

# COMPLEX ASYMMETRY: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA

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The relations of the People's Republic of China (PRC) with developing countries, which has always been emphasized as the corner stone of its overall foreign relations, have witnessed different roads and revealed different features due to the diversity with developing countries. These are remarkably seen in China's relations with Africa and Latin America, the two continents with major developing countries. China's relations with African countries started earlier and had stronger background than its relations with Latin American countries and the two bilateral relations revealed asymmetrical features. Though China's policies toward the two continents are identical today China-Latin American relations are catching up very fast and are becoming more robust and substantial than those with African countries, leading to a new asymmetry. These changes demonstrate the major concern in China's foreign relations are changing. More importantly it indicates the future bilateral relations will not only be shaped by the Chinese side alone but equally by the other sides of these bilateral relations. Sino-Latin American relations seem to enjoy bigger potential than those with African countries.

**Keywords:** China's foreign relations; China's policy toward developing countries; Sino-Latin American relations; Sino-African relations; China's foreign economic relations.

## ASSIMETRIA COMPLEXA: UMA PERSPECTIVA COMPARADA DAS RELAÇÕES DA CHINA COM A ÁFRICA E A AMÉRICA LATINA

As relações da República Popular da China (RPC) com os países em desenvolvimento – que têm sido enfatizadas como a pedra angular de suas relações externas globais – têm percorrido muitos caminhos e assumido distintas características devido à diversidade própria dos países em desenvolvimento. Isso se faz notar particularmente nas relações da China com a África e a América Latina, os dois continentes que abrigam os principais países em desenvolvimento. As relações da China com os países africanos iniciaram-se mais cedo e são mais tradicionais do que as relações com os países latino-americanos, e ambas revelam características assimétricas. Embora as políticas chinesas para com os dois continentes sejam idênticas hoje, verifica-se que as relações com a América Latina têm evoluído rapidamente e se tornado mais robustas e substanciais comparativamente ao que se observa com os países africanos, gerando uma nova assimetria. Tais mudanças demonstram que as preocupações centrais nas relações exteriores da China estão mudando. Mais do que isso, indicam que as futuras relações bilaterais não serão moldadas apenas pelo par chinês, mas igualmente pelos outros pares de tais relações bilaterais. As relações sino-latino-americanas aparentam ter maior potencial comparativamente às relações com países africanos.

**Palavras-chave:** relações exteriores da China; política chinesa para os países em desenvolvimento; relações sino-americanas; relações sino-africanas; relações exteriores econômicas da China.

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## ASIMETRÍA COMPLEJA: UNA PERSPECTIVA COMPARADA SOBRE LAS RELACIONES DE CHINA CON ÁFRICA Y AMÉRICA LATINA

Las relaciones de China (República Popular de China) con los países en desarrollo – las cuales han sido enfatizadas como la piedra angular de sus relaciones exteriores en general – han recurrido muchos caminos y asumido características diferentes debido a la diversidad de los países en desarrollo. Esto se nota sobre todo en las relaciones de China con África y América Latina, los dos continentes que poseen los principales países en desarrollo. Las relaciones de China con los países africanos son más antiguas y tradicionales que las relaciones con los países de América Latina, y ambas presentan características asimétricas. Si bien las políticas chinas hacia los dos continentes son las mismas en la actualidad, las relaciones con América Latina han evolucionado rápidamente y se han cambiado en más robustas y sustanciales en comparación con la observada con los países africanos, originando una nueva asimetría. Estos cambios muestran que las preocupaciones centrales en las relaciones exteriores de China están cambiando. Más que eso, indican que las futuras relaciones bilaterales no serán establecidas sólo desde China, sino también desde otros países. Las relaciones sino-latinoamericanas parecen tener mayor potencial con respecto a las relaciones de China con los países africanos.

**Palabras clave:** relaciones exteriores de China; política china para los países en desarrollo; relaciones sino-americanas; relaciones sino-africanas; relaciones exteriores económicas de China.

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

Developing countries are those “whose economies are comparatively backward and who are in the transformation from traditional economy to modern economy” (Qian, 2005, p. 560). They were referred to as *xinxiing guojia* (newly emerging countries) in the 1950s-1960s, then as third world countries in the 1970s-1980s, and now more commonly as developing countries in Chinese politics. However referred, they have always been emphasized as the basis or corner stone of the overall foreign relations of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). But developing countries have never been united as an independent political force or a strong economic force due to the differences in their political systems, diverse cultures as well economic development (Zhang, 2001). These countries could be categorized differently according to their economic development, political system, and foreign policy orientation, but geographically can be categorized into three groups: China’s Asian neighbors, African countries, and Latin American countries. In the new patterns of China’s diplomacy, relations with Asian neighbors have been upgraded as the priorities while relations with developing countries, mainly in Latin America and Africa remain as the basis of China’s foreign relations.<sup>2</sup> China’s relations with the two continents developed differently in history and have demonstrated distinct features characterized by a complex asymmetry which has

2. In the new pattern of Chinese foreign policy, relations with developed countries are considered as the key, with neighbors the priority, and with developing countries the basis.

undergone changes. Tracing the asymmetrical development in China's relations with African and Latin American countries, this chapter focuses on the current Chinese relations with Africa and Latin America in a comparative perspective. Though China still attaches great and equal significance to its relations with developing countries politically and diplomatically, its relations with the two continents reveal differences or asymmetry in sustainable economic fields. These differences reveal China's complex global status as well as some new features in its foreign policy.

## **2 ASYMMETRICAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA**

### **2.1 Asymmetrical start**

The PRC's foreign policy toward developing countries has been an important part of China's diplomatic strategies which have undergone changes with its policy towards superpowers. After its founding, the new Chinese government of China pursued a policy of leaning to the socialist camp headed by the Soviet Union and opposing the American imperialism. Within such framework, China's policy toward countries in the intermediate zones, the emerging countries, was to support the liberation movements, which were considered as in line with China's strategy against imperialist countries. The starting point of such policy was expounded by Zhou Enlai, premier and foreign minister of China, as that most developing countries "have been subjected to colonial plunder and oppression, and have thus been forced to remain in a stagnant state of poverty and backwardness (...). Suffering from the same cause and struggling for the same aim" (Han, 1987, p. 413), it is easier for China and other developing countries to understand each other. Mao called to its people that China must actively support the movement for national independence and liberation in various Asian, African, and Latin American countries, and said that the peoples in Asia, Africa, and Latin America shall unite and drive the American imperialists back home from Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Zedong, 1994). But such policy was received differently in Africa and Latin America due to the differences in their respective geopolitical position and the fact that countries in African and Latin America were facing different national tasks, and China's relations with them demonstrated periodical asymmetry.

China's policy was welcome in Africa and China's relations with African countries were the most active sections of China's foreign relations in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As most African countries in sub-Saharan area unfolded their armed struggles for their national independence in the 1950s, China established contacts with various national liberation organizations in those countries and China made arms, funds, and training supplies to a lot of liberation movements in Asia and Africa. Groups of admiring "Maoist" intellectuals sprung up in the African continent.

As one studies shows, “by 1965, Beijing endorsed wars of national liberation in twenty-three countries. Many of these revolutionary movements received financial support, arms, or training from Beijing” (Ness, 1971, p. 78, 90, 114; Garver, 1993, p. 144, 146). Newly independent African countries and the PRC recognized each other immediately after they gained independence. Mutual support was the major theme of China’s relations with African countries as demonstrated by the exchange of frequent high level visits between them and large amount of foreign aid from the Chinese side and African countries’ continuous support for PRC’s membership in the United Nations (UN). For instance, China had provided aid to 86 countries from 1950 to 1985, almost all developing countries, among which twenty are in Asia, 46 in Africa, sixteen in Latin America and South Pacific area, and five in Europe according to sources of the Chinese government (Shi, 1989, p. 20-21).

Unlike most African countries which badly needed China’s support for their national liberation struggle against the western imperialists, a common enemy of China, Latin American countries got independence from as early as the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century till the mid of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Latin America was not only too far away to be of real interest to China (Ratliff, 2009, p. 4), but it was so much dominated by the United States as to be considered the “backyard” of the United States. Most of their policies towards the PRC were very much constrained by the United States policy toward China. China’s policy of supporting national liberation movement was scarcely received in Latin America. Considering the situation in Latin America, Zhou Enlai said that China understood the difficulties of Latin American countries in developing relations with China and the bilateral relations should develop in accordance with the principle of *xishui changliu, wenbu qianjin* (go about the relations little by little without a letup to achieve steady advancement), and even the people to people relations should start from the reality and should not hurt the feeling of the friendly Latin American people (Pei, 1994, p. 351). No diplomatic ties were established between China and Latin American countries until Cuba and the PRC did so in 1960, one year after its successful socialist revolution. At the same time China kept a close eye on the political development in Latin America and was ready to extend its utmost support to whoever opposed to the United States. For instance, Mao expressed China’s support to Panama when a demonstration calling for the return of the Panama Canal in Panama City took place in January 1964 (Mao, 1994, p. 510). More than a million Chinese participated in a demonstration in Beijing in support of the Panama though the two countries did not have diplomatic ties. In addition to Cuba, China’s supports were welcome only by a few leftist guerrillas in Latin America, and were not reciprocated by any the national governments as they were in Africa.

## 2.2 Reversed asymmetry

From the 1960s, especially in the 1970s, China's diplomatic strategy changed to one of "opposing the Soviet hegemonism", according to which China drew lines, or decided its relations with other developing countries upon that country's relations with the Soviets, opposing whoever was the friend of the Soviets and supporting whoever was Soviets enemy. This strategy affected China's relations with Africa and Latin America differently, and gave China's relations with the two continents another asymmetrical feature which was different from that in the 1950s and early 1960s. China's relations with African countries witnessed a setback during the Cultural Revolution when China had diplomatic disputes with nearly thirty of the forty plus countries that have diplomatic relations with China. Many of them are African countries (Xie, 1988, p. 385-387). China's relations with African countries were further straightjacket by China's one line strategy, which reduced the flexibility of China's foreign policy. After China restored its legitimate rights in the UN with the help of developing countries, no concrete progress was made in Sino-African relations in 1970.

China's zealous support for revolution in Latin America, which was not well received from the very beginning, encountered another setback when the Sino-Soviet split led to the split among the leftist guerrillas in Latin America. Cuba, the only country that maintained diplomatic ties with China, sided with the Soviet Union and condemned China's foreign policy. Economically, Cuba complained that China was not providing enough economic aid, while China criticized Cuban policy in supporting Sovietic policy in Africa. There were little substantive contacts between China and Latin American countries from the late 1960s through the early 1980s.

Except for the leftist group (Cuba included), PRC's relations with Latin American countries changed to a different and positive direction in the 1970s. Sino-United States rapprochement, which was possible due to Sino-Soviet split, removed the obstacle of the United States in developing Latin American-China relations. As United States, hostile policy toward China moderated, Chile and China established diplomatic relations in December 1970. After United States president Nixon made his historic visit to Beijing in 1972, major Latin American countries started to change their attitude towards China and gradually normalized their diplomatic relations with China, Peru in 1971, Mexico, Argentina, Guyana, and Jamaica in 1972, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, and Brazil in 1974, Surinam in 1976. As diplomatic relations were normalized, economic relations started to grow. Sino-Latin America trade in 1950 was US\$ 1.9 million and grew to US\$ 31.3 million in 1960, resurged to US\$ 475.7 after to down turn during the Cultural Revolution (Ratliff, 2009, p. 6).

### 2.3 Similar features

When China decided to shift the focus of its domestic focus from class struggle to economic development, its foreign policy was also adjusted to creating a favorable international environment for its domestic economic development. China made it its fundamental policy not to enter into any kind of alliance with any big powers, but to develop omni-directional relations on the basis of five principles of peaceful co-existence with all countries (Tian, 1993, p. 1-7). With such foreign policy adjustment, China's relations with Africa and Latin America began to share common features as China began to emphasize the importance of developing mutually beneficial and friendly cooperative relations with developing countries in accordance with the principles of non-interference with each other's domestic affairs. This principle ushered in a period when China's foreign relations with the two continents share the most commonalities.

The commonality or symmetry in China's relations with the two developing continents was possible first due to the decreasing significance of Sino-African relations. The first few years after China's opening up and reform witnessed a fluctuation in Sino-Africa relations: economic aid was reduced, accompanied by a decline in bilateral trade and a drop in the number of missions of medical teams (Li, 2006). After the Chinese government formally announced its foreign policy adjustment in 1982, premier Zhao Ziyang paid a visit to eleven African countries from December 1982 to January 1983, the first tour abroad after he took premiership, the first Chinese leader to visit the continent eighteen years after Zhou's visit to Africa in 1964. While stressing the common ground shared by China and many third world countries and reaffirming China's firm support for Africa, Zhao explained to his hosts in Africa that China would continue its aid to the best of its ability to other developing countries, some least developing countries in particular, but China would try gradually to shift the focus to developing mutually beneficial economic and technological cooperation. To this end, he put forward four principles on developing economic cooperation with African countries, for example, "equality and mutual benefit, stress on practical results, diversity in form, and attainment of common progress" (Tian, 1993, p. 131-132; Han, 1987, p. 362).

The symmetry was possible also because the fast catching up of Sino-Latin American relations. Diplomatic normalization in the 1970s paved the way for China's relations with major Latin America countries and China pursued a similar line as in its relations with African countries. After his visit to Africa, Zhao paid a visit to four Latin America countries – Columbia, Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela in 1985, the first high level visit to this continent in the history of PRC. During his tour, the premier expressed China's wish to further develop its relations both politically and economically with the countries already having diplomatic relations with China. With countries that were yet to establish diplomatic relations

with China, he expressed that China was also ready to establish and develop relations with them on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful-Co-existence. On economic cooperation, Zhao set forth four principles for developing relations between China and Latin American countries: peace and friendship, mutual support, equality and mutual benefit and attainment of common progress, (Han, 1987, p. 368) almost a replication of the principles for China's relations with Africa.

The common features in China's relations with Africa and Latin America from the 1980s were reflected in the fact that the relations were conducted from the perspective of South-South cooperation. Ideology was surpassed; no anti-United States or anti-Soviet lines were drawn in developing relations with these countries. In accordance with the spirit of mutual benefit and attainment of common development, China reduced its aid to developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America; and gradually explore diversified forms of economic and technological cooperation, such as contracting projects, providing labor, technological services and spare parts, launching joint or solely Chinese-funded ventures or cooperative enterprises, exchange of needed goods and services, promotion of their respective national economies etc.

### **3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA AND POLITICAL SYMMETRY IN CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH BOTH REGIONS**

So long as domestic economic development remains China's central task it would further tilt externally toward developed countries, which played a vital role in sustaining China's export-oriented economic development, and the significance of developing countries would continue to decline in China's overall foreign policy structure. But changes in China's domestic politics and the end of the Cold War stopped China from further tilting toward the developed countries, and China's began to re-emphasize the political significance of developing countries.

#### **3.1 The political importance of Africa and Latin America in China's foreign relations**

The end of the Cold War and the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 was a disaster for China not only domestically but in China's foreign relations. Most western developed countries condemned China's policies, and major powers imposed economic sanctions and suspended exchange of high level visits with China. Under the pressures from the West, China found different responses from developing countries: none of them followed the suit of developed countries. They showed sympathy with, expressed understanding of, and voiced support for what the Chinese government did, and criticized Western interference in China's internal affairs. Contrary to western countries' while suspended high level contacts with China, developing countries continued the exchange of high level visits

as scheduled. For instance, Chinese foreign minister Qian Qichen made a fourteen countries' tour to Africa; and nine heads of state or government from Africa visited China in 1989, among whom president Compaore of Burkina Faso was the first foreign head of state to visit China after June 4, 1989. A Chinese Foreign Ministry edited book on Chinese foreign policy paid special attention to such a visit in a very difficult time, which would otherwise be negligible (Tian, 1993, p. 146). China realized that developing countries, who came to China when China was in need, are friends indeed.

With the support from developing countries, China has successfully defended itself from western criticism and survived their pressures. The confrontation over human rights offers a good example. For twelve consecutive years since 1989, some developed countries tried to table draft resolutions to "condemn" China's human rights condition at the UN human rights conference in Geneva, but have failed in the end to put the draft resolutions on the agenda because of the support China received from developing countries. Among the 23 countries that supported China at the 2001 conference ten are from Asia, ten are from Africa, and two are from Latin America. With so much support from developing countries China was able argue that the West was not only using human rights to interfere in China's internal affairs, that human right differences manifest a contradiction between developed countries and developing countries as a whole (Liu, 1994; Li, 1998). The Chinese are unequivocal that China would not have succeeded in many of its other political endeavors without the support from developing countries, such as China's successful bidding for and hosting the 28 Beijing Olympics in 2008, China's successful bidding for the world Expo in 2010, the blocking of Taiwan's return to the UN etc. China found a new rationale for emphasizing the role of developing countries.

The rising significance of developing countries also resulted from the Taiwan issue. The Cold War confrontation used to provide some developing countries leverages to maneuver between the two superpowers in order to gain economic aid and other support. Such opportunity went away with the end of the Cold War. The Taipei authorities changed its policy on cross straits relations and began to pursue "flexible diplomacy" in an attempt to seek "Taiwan independence". The diplomatic competition between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits provides some developing countries with the opportunity that the collapse of the Soviet Union has deprived them of. Utilizing the competing dollar diplomacy on the two sides of the Taiwan Straits some countries switched diplomatic recognition between Beijing and Taipei to further their short term goals disregarding their commitments in establishing diplomatic relations with whichever China. Africa and Latin America are the two major theaters of Beijing-Taipei diplomatic competition. Among the 21 countries that recognize Taipei, as the sole legitimate government of China,



twelve are from Latin America, including Paraguay, Belize, Dominican republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines, four are in Africa (the others mainly in Oceania, another area of developing countries). The “diplomatic truce” between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait after Ma Ying-joe took office in Taiwan seems to have removed the issue for the time being, but the Taiwan issue will remain a major concern in China's relations with developing countries. Considering the significance of the Taiwan issue for Chinese politics, no leader in Beijing can afford to neglect the developing countries.

The remaining significance of Africa and Latin America in China's relations also comes from the complementary nature of their economies and the significance of the two continents in sustaining China economic growth. The success of China's opening up and reform has transformed China into a global plant, which needs raw materials to feed its production and markets to consume its products. Both Africa and Latin America, rich in resources and large in population, have what China needs for its rapid economic development. In a strategic perspective, the two continents can also help diversify China's dependence on western powers, which are always politically critical about China. From Africa and Latin America's perspective, China offers an alternative source of power and influence to the western power; new markets to trade, particularly for the sale of raw materials and foodstuffs to promote growth at home and reduce reliance on western powers; increasing foreign investment without strings associated with the Western investments etc. Moreover, China and Africa and Latin America have common interests in solving global economic problems involving such issues as South-South cooperation in the age of globalization (Ratliff, 2009, p. 7-8; Jiang, 2006; He, 2007, p. 26-28, Li, 2007, p. 78-81).

### 3.2 Political symmetry in China's policy toward Africa and Latin America

To fending itself against the pressures from the only super power, the United States, China has pushed for multi-polarization, called for democratization of international relations, and proposed for international multilateralism after the end of the Cold War. In all these campaigns, Africa and Latin America were considered an important and indispensable force (Yang, 2004, p. 12-15). As one Chinese scholar wrote, “after the collapse of the bipolar system and the end of the cold war”, stronger developing countries will play an irreplaceable role in promoting multipolarization process under the “*yichao duoqiang* (one superpower with many strong powers) situation” (He, 1999, p. 28). African was considered as “one pole in the multi-polar world”, and “cannot be neglected” (The..., 1999; When..., 1999). The same could be said about the role of Latin American countries.

China speaks on behalf of developing countries in many multilateral organizations and on many global issues though it declines to be the head of developing countries.<sup>3</sup> For instance, China published a policy paper on UN reform to elaborate its policy, which states that the UN reform should fully consider the concerns and interests of developing nations, listen more to their voices and increase their representation in the UN (China, 2010). In order to know their demands and viewpoints on various important issues views the Chinese ambassador to the World Trade Organization (WTO) always maintains close communication with developing members of the WTO. In the International Monetary Fund (IMF), “China’s consistent position has been supporting the righteous and correct policies of developing countries”, and criticizing the “proposals that harm the interests of developing countries” (Dai, 2001). On environment issue, Chinese president Jiang Zemin called in the International Conference on Protection of the Ozone layer in December 1999 that developed countries should fully realized the historical effects their development has had on environment in the long past, take more responsibilities, and “actively help developing countries solve their environmental problems” (President..., 1999).

Presently, Africa and Latin America stand together and are always treated equally in China’s foreign policy. Their relations with China are again regarded as the basis of China’s overall foreign relations. To make clear and emphasize the importance of China’s relations with and policies toward Africa and Latin America, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a policy paper on Africa in the beginning of 2005, and a parallel policy paper on Latin America and Caribbean was published three years later (China, 2009a; 2009b). The two papers, identical in length and with the same structure and logic, elaborated the significant position and roles of the two continents in the world in similar terms. Both reiterated the similar areas of potential bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and both expounded that China would establish and develop a new type of strategic partnership with them which features political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchange. The only difference between the two papers is the one more section (three lines) on the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and Its Follow-up Actions in China’s policy paper on Africa.

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3. As early as in 1982, Deng Xiao-ping told general secretary of the UN, “a lot of friends said China is the head of the Third World. But we say we cannot be so, it is not feasible to be the head, it would be bad for being the head. The reputation for hegemony is very bad, and so is the fame for being the head of Third World. This is not for politeness but a true political consideration” (Deng, 1994a, p. 415). In December 1990, Deng Xiao-ping, in his talk with leading members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, said: “some developing countries would like China to become the leader of the Third World. We absolutely cannot do that – this is one of our basic state policies (...). China will always side with the Third World countries, but we shall never seek hegemony over them and or serve as their leader” (Deng, 1994b, p. 363). From then on the Chinese leaders have insisted that it is and it will continue to be a developing country by the mid of this century when China becomes a mid-developed country.

In multilateral areas similarities also exist. China has established partnerships with several African and Latin American countries. China supported and cooperated closely with Africa Union, has become an observer to several African sub-regional economic integration organizations. Responding the calls from some African countries China initiated and spearheaded the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, which has become a major multilateral platform for China African cooperation. Latin America is catching up in this regard. China has held seventeen rounds of dialogue with the Rio Group and established multi-lateral mechanism with Latin American countries including China-Mercosur Dialogue, China-Andean Community Consultation, China-Caribbean Economic and Commercial Forum, China and Latin American Conference among others.

The identical features in political area are also reflected in the equal frequency of exchanges of high level visits between Chinese leaders and their counterpart in the two continents. The director general of the African Affairs Department with the Chinese Foreign Ministry wrote that in the first five years of the new century, there have been more than two hundred exchanges of visits above the rank of foreign minister between China and African countries (Xu, 2006). The 2006 China African summit in Beijing was participated by forty-eight countries that have diplomatic ties with China with 42 delegations headed by head of state or head of government.

Latin America enjoys a similar kind of intimate political relations with China from the perspective of high level visits. More than thirty heads of state of heads of government from Latin America visited China in the 1990s, while in the first nine year of the new century, the heads of state, heads of government, and speakers of parliament from Latin America paid nearly ninety visits to China. This was reciprocated by Chinese leaders' visits to twenty countries in the continent during the same time span (Zheng, Sun and Yue, 2009). Taken into account the number of countries that have diplomatic relations with China and the total visits Chinese leaders paid to the two continents, each African country has received 1.27 visit from Chinese leaders, and each Latin American country has received 1.7 visit from 1992 to 2006 (Zhang and Liu, 2008).

#### **4 NEW ASYMMETRY: DIFFERENT SITUATION IN CHINA'S ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA**

Both Africa and Latin America are crucial to China's assumption and exercise of global role as well as economic development and both are considered equally important in Chinese foreign policy. Yet Latin America has loomed much larger than Africa in more substantive economic relations with China, even though the latter was late to start. Asymmetry remains a remarkable feature in China's economic relations with African and Latin America.

If the bilateral trade is seen separately and chronologically, parallel increase and remarkable progresses are discernable. For instance China-Africa trade volume, which was US\$ 10 million in 1950, increased to US\$ 100 million in 1960, to US\$ 1 billion in 1980, to more than US\$ 10 billion in 2000, to US\$ 55.5 billion in 2006. China's trade with Africa countries are mainly with the resource rich countries. Oil accounts for most of Africa exports to China. All Angola's exports, 98.8% of Sudan's, 88.9% of Nigeria's, 85.9% of Congo's, 54.8 % of Gabon's exports to China is oil in 2005 (Meibo and Xiuli, 2009). China's top ten trade partners in Africa take up 78% of China's total trade with the continent, and China's trade with the first five trade partners account for 61% of China's total trade with this continent. By the end of 2005 China's accumulated investment in Africa amounted to US\$ 6.27 billion with more than eight hundred enterprises invested in 49 countries, covering trade, production and processing, resource development, communications and agriculture (Sino-African..., 2007).

Parallel progress could be seen in Sino-Latin American economic relations. In 1950 the two-way trade between China and Latin America was only US\$ 1.9 million, which rose to more than US\$ 30 million in 1960, to more than US\$ 1 billion in 1978. China's opening up has given Sino-Latin American economic relations new momentum, and bilateral trade expanded impressively to US\$ 12.6 billion in 2000, US\$ 50 billion in 2005, US\$ 102.6 billion in 2007, three years ahead of the goal proposed by Chinese president Hu Jintao (Jian, 2006). The figure further jumped to US\$ 143.3 billion in 2008 with the top ten trade partners in the region being Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela, Panama, Columbia, Costa Rica, and Cuba. China's main exports are computers, telecommunications equipment, clothing, shoes, electronics, motorcycles and cars, while most imports are in raw material commodities – iron ore, copper, tin, tungsten, molybdenum, aluminum, nickel. Venezuela is the seventh largest source of Beijing's external oil supplies (Shambaugh, 2008).

If the two economic relations are approached from a comparative perspective, impressive asymmetry becomes remarkable. For instance, China-Africa trade volume was US\$ 10 million while Sino-Latin American trade was only US\$ 1.9 million in 1950, one fifth of Sino-African trade. In 1960, Sino-Africa reached US\$ 100 million while Sino-Latin America trade was only US\$ 30 million. But by the time China launched reform and opening up Sino-Latin American trade surpassed Sino-African trade, reaching US\$ 1 billion in 1978, two years ahead of Sino-African trade to that figure. Ever since then Sino-African trade has lagged far behind Sino-Latin American trade. For instance, in the year of 1991 when Cold War ended, China's trade with Africa was US\$ 1.4 billion, while its trade with Latin America reached US\$ 2.43 billion, almost doubling the former. These figures reached US\$ 10.6 billion and US\$ 12.6 billion respectively by 2000 and further

to US\$ 73.6 billion and US\$ 102.6 billion in 2007. It seems unlikely from the current situation that Sino-African trade will come closer to that between China and Latin American since the latter relations are a lot more dynamic than the former. China has signed Free Trade Agreement with Chile in 2005, with Peru in 2009 and has conducted several rounds of negotiation on similar agreement with Costa Rica, and fifteen bilateral trade agreements, twelve investment protection agreements, seven agreements on exemption of double taxation, and formed twelve joint bilateral economic and trade commissions with Latin American countries (Liming, 2005).

The asymmetry in Sino-African and Sino-Latin America economic relations is further revealed in the field of investment. China's economic activities in Africa has caught a lot more global attention than it received in Latin America which accounts for a large portion of China's external investment. The statistics of China's investment in Latin America range from almost half to a quarter, to 15% of China's total external investment (Piao, 2006; 1/4 investments..., 2008; Zheng, Sun and Yue, 2009). Whichever figure is correct it takes a large portion of China's external investment. Relevant scholars doubt about the figures due to the "round-tripping" of Chinese "investment" in Latin America. Some Chinese capitals are believed to have gone to the three British dependencies in the region, the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and Bermuda, that have served as tax havens, then come back to China to "take advantage of preferences given to foreign firms" (United States, 2008, p. 22). But even after a large reduction, China's investment in Latin America still leads far ahead of its investment in Africa. Chinese investment in Latin America is US\$ 24.8 billion in 2008 and it attracted US\$ 112.6 billion investment from Latin America the same year, both are next only to the figures that China invested in Asia and the investment China received from Asia (Zheng, Sun and Yue, 2009). Comparatively, China's investment in Africa was only US\$ 4.5 billion in 2007 (Meibo and Xiuli, 2009).

Because China's economic relations with Africa lacks impetus, foreign aid remains an efficient and most welcome means for China to enhance its relations with African countries from mid 1990s, and the Forum on China Africa Cooperation has become a successful platform in this regard since its inauguration. In the first summit of the Forum in October 2000, China committed to reduce or cancel RMB10 billion loans owned by less developed countries in Africa and a totaling RMB10.9 billion loan owned by 31 African countries was written off in the following years (China..., 2006).

At the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in November 2006, China made eight more commitments, including doubling its 2006 assistance to Africa by 2009, providing US\$ 3 billion of preferential loans and US\$ 2 billion of preferential buyer's credits to Africa in the next three years,

writing off debt in the form of all the interest-free government loans that matured at the end of 2005 owed by the heavily indebted poor countries etc. (Hu, 2006).

Chinese premier Wen Jiabao further pledged at the Forum's Forth Ministerial Meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in 2009 that China would give African countries US\$ 10 billion in concessional loans to help Africa build up its financing capabilities, phase in zero-tariff treatment to 95% of the products from the least developed African countries, train 2 thousand agricultural technology personnel for Africa, providing medical equipment and anti-malaria materials worth 500 million yuan (US\$ 73.2 million), and training 3 thousand doctors and nurses for Africa etc. (Wen, 2009).

These Chinese assistance towards Africa consist of a mix of grants, interest-free loans, concessional low-interest loans. Estimates of China's aid toward Africa in 2005 accounts for a third to half of China's total foreign aid, while the estimated Chinese aid towards Latin America only account for a tenth of China's total foreign aid (Brautigam, 2008; Glosny, 2006, p. 15).

Unlike the situation during the Cold War when political and strategic concern overshadowed economic relations, economic frictions aroused and increased quickly as economic relations become stronger. For instance, some Latin America countries tend to blame the rising unemployment rate on the expansion of Chinese exports; some African countries complained about the quality of Chinese goods. Chinese investment in Africa has caused concerns about the environment degradation; anti-dumping tariffs in Latin America have been on the rise.<sup>4</sup> Chinese aid has been criticized for neglecting the human rights situation, especially in Africa. What is abnormal with the situation in China's economic relations with the two areas compared with China's relations with western countries is that Sino-European Union or Sino-United States trade frictions seem to be normal while the frictions in China's economic relations with developing Africa and Latin America are always amplified globally.

The complaints and concerns resulting from, or about the frictions in China's relations with and active involvement in Africa and Latin America are less visible in developing countries than those among the Western countries. In the political realm criticism on China's policy toward the two continents, include China's support of pariah regimes, China's negligence on human rights abuses, fiscal transparency, and clean governance while cementing relations with them. In a broader sense criticism on China's policy in Africa and Latin America are generally the same in Europe and America, but more specifically the concerns from the two developed areas differ in their focus. China's policy in Africa has been criticized as

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4. Starting with Mexico in 1993, many Latin American countries have been using antidumping tariffs to limit Chinese exports, and there are over 4 thousand Chinese products on Mexico's anti-dumping list. See IBA (2010).

“new imperialism” in Africa, (Wrong, 2006) China's demands for resources have been referred to as “insatiable appetite for energy and raw materials”, China's investment in Africa as “extracting resources rather than helping to create employment” just like the imperial powers of the nineteenth century, or “China is trying to colonize Africa” (Blair, 2007). Such criticism is mainly from Europe who used to exercise colonial rule in that continent and most of these references to China's role in Africa are reminiscent of the languages used to describe 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonialism in Africa.

While China's proactive diplomacy in Africa caused more concern in Europe, China's coming to Latin America has caused comparatively more concerns from the United States who enjoyed dominant influence in that continent. The general response from the United States government has been calm because the United States is confident that its economic influence in Latin America dwarfs that of China due to their historical relations and geopolitical proximity nonetheless China's growing linkage with Latin America (United States, 2008, p. 30). United States Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega's testimony at a congressional hearing has been quoted in many places as reflecting the United States view on China's enhancing relations with Latin America, saying “it is safe to say the United States has been and will continue to be the long-term partner of preference” in Latin America though China's influence in this Area has been growing (Dunbaugh and Sullivan, 2005, p. 6). But concerns do exist among congressmen, media, and some think tanks that view China as representing the most serious challenges to Washington in Latin America by pointing out Beijing's presence in the Panama Canal, political support for Fidel Castro, growing interactions with oil abundant Venezuela, and China's possible political and military relations with countries in this area (Johnson, 2005). Hearings in United States Congress, seminars organized by think tanks, and columns in newspapers on China's coming to Latin America have been popular, especially when Chinese leaders visited Latin America, or major events happened or big steps were taken in Sino-Latin American relations.

## 5 CONCLUSION

China's policy towards and its relations with Africa and Latin America along with the international repercussion of such relations reflect China's paradoxical global status and some fundamental changes in China's foreign policy making in general and China's policy towards Africa and Latin America in particular.

Historically China's relations with developing countries were emphasized for political reasons. The shift from politics in command to economy in command in Chinese domestic politics after its opening up has redefined China's foreign policy priorities. The fast growing trade with developed countries has become the

driving force for China's sustained economic development. While joining the rank of big powers, China has become increasingly interdependent with them. The accusation about China on the ways and scales of its engagement with Africa and Latin America as a colonialist obviously position China no longer as a developing country or at least not a developing country in the conventional sense. "China threat" and the expectation for China to be a "responsible stakeholder" or shoulder more international responsibility are the two sides of the same coin that China is a big power rather than a developing country.

To maintain stable relations with developed countries has been vital in propping up China's domestic economic growth. But at the same time China has found itself always at odds with the Western developed countries on many political issues and many economic issues are always politicized. When finding itself in a very difficult position with developed countries, China had to turn to developing countries for support. The principles over which China differs from Western developed countries over developing countries are the very principles over which China conflicts with the developed countries, such as providing aid with no strings attached, non-interference in internal affairs, and the concept of human rights by developing countries etc. The disputes between China and the Western developed countries in Africa and Latin America can be understood as the spillover of China's political disputes with the Western developed countries about their bilateral relations and to how domestic politics should be governed and how World affairs should be addressed. The paradoxical global status of China, which is becoming an economically developed country but politically and diplomatically a self-styled developing country, demonstrates that China has to cling to its traditional position as a developing country in its competition with western powers.

The asymmetrical features of the two bilateral economic relations also demonstrates the base of China's relations with developing countries has shifted from the politically opposing colonialism, imperialism, and hegemonism to economically mutual benefit. During the Cold War, economic considerations were always overshadowed by political and strategic considerations. It has been a tradition that China was always ready to suffer economic costs for political gains. For instance it had exported to Africa Chinese goods at a price lower than the global market price, and even purchased merchandises for which no demand existed on the Chinese market just to help the strategically friendly countries to overcome their economic problems, or simply to address their trade imbalance with China (Snow, 1997, p. 287-288). Today's economic relations are more complex and the two sides may gain in one area but loose in other areas, or some sectors in one side suffer while others benefit. Take China's relations with Latin American as example. Countries with strong natural resources exporting sector, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, benefited more than Mexico,



Central America, the Caribbean countries whose export economy are highly integrated into North America industrial zone in their trade relations with China.

The reasons for the asymmetry in China's relations with the two continents are not confined on the Chinese side. One reason for the faster growing economic ties between China and Latin America lays in the growing economic power of Latin America in world economy in comparison with that of Africa. China's equal policy or equal efforts are not equally reciprocated due to reasons not depending on China's side. For instance Sino-African relations lack the locomotive that Sino-Brazilian relations play in Sino-Latin American relations. The rise of China and Brazil has made Sino-Brazilian relations strategic in nature because both seek stronger and more influential international status as member of emerging "Golden BRICS" (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), and both encompass fast growing trade, cross country investment, and technological cooperation. Brazil has surpassed India in 2009 to become China's ninth in the world and the first trade partner among the BRICS members. The agreement in 2009 for China to invest US\$ 10 billion in Brazil's national energy company Petrobras over the next five years to support its exploration in the Atlantic will definitely propel the economic relation between China and Brazil in particular and Latin America in general (Chinese..., 2009). China's relations with Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, Chile and traditionally Cuba followed Sino-Brazilian relations in China's overall relations with Latin America.

However, no parallel bilateral relations in Sino-African relations could be found. Among the 53 African countries, few countries followed South Africa whose relations with China are overall reciprocal and healthy either in trade terms or in terms of investment. Major Chinese trade partners in Africa are resources rich countries because other countries do not have what China needs and even the resources rich countries have nothing else but resources to export to China, to say nothing of investment in China. In a world of globalization you cannot expect China to buy finished products from these African countries with no demand in the Chinese market as China's did during the Cold War. The future Sino-African and Sino-Latin American relations are not only contingent upon the rise of China but also the rise of Africa and Latin America.

Another reason for the slow growth in Sino-African relations is the traditional friendship, which could be acclaimed as valuable assets as well as historical burdens. Many Africans still miss the revolutionary China who supported them in opposition to big powers regardless of cost; they still expect China to provide them what China did during the Cold War as they see China become economically more powerful. China's foreign aid from the 1950s-1970s were unconditionally awarded based on ideological motivations and political expediency, and economic effectiveness was largely disregarded. While today China's aid is channeled through market oriented means with an emphasis on efficiency and mutual benefits within China's

financial capability. China is no longer in such a position as to meet their expectations and disappointment easily changes to complaints. Sino-Latin American relations did not have a long history and a new kind of relations is easier to start under current international environment. The current momentum foretells that Sino-Latin American relations are more promising than Sino-African relations and the asymmetry will continue though in different ways.

The complex asymmetry, especially the accusation that China faces in its relations with Africa and Latin America also reflects the changing situation in China's foreign policy making. The Chinese party-state system has appeared a strong unitary actor in world politics. Chinese foreign policy making has been undergoing historical changes as Lampton has characterized. Professionalization, cooperation, pluralization, decentralization, and globalization have made of Chinese foreign policy a bureaucratic coordinating process during which where you stand depend upon where you sit (Lampton, 2001). For instance, the following up commission of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum is composed of 22 ministerial level agencies of the Chinese Government with the Ministry of Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Commerce jointly taking the lead (Zhang, 2006).

Not only are more bureaucracies getting involved in China's foreign policy making toward Africa and Latin America. Many initiatives are taken by business sectors without the involvement of the state. The Chinese-state affiliated companies are always considered as the representatives of the Chinese state if not the state itself, and any connection of the enterprises with the Chinese People's Liberation Army is always highlighted globally. But among the 8 hundred plus Chinese enterprises that invested in Africa only one hundred are state-owned big or medium-sized enterprises and the majority are private enterprises (Chinese..., 2007). As it goes business is business, they are all profit driven regardless state-owned or private enterprises. The state could exercise control over major and sensitive issues but could not scrutinize the concrete and discrete policies. The Chinese central government always credited itself for any good behaviors, so it should be blamed for any wrong or disgraceful actions. Beijing is facing many policy and management challenges and the deficiencies in Chinese government's policy making apparatus put China's internally strong party-state on the defensive in its international image or soft power. Such tendencies, which have been realized by some keen China watchers (Gill and Reilly, 2007; Downs, 2006), should not be overlooked by the correct generalization that China is domestically fragile while externally powerful (Shirk, 2007). A comparative study of China's policy toward Africa and Latin America present a more complex and paradoxical China. A less powerful Chinese state or more active private sectors, a situation many westerners expect to see and even taken measure to facilitate, would not necessarily promise a more responsible China which could be easy to deal with.

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