great Cultural Revolution and the Sino-Soviet confrontation, Communist China's aid to Africa again increased by 1970. It is quite clear that African policy is an integral part of Peking's global policy, rather than constituting a separate policy. Hence, the importance of Africa is always determined by the context of Peking's

global considerations.

Peking's foreign policy objectives in Africa during the past 25 year could be classified into four categories: (1) to break out of isolation; (2) to win diplomatic recognition and a seat in the United Nations; (3) to promote Communism in Africa; (4) to build up its leadership in African states. Of the four objectives, Communist China has successfully achieved the first two by extending aid. It gained recognition by the majority of African countries, achieved the membership of the United Nations and became one of the five permanent members of the Security Council. Its international stature has greatly improved. However, Communist China's achievement of the last two objectives is comparatively limited due to the challenges it has faced from the Africans, the Soviet Union and the West. These challenges have impeded the Chinese Communist advances in Africa and circumscribed the effectiveness of Peking's aid.

The future of Communist China's aid towards Africa is a question worth exploring. To be able to grasp what this involves, it must be necessary first to understand Peking's foreign policy and its future attitude towards Africa.

Communist China's main objectives in the 1980s have

been spelt out by its leader Deng Xiaoping on various occasions. These main goals are: (1) to continue the policy of anti-hegemonism; (2) to implement the mission of reunification with Taiwan; (3) to accomplish the mission of the "Four Modernizations" as soon as possible[1]. On August 22, 1982, he reiterated his stance to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Javier Perez de Cuellar: "The Third World is the main force in the campaign against hegemonism. Its force is becoming stronger and stronger. Nobody can neglect this fact[2]". The concept of the Three Worlds remains the basic guideline of Communist China's African policy.

On June 12, 1981 Deng Xiaoping explained Peking's African Policy as follows:

> "We will insist on the foreign policy set by Chairman Mao Tse-tung and late Premier Chou En-lai. In the past, we supported Africans in struggle for independence. Today, we continue to support them in struggle of safeguarding national independence and developing National economies, especially in the struggle against South African racist regime. Economically, we will continuously promote the cooperation relations with African countries within our capacity[3]"

On the basis of Deng's statements we can discern four objectives of Communist China's policy towards Africa for the 1980s: (1) to incite anti-hegemonism sentiment in Africa; (2) to support national liberation movements in Africa, especially in Southern Africa; (3) to build up its leadership in Africa; and (4) to isolate, and eventually force out, altogether, the Republic of China from Africa.

To attain these goals, Peking will continue to use aid as an instrument of its foreign policy. However, different aid activities apply to different areas in pursuit of different aims. This can be seen under three headings: (1) aid to African countries in general; (2) aid to South African liberation movements; and (3) aid to a few African countries which maintain diplomatic ties with the Republic of China.

Since inciting anti-hegemonism sentiment and to building up its leadership in Africa constitute the major objectives for the 1980s, Communist China has to continue its aid to African countries in general in order to ingratiate itself with those states. From 1980 onwards, a number of aid agreements have been signed between Communist China and African governments, and several projects signed previously have been put into operation. In December 1983 alone, Communist China completed a shipyard for Congo-Brazzaville and one motor road each

for Ethiopia and Kenya. Peking also signed three agreements with Gabon, one economic and technical agreement with Tunisia and one medical assistance agreement with Zimbabwe[4]. However, the most important activity in which Communist China engaged during this period, was the one-month-long visit to eleven African states by Peking's Premier Zhao Ziyang between December 1982 and January 1983.

Zhao Ziyang's visit to Afirca has been described as a major event for both Communist China and Africa[5]. It was the first visit by a Chinese Communist premier to Africa in nearly twenty years after Chou En-lai's tour in 1963. During his one month tour Zhao Ziyang visited eleven African states: Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Guinea, Gabon, Zaire, Congo, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Kenya. The purpose of his tour, as Zhao pointed out, was (1) to improve cooperation with the Third World; (2) to oppose hegemonism; and (3) to further the establishment of a reasonable international economic order[6]. To demonstrate Peking's goodwill, Zhao Ziyang promised assistance to African countries. Zhao negotiated two agreements with Egypt, under which Communist China would supply 60-80 Chinese-made F-7 fighter aircrafts (Chinese Mig-21) as well as spare parts which had earlier been supplied by the USSR. Zhao also agreed to extend a previous Sino-Egyptian economic agreement by one year. Meanwhile another meeting to discuss a loan has been arranged[7].

While in Morocco, Zhao promised to discuss further trade and cooperation arrangements with a Morocco delegation scheduled to visit Peking[8]. Zhao Ziyang also signed two agreements with Gabon: the one aimed at expanding and diversifing technical cooperation to suit the demands of Gabon, the other aimed at increasing Chinese aid in rice-growing, medical cooperation and personnel training[9]. In Congo (Brazzaville), he promised to send 200 experts to help the Congo build a military college and agreed to furnish a long-term loan[10]. He also promised to extend an interest-free loan of 33 million dollars to Zimbabwe[11].

This new venture, indicates that Communist China is endeavouring to improve its relations with Africa in the 1980s. Nevertheless, its poor economy continues to exert constraints on its aid policy. As the "Four Modernizations" (Agricultural Modernization, Industrial Modernization, Defence Modernization, and Science and Technology Modernization) is likely to remain one of the three major goals of Communist China in the 1980s, large sums of money have to be raised for the various construction projects designed to bring about the kind of modernizations Peking envisages. According to Hwa Kuo-fong, Communist China has to invest altogether an amount of $ 65 billion to carry out the Development Plan for the period of 1976 to 1985[12]. It is obvicus that Peking can not raise sufficient funds by drawing on

domestic sources[13], and thus has to rely on foreign loans and investments from the West. This situation undoubtedly curtails Peking in its aid-delivering operation in Afirca, and may eventually force Peking to modify its aid policy. On January 25, 1981 Peking's Foreign Minister Huang Hua delivered a report on the "Diplomatic Situation in the 80s: Policies and Future Tasks". In this report Huang Hua spoke of "developing trade and expanding cultural, sports, scientific and technological as well as educational exchanges with African nations, instead of economic aid and unified assistance, are the future directions[14]". This was reflected in the very visit by Zhao Ziyang to Africa. While promising aid on the one hand, he refused some requests on the other hand. For instance, when Zhao visited Zambia on January 6, 1983, President Kuanda requested Communist China to help African countries develop economies in the way it had supported Africans in independence struggles in the 50s and 60s[15]. Rather than promising aid, he explained the Chinese development experience to Kuanda. It is obvious that Zhao could not enter into major aid commitments because of China's limited economic capabilities. Rather, he encouraged Zambia to adopt the Chinese model than to ask for aid[16].

To aid South African and Namibian liberation movements is Communist China's second task in its aid operations in Africa. By 1980, all African countries

gained independence from their former colonial powers. But South Africa and South West Africa are still under white rule. Therefore South African and Namibian Liberation movements are likely the major recipients of Communist China's aid in the 80s.

Chinese Communists are interested in South Africa for various reasons[17] : (1) They regard capitalists as their arch-enemies. Their main objective is to bring about the fall of capitalism and to establish Communism world-wide. South Africa, being a capitalist country, is by its nature on Peking's list for revolutionary action; (2) South Africa has a highly industrialized economy with two developed classes, the capitalists and the wage-earners, engaging in a class conflict. The situation is suited for such a revolution; (3) South Africa is the greatest obstacle to the Communists' endeavours to gain control of the whole African continent. If they can contol South Africa, they expect to achieve final victory in Africa; (4) If South Africa falls into Communist hands it would prove a great economic, military and general asset to the Communist world because South Africa has plenty of precious minerals and controls a strategically important sea-route; (5) If they succeed in South Africa, it would significally advance their world-wide struggle against capitalism; (6) If they can control South Africa or create a sphere or influence on the sub-continent, it would signify a major victory

in their competition with the USSR; (7) They believe that nationalistically inclined blacks of South Africa would be amenable to aid from Communist China in their struggle against oppression; (8) They believe that the blacks of South Africa would readily accept the Communist order; (9) They maintain that the present struggle of international organized Communism against world capitalism is in fact a struggle of the black, yellow and brown people agianst the whites.

Once having gained a considerable breakthrough in most areas of Africa during the past 25 years, Peking naturally aspires to forge its control over South Africa[18]. Communist China understands that a conventional war between itself and the Republic of South Africa is not feasible[19]. It realizes that the best method to achieve its goal is to support South African liberation movements to win the war against the white regime as happened with Mugabe in his revolutionary war.

Peking's determination to support South African liberation movements has been repeatedly stated by Chinese Communist leaders and the leaders of the liberation movements. On the eve of Zhao Ziyang's visit to Africa at the end of 1982, Peking's newspapers commented that

> "The present political situation in Africa is very much different from that of the early 1960s. Except that the people of Namibia and South Africa have yet to struggle against colonialism and racism, other African states have basically accomplished the great historical task of national independence. At present, many African states are endeavouring to develop their national economy, with a view to consolidating their not easily gained political independence, by means of economic independence. This is the mainstream of African development. However, the stability of this development is seriously impaired by the opposition and destruction of South African racism[20] ".

The People's Daily further disclosed that Chinese Communists would

> "regard the resolute support of African people.... in their struggle against imperialism, colonialism, hegemonism, South African racism.... as their sacred international obligation"[21].

When Zhao Ziyang visited Tanzania, he frankly declared that, "if any black countries whose security is threatened by South Africa ask for military assistance from Communist China, Communist China would definitely support them"[22]. He said that Peking's current policy towards South Africa was based on four principles: (1) Peking disagrees that the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola be seen as a prerequisite of South African withdrawal from Namibia and of Namibian independence; (2) Peking supports the Frontline States against South Africa (3) Communist China will do its best to unite all national liberation movements of South Africa; (4) Peking recognizes Angola and supports its struggle against racism. He also met Oliver Tambo, the leader of ANC, and Hage Geingov, an executive officer of SWAPO, in Lusaka to reaffirm Peking's support for the two liberation organizations[23]. Later, the leader of SWAPO, Sam Nujoma disclosed during a visit to Peking that Communist China had promised to supply SWAPO with weapons and other items to fight South Africa[24]. Communist China's President Li Xiannian on one occasion assured the president of Botswana, Quett Masire, of Peking's support for the Frontline States in their fight against South African "racism, aggression and expansionism"[25]

One of the four objectives of Communist China's African polciy for the 1980s is to eliminate any presence by the Republic of China in Africa. Thus, the countries

which still maintain diplomatic relations with the Republic of China are the target areas for Communist China's aid extending.

Until 1980, five African states maintained formal relations with the Republic of China: South Africa, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Malawi and Swaziland. Since South Africa has not been a target for Peking to establish diplomatic relations under present circumstances, it has concentrated on the other four countries. In order to cause these four countries to switch their recognition from the Republic of China to Communist China, Peking has tried to get a resolution passed by the Organization of African Unity urging all member countries to recognize Peking on the one hand [26]; and it has used aid to expand its influence over these countries, on the other.

Peking's aid to Ivory Coast and Lesotho yielded results in 1983. On March 2, the Ivory Coast announced its intention to establish diplomatic relations with Peking. According to a report, Peking's purchase of 3,000 tons of Ivory Coast's cocoa in 1982 played an important role in bringing about this reversal of attitude. At that time the Ivory Coast was suffering from economic difficulties resulting from the drop in price of cocoa [27].

Two months later Lesotho also severed diplomatic

ties with the Republic of China. Observers attributed this switch to Lesotho's anti-South Africa attitude and its desire to keep in line with the Fronline States and the majority of the Third World[28]. However, after the event Lesotho announced that Peking has extended a $ 6 million interest-free loan to Lesotho. This suggested that Peking's aid had been taken into account by the Lesotho government when it decided to switch diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Peking.

The challenges Communist China faced in the past will continue to be the challenges for it in the future. Non-alignment remains the avowed policy of the majority of African countries, and presently there is no indication for any sudden deviation from this course[29]. African countries will maintain their neutral stand towards the rivalry among the superpowers, as this posture ensures them aid from all side. Their attitude toward Peking has to be seen in this context. The condition for their acceptance of Communist China's aid is non-interference in their domestic affairs and adherence to neutralism. When Zhao Ziyang visited Egypt at the end of 1982, he promised economic and military aid, while he, at the same time, wanted to draw Egypt into the struggle against the two superpowers, i.e. the Soviet Union and the United States. But this anti-hegemonism proposal was refused by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak[30].

To save face, Zhao later said that "due to the different economic experience and different angles in perceiving issues (between us), it is natural that there will be some different opinion on some issues. This will not impede the development of Sino-Egyptian relations"[31]. It is clear that Zhao Ziyang did not succeed in involving Egypt in his anti-hegemonism operation by using aid as a lever.

By way of conclusion, we may expect the Communist China to continue to use aid in order to achieve its policy objectives in Africa. However, in view of its internal problems, its aid programs to African countries will decline or be substituted partly by trade, sports, cultural, scientific and educational exchanges. As South Africa is the last target of its revolutionary war in Africa, Peking's military assistance to South African liberation movements will form a major part of its aid commitments. Peking will continue to isolate the Republic of China, and will use aid to affect those countries, still maintaining diplomatic relations with the Republic of China, to change their attitude. It is possible that Communist China's reputation and influence in Africa will increase in the near future because of its active operations. Nevertheless, confronted by the non-alignment policy of African countries and activities of the West and the Soviet Union, Peking is unlikely to become the leader of Africa.

Footnote

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6. People's Daily, January 4, 1983

7. Monthly Report on African Politics and Sino-African and Soviet-African Relationships, January 1983, PP. 34-35

8. Ibid, P. 36

9. Ibid, P. 37

10. Ibid, P. 38

11. Ibid, P. 39

12. Chang Chen-pang "Tough Knots in Peiping's Four Modernizations" in Chinese Communist Modernization Problems (Taipei: China Publishing Co. 1979) P. 80

13. Ibid

14. Chang Ya-chun, op. cit. PP. 63-64

15. People's Daily, January 8, 1983

16. B.T. Yeh, "On Zhao Ziyang's African Tour" Issues and Studies (Chinese) vol.22.no. 5, February 1983, P. 27

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18. Cas de Villiers op. cit. P. 37

19. D.J. Kotzé, op. cit. P. 183

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22. Monthly Report on African Politics and Sino-African and Soviet-African Relationships January 1983, P. 39

23. China Daily, January 9, 1983

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25. The Star, November 15, 1983

26. Central Daily News, March 3, 1983

27. Ibid

28. The Star, May 19, 1983

29. Sam Motsuenyane "Africa's Response" in Foreign Powers and Africa: Socio-Economic Dimensions op. cit. P. 89

30. B.T. Yeh, op. cit. P. 18

31. People's Daily, December 28, 1982

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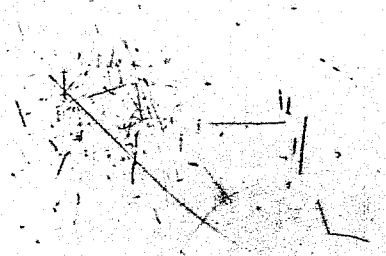

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