The Post-Cold War China's Strategic Move in Africa and the Shifting Paradigm

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Abstract
China-Africa cooperation is a widely discussed topic. Researchers, constantly, disagree; each other about China’s presence in Africa. While certain evaluate the Middle Kingdom’s actions on the Dark Continent, others focus on historical process of its involvement in Africa. Recent studies have presented Covid-19 as a serious factor changing drastically overall connections. However, few, if not any, have addressed the issue of China’s Post-Cold War strategic move in Africa and the ongoing change. This article presents the context of China’s strategic move in Africa, the shifting paradigm and explains why? The DRC, more than other African countries, should take this structural transformation into account in order to anticipate, adjust, and adapt its related policies.

Key words: Post-cold war Era, China’s strategic Move in Africa, Shifting paradigm, DRC.

Introduction
There is no doubt the Chinese presence in Africa is old than European. According to French Hoffman, a million Chinese migrants are building a new empire in Africa and Africa has become a de facto a second China’s continent (Howard W 2014). This presence is so visible that even in our small villages there are Chinese stores and businesses. Beyond political and diplomatic-ideological conceptions, it is quite legitimate to know and understand the real story of this China’s remarkable involvement in Africa and why only on the Post-cold war era.

Africa is one of the five parts of the world, with an area of 30,310,000 km2. Crossed almost in the middle by the equator and mostly included between the tropics. This continent is made up of 55 countries divided into five sub-regions geographically constituted by Central Africa, West Africa, North Africa, Southern Africa and East Africa. Although geographically and geopolitically diverse, Africa has been in the process of unification since independence. From the Organization of African Unity to the African Union today with the African Continental Free Trade Area, it’ is equally visible that the black continent has taken the path of no return for the all-out integration of African states and populations. The enthusiasm of African peoples and decision-makers around Agenda 2063 Africa we want confirms this.

Since the Covid-19 outbreak in China, some observers have enthusiastically presented the pandemic as an important factor changing drastically the China-Africa cooperation stigmatizing the dangerous effect of Covid-19 on economics and business (OECD 2020) (DW.com 2020). That is understandable since China being the first economic and financial partner of the whole African countries whatever affects seriously China have at least be felt in livelihood of Africans.

While, wanting to give a unique and unified dimension to China-Africa Angle, the main concern of this article is to explain why Covid-19 is not the major factor that would change Sino-African relations. As demonstrated below, the reduction in DRC exports to China in 2015 and Washington's diplomatic pressure to review Le Contrat Chinois (2008 onward) for instance are signs of a profound change in China’s internal dynamics and the post-Cold War international system and thus could seriously affect the China-Africa intercourse.

For strategic, synthetic and personal reasons, the Democratic Republic of Congo is taken as a case study to explain why China is so interested in Africa and also to set out the analytical model for understanding the facts: Strategic Move. The DRC is a country with a distant past, close and rich immediate history with the Middle Kingdom.

Knowing how the issue of Chinese Post-cold war involvement in Africa is discussed among African and Western elites, this article, far from being a text on history of China in Africa, demonstrate why it is on the continent and beyond Covid-19, presents profound factors affecting this odyssey. It further, examine the process

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of China's involvement in Africa and various transformations that have resulted from different strategies for a better understanding of current implications not only for Africa but for the international system as a whole.

From a methodological standpoint, this article focuses on official documents, scholarly analyses, books and articles. The first section discusses the China’s post-cold war strategic move in Africa and the shifting paradigm. The second analyses the China’s new growth model and its impact on Africans exports to China. The third section gives an overview of the Sino-US struggle for world primacy and a concluding remarks end the paper.

**China's post-cold war strategic move in Africa**

*Theoretical background*

The post-cold-war era has been labeled the unipolar moment (Acharya 2014). Referring to and believing that American hegemony will last forever. As Kishore has brilliantly documented: "it was a time of American hubris" (Mahbubani 2018). Despite early warnings, the ruling elite believed, with good faith, to keep American leadership at the world chessboard proclaiming the End of History (Fukuyama 1989). From theory of hegemonic instability, Layne tells us that everything that goes high falls under heaven (Layne 2020). This explains the current US continuing diminishing position in world affairs. Thus, China's global rise (Feng 2009) (Barry 2010) (Xuetong 2019), predictable since Deng Xiaoping's accession to power, has only confirmed on the one hand predictions that had been well published (Kishore 1998), and on the other hand the ineluctable American decline (Layne 2020) (Acharya 2014) (Martin 2009), relative though it may be, thus modifying the balance of power as pre-established since the end of the cold war: the end of uni-polarity. However, the meaning or significance to be given to this Chinese rise, from the very beginning, has only give birth to different interpretations and analyses. Is it also true that no one expected, ten years after the end of Cold War, attacks on World Center and Pentagon, that a country would be reborn with such speed, China may it be.

In regional chessboard, many have come out with, sometimes comparativist and propagandistic, analyses repeatedly presenting China as a supporter of despots, a new colonizer, a promoter of authoritarianism, and a buyer of developing countries through the debt trap, a destroyer of environmental ecosystems through uncoordinated actions of its SOEs, etc (Alden 2008) (Brookes 2006) (Howard W 2014). To this must be added those who are opportunistic and benevolent to the Middle Kingdom, thus brandishing its important contribution to the harmonious march of world since the advent of the 21st century (Brautigam 1998) (Brautigan 2010) (Chan-Fishel 2000) (Friedman 2009).

Beyond this plural presentation which, sometimes confuse, this article would like to conceptualize and give a unique meaning and unified character to the essence of Chinese Post-cold war involvement into Africa in what is convenient to present as a strategic move1 (rooted on Chinese internal dynamics and context of post-cold-war international system) taking into account the internal politics proper to China and the international context of the 1990s which allowed this strategic planning initiated towards Africa. Indeed, if both internal and external variables were essential to Chinese odyssey to Africa, the change in one or both variables could affect this relationship how beneficial or not between the two partners.

Let me start. The 1990s China is first of all one that came out victorious from its strategic move with great powers, but also the one of the end of Deng Xiaoping’s era and entry on stage of Jiang Jemin (faithful supporter of Deng) who knew genuinely to capitalize the audacious reforms initiated by the Communist Party under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping for the modernization of the Middle Kingdom, But more importantly, China was already rich and understood in the very beginning its role in the globalized world and strategically decided to project itself for the conquest of the international market.

China's strategic move towards Africa is in unison with the four necessities anchored in China's grand strategy of peaceful development, namely: excessive need for strategic minerals, low profile strategy -avoidance of

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1 From a strategic and political perspective for instance its geostrategic calculations.

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direct confrontation with great powers (especially the United States), the need for market for Chinese enterprises, and acquisition of external expertise (Howard W 2014).

Regarding the excessive need for strategic minerals: the Middle Kingdom needed them not only to strengthen its existing industry but also to meet new requirements of building industries that meet standards of the 21st century (Dollar 2016). This requirement led to the signing of several agreements between China and African countries in the fields of mining and oil. Between 1990 and 2010, China has built up an industry in almost all areas of its national life and constituted reserves of minerals imported mainly from Africa (Dollar 2016).

During this period, China has followed the policy of avoiding direct confrontation with great powers and has strategically kept a low profile (Xuetong, 2014), respecting imperatives of not directly confronting great powers, even in very difficult moments, for instance when Western countries and institutions were simultaneously pressing for renegotiation of Chinese contracts in the DRC, insisting for departure of Oumar Béchir in Sudan and supporting rebellion against Kadafi, three countries in which China had already invested more than 40 billion US dollars in minerals and oil (Michael and Chris 2011) (David and Charles 2017) (David G 2017). China took advantage of the vacuum left by Americans and Europeans to gain ground in Africa. This approach promoted China’s new type of Soft Power (Li 2008) especially in Africa.

It was a strategic choice of projection in that, with time, Chinese companies have not only won markets including infrastructure construction of all kinds but also have been strengthened to project themselves in other regions including Europe what was quite rare before the strategic move to Africa.

The Chinese odyssey in Africa far from being a fact of chance should be understood as a strategic move uniformly initiated, planned, oriented by the high leadership of the Chinese Communist Party better known under the label "Go Global policy" for the supply of strategic minerals, acquisition of external markets and the test-expertise which had to be done following a strategy of low profile. The Congolese case elucidate well and demonstrates some variations of it and answers the initial question why Covid-19 is not the major factor changing China-Africa Angle of cooperation.

Why the Democratic Republic of Congo

The DRC is one of the most important African countries for China. It is a country located in the heart of Africa and is still superlatively praised for its soil and subsoil full of mineral, fishery, environmental and human resources. Following its eventful history, from slavery trade to the present day, has a crying need for basic infrastructure to not only integrate her but also promote trade and therefore economic growth inside the country and in whole the continent. A country always wanted by great powers (Kabemba 2016). If yesterday it was the robust men of the Kongo kingdom that had to be brought across Atlantic to Americas, rubber that had to be extracted for manufacture of tires, Uranium of 1945 to annihilate Japan, cobalt in 1960 to keep a strategic advantage over Soviet, today still the DRC is worth for the fight against global warming, green energy, an always expanding internal market, etc. China, which discovered the Congo in the 19th century, is well aware of the strategic importance of this country located in the Afrique du Milieu².

Thus, since mid-1990s, the Chinese were keenly interested in investing in the then Zaire. The political instability of those years led to withdrawal of investors and partners, including Chinese. The return was possible after the victory of AFDL –Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la liberation- regime and the launch of FOCAC –Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. Chinese returned and firstly invested in artisanal mines and from 2007 onwards the signing of the memorandum of understanding between the Congolese government and some Chinese public companies demonstrated China’s ambition to access the heart of Congolese copper and

² Afrique du milieu is a concept coined by us to well incorporate dynamics which affect altogether the Central Africa, East Africa and an important part of southern Africa. For instance the 1st and 2nd Congo wars has gone beyond the so called Great Lakes Region to affect all parts mentioned above and UN or EU resolutions to solve the crises have included also those part of Africa.

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cobalt mines. The agreement formalized with the signing of the Convention de collaboration (2008) has been and continues to be interpreted in various ways both internally (in the Congo) and globally. It should be added that this Chinese contract, as it was labeled, is one of the key events in the China’s strategic move in Africa. And its mitigated success is a function of two changing variables in the China-Africa angle.

In the DRC, if the China’s strategic move has provoked and supported (whether directly or indirectly) as everywhere in Africa, economic growth, state-building and thus made possible timid improvement of living conditions of populations, on other hand, the odyssey would change or is affected first of all by the new growth model in China which, in 2015, contributed to the reduction of the country's economic growth and then by dynamics of profound transformation of the post-cold war international system, referred here as the Sino-US struggle for world primacy, which has a major impact on China's presence in Africa, particularly resurgence of the renegotiation of the Chinese contract signed between the DRC and Chinese state-owned enterprises (Chris and Jim 2021).

From the above observation and as we further demonstrate below, Covid-19 itself constitute a tiny factor in this angle of cooperation. Therefore, other variables (internal to China and that of the international system) are more evident and visible.

The Shifting Paradigm - China's New Growth Model

China's rise as a world power is firstly result of its economic growth and secondly due to the intelligence of the Chinese political elite led by the famous Chinese Communist Party. Frankly, it is useful to understand the twists and turns of China's economic growth because in reality external projection of any country has always been to support and fix internal challenges.

China-Africa partnership has been presented as natural for years. The complementarity of their economies stems primarily from the precariously of China's natural resources (compared to Africa) and the excessive need for manufactured goods in Africa. Nevertheless, China has relatively few metals and a good quantity of rare earths (Dollar 2016). But in general, it can be considered poor in natural resources. In contrast, African continent is rich in numerous resources especially raw metals relative to its population. In particular, it has vast energy and mineral reserves. This difference in endowments creates a real/potential for mutually beneficial intercourse (Miria and Wenxia 2015) (Heidi 2011).

This disparity in natural endowments between China and Africa has been exacerbated by China's old growth model, which has proven to be extremely resource-intensive in recent years. It is then important to understand the new growth model because it is a game changer. Not only did China's growth rate slow significantly in 2014 and 2015, but its GDP composition also shifted from investment to consumption (Dollar 2016). This is a serious signal likely to be a permanent shift, not a temporary cycle, and thus will have long-term, especially in Post Covid-19 world.

Economic pragmatism led China, in 1978, to move away from planned economy model with a reform program known as gaige kaifang (open door policies) to market economy (James R 2013). It gradually opened up important sectors of the economy, including most manufacturing industries, to international trade and foreign direct investment. It has also opened up space for a domestic private sector to develop alongside foreign-invested enterprises. More importantly, China had privatized some state-owned enterprises while retaining many important ones, especially in modern services such as finance, telecommunications, media and transportation. While foreign firms have helped China connect to global markets and have been responsible for much of its exports, recent research has shown that the majority of added value in China's exports comes from the domestic private sector, not from foreign firms or state-owned enterprises.16 This construction of domestic value chains, based on the local private sector, has been one of the foundations of China's success (Dollar 2016).

The open door policies, as David Dollar confirms, led quickly to an intensive investment growth model. The investment rate of Chinese economy for the period 1980-2000, for instance, was 35 percent of GDP, except for a brief peak in 1993-94. This was similar to the earlier experiences of Japan, Taiwan and South Korea during their periods of rapid growth. However, after 2000, China's investment rate increased significantly, first to 40 percent of GDP and then to nearly 50 percent between 2010 and 2011 (Dollar 2016).

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The structural factors driving Chinese old growth model were mainly fueled by: China's accession to World Trade Organization in 2000 (which contributed to the explosion of exports) and privatization of real estate sector in late 1990s (which triggered a boom in real estate construction) (Hui 2006). This model generated a huge and ever-changing demand for energy and other natural resources. We understand why China invested and imported much in Africa. The construction side, for instance, required further large amounts of iron, copper and other metals. The investment in machinery, equipment production also was a gourmand of energy and metals. Not only was the rate of investment high and rising, but the Chinese economy also grew extremely fast, at about 10% per year, in part because of this intensive investment feature.

The combination of 10 percent GDP growth per year and an increasing share of investment resulted in a surge in real investment of about 13 percent per year. To maintain this rate of investment, China has had to import increasing amounts of oil, iron, copper, zinc and other metals. In the case of copper, for example, China's import volume growth rate averaged 13 percent between 2006 and 2014. The value of imports grew even faster as China's demand put upward pressure on prices. This contributed to the rise in metal prices between 2005 and 2011. Huge amount of imports was dictated by internal demand (Yan 2015).

When the 2008 financial crisis broke out, China suffered a major shock (Linyue, Thomas D and Nan 2012). The crisis easing measures taken by the Chinese authorities increased investment. For instance, investment in infrastructure such as highways, railroads, urban transport, water supply and electricity supply was the main part of the easing measures (Dollar, 2016). In addition to this fiscal stimulus, the easing of monetary conditions also allowed the housing boom to resume, and all of this had a strong enough influence on the manufacturing industry that investment in this key sector also picked up. As a result, the overall investment rate did not fall after the global crisis, but continued to rise.

The slowdown in China's growth from 2011 onwards is slowing investment-led growth (Ross, Cai and Song 2013). The problem with investing at such a high rate is that excess capacity inevitably develops, which lowers return on additional investment. Overcapacity has become visible throughout the economy. After a long housing boom, during which many people bought additional apartments as investments, an estimated one-fifth of apartments are now empty. The problem is particularly critical in third and fourth tier cities. Although the infrastructure boom after the global financial crisis stimulated the economy, it also led to an increase in local government debt. The government continues to invest in carefully selected infrastructure projects, but is working to prevent a further increase in public debt to GDP. It is natural for investment growth to slow in this environment (Dollar 2016).

In 2015, investment contributed an average of 2.3 percentage points to growth, implying a growth rate of 4.6 percent. Since 2016, China's leaders have advocated a new growth model that relies less on investment and more on innovation, growth and productivity. They are also encouraging consumption growth, which for a long time grew at a slower pace than GDP, but is now outpacing GDP growth. On the demand side, it has become the engine of China's new growth model.

China's leaders have also accepted that the country's GDP growth rate will slow down now that China is a middle-income economy. They are aiming for growth of about 6.5 percent, which may be ambitious given the difficulty of implementing the reforms that underpin the new growth model (Dollar 2016) (Ross, Cai and Song 2013).

Therefore, Chinese economy is undergoing profound change in policy and structure. The change initiated to increase the value of growth to the Chinese community, and to sustain growth into the future of China's prosperity. The change is being driven partly by economic pressures that are emerging naturally from successful economic development, as labor scarcity and rapid increases in real wages change patterns of resource allocation, income distribution, environmental impact, and rates of economic growth, savings, investment and international capital flows. These changes that have emerged from the success of old patterns of growth are being reinforced by changes in national policy (Ross, Cai and Song 2013).

The issue here is to look at whether this fundamental shift in China’s growth model affected Africa? If so to what extent? Why? A look at Congolese case may give us a real picture.
Lesson from History: The Case of the 2015 Congolese Economic Recession

During the period of China’s intensive investment growth model, China supplanted the US as Africa’s largest trading partner. In 2005, the US was the largest market for African exports. Although, America has welcomed a wide range of manufactured imports from Africa nontaxed through the famous African Growth and Opportunity Act, in practice most of Africa’s exports to the US have been oil. With the price boom after 2005, Africa's overall exports increased rapidly in the following years. Exports to the US increased about fivefold, peaking in 2008 before the global financial crisis triggered a sharp drop. Since then, China has become the largest trading and financial partner of the whole African continent and economic relations between them has risen exponentially within the two last decade (Taylor, 2009) (Dollar 2016).

The DRC’s economic recovery (since 2002) was mainly driven by extractive industries, agriculture, construction, telecommunication and trade. Many Chinese investors were involved then particularly the China Railway Group Limited (CRGL) subsidiary, China Overseas Engineering Group Corporation Limited (COVEC), has been active in the DRC’s mining sector since 2005 as party to two joint ventures: COMILU (Compagnie Minière de Luisha) and COMMUS (Compagnie Minière de Musono). The COMILU is a Joint Venture in which the Congolese state-owned, Gécamines, holds 28%, COVEC 35.38% and CRGL 36.72%. Established in 2006, this Joint Venture mines the 26.1 million tonnes of Luisha copper and cobalt deposits, the 1.45 million tonnes of Kalumbwe and Myunga deposits, and has a fairly large smelting operation. The COMMUS is a 73:27 Joint Venture between COVEC and Gécamines. Established in 2005, it holds the Musono copper and cobalt concession for 30 million tonnes (Johanna 2011). This corresponds to thereafter China’s join WTO and appetite for metals.

To achieve good economic performance since 2002 (after counter performances observed over the period 1990-2001 marked by hyperinflation and declining growth and to reduce poverty), the DRC has had implemented several programs of macroeconomic stabilization with financial reforms, as well as sectorial3 and/or multi sectorial4 programs and some development strategies articulated in the interim poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP-I) covering the period 2001-2005 and in two strategy tools for growth and poverty reduction (DSCRP-1 and DSCRP-2) covering the periods of 2006-2010 and 2011-2015, respectively. Despite the implementation of IMF and World Bank’s programs which led to socio-economic progress recorded since 2002 especially the cancellation of almost 90% of US 10 billion foreign debt after reaching point of completion of heavily indebted poor countries in 2010, the Chinese investments in keys sectors namely mining, infrastructure, telecommunications, agriculture has played a central role on state building in post war DRC5 played a crucial role especially the continued growth until 2015.

According to reports from the Banque Centrale du Congo (Congolese central bank), decline in growth observed in 2015 was primarily due to sudden lowering prices of natural resources (BCDC 2016) (BCC 2016). This is significant because 95 percent of Congolese dividend comes from exportations of natural resources (Xavier 2017). Again, since 2015 to 2019 prices don’t seriously increase and Congolese economic was suffering not

3 Enhanced interim program (PIR), government economic program (PEG 1 and 2), and consolidation relay program (PRC) and Government action program (PAG).
4 National aid program (PNLS), national multi-sectoral aid program (PNMLS), national nutrition program (PRONANUT), national reproductive health program (PNSR), national program to combat Malaria (PNLP), framework program for job creation and income (PROCER), multi-sectoral rehabilitation and reconstruction emergency program (PMURR), interim education program (PIE), rehabilitation support program (PAR), project competitiveness and private sector development (PCDSP), former combatants demobilization and reintegration program (PDR), expanded program on immunization (PEV), interim demobilization and reintegration program (PIDR), minimum program of Partnership for transition and recovery (PMPTR), national governance improvement program (PNAG), national tuberculosis (PNLT), national household rehabilitation program (PRONAREM), project emergency support to the process of economic and social reunification (PUSPRES), national health development plan (PNDS), health facilities equipment program (PESS),
5 Plan National du développement, 2016, p46.
only because of that decrease but also the effect of Sino-US trade war (UNCTAD 2019). Obviously, it’s well known that since the beginning of the 21st century quasi wholesale of Congolese minerals, no matter whose producer, are exported to China. This is a tangible fact. The Sino-Congolese economic intercourse is highly pronounced that in a minute slowdown happening in China automatically DRC is affected. And, the DRC, as many other African countries, especially minerals, were affected the same year.

The underlining reason is the New China Growth Model. China Growth model has evolved from investment and trade to consumption and industry. Since 2016, China has entered a phase in which consumption is growing than investment. This shifting pattern is less resource-intensive. This China’s new growth model is a real factor to understanding the underlining change in China-Africa cooperation in general and China’s strategic move in Africa in particular. It clearly explains why China is more cautious in investing now (compared to the 2000s and 2010s) huge amount in mineral but also why there are more and more China’s SOEs and privates companies investment in other sectors (tech, agriculture, manufacture, services etc.) Africa.

The Shifting paradigm: The Sino-American struggle for global primacy

One thing is certain. The post-Cold War international system is shifting from unipolar to multipolar. This structural transformation of the international system pivots on Sino-American dynamic. However, the geopolitical competition that has erupted between America and China will continue in the coming decades and will have an impact on all continents.

Scholars disagree about the Sino-American worldwide competition. Realists argue that the inescapable laws of nature fascinate people who do and die for survival and power politics. Liberals, on the other hand, insist on the ameliorating and mitigating power of three mutually reinforcing causal mechanisms: democratization, international institutions, and economic interdependence. Constructivists believe that international system is what you make of it. However, realists, liberals, and constructivists alike all accept China's de facto position as a global actor, with little difference of opinion on China's status in current world stage and whether or not China will be able to replace the United States as hegemon.

Structural forces leading to Sino-US struggle for global primacy

- Geopolitical law (a two thousand rule). It’s obvious. When the emerging World power (which is today China) is about to overtake the world number one power (today’s U.S); the world number one power always pushes the world emerging power. The Harvard distinguished Professor Graham Alison recently studied 16 cases on a book titled Destined for war: can America and China escape Thucydides’s trap? (Graham 2017). Therefore, it’s quite nature why Sino-US are now engaged on a worldwide geopolitical contest.

- Yellow peril. It looks at the way humans make decisions. Yellow peril is concerned about things driven by emotions, conscious or unconscious. Georges Kennan wisely observed, that “loss of temper and self-control” is a sign of weakness. The Singaporean distinguished Professor Kishore Mahbubani has brilliantly pointed out “emotions play as important a role as reason in international relations” (Kishore 2020). This has implications on the already geopolitical contest between America and China. Western countries, today lead by US, since 5 centuries has designed the world on their self-image. They can’t easily see, adjust and adapt to the world new realities. That’s what makes the competition more dangerous and unpredictable. Yellow peril.

If distant facts can be considered as signs of current competition, it should be noted that it is the Trump administration that launches the Trade war against China. Before Covid-19, it was most remarkable event on the planet. Even developing countries were affected because they know and understand the dominant role of great powers in international system. Let check out the below lesson from history to understand how and why the Sino-US power struggle affect the China’s strategic move in Africa.

Lesson from History: US opposed the Chinese Contract in the DRC
The DRC is not a great power. However, it has almost all strategic resources indispensable for great powers. This explains why it was created during a conference of great powers (Berlin conference). Since its creation and decomposition as a geopolitical entity by western powers (Olemanu, Research Gate 2017), DRC has always been at the center of world stakes (strong men to be send in America, rubber, Uranium, Cobalt, geophysical centrality, Coltan, Lithium-rock, peat bog, etc.) and tested in all great power competitions (UK-Germany, USSR, US-France, US-China) since 1885 until now. Let analyze Sicomines debate to elucidate the real game. The Sicomines Agreement is the great shift on Sino-Congolese Relations. It’s one of the DRC-China’s widely, if not the unique, widely discussed subject. To capture the real concept above let start from the beginning: why did DRC’s government initiated the deal? Why did Chinese accepted? Was Congolese government so naïve about and needed western community implications? Here we go.

The DRC’s 2006 elections marked the end of long transition period that followed the country’s 1996–1997 and 1998–2003 wars. Although Sino-Congolese harmonized bilateral relations date back to 1972, and before that to early independence years, it was only after the 2006 general elections that China began to play a more active role in the Lumumba’s country (Johanna 2011) However, earlier China’s presence in DRC was mitigated and tumultuous due to political instability. At that period China’s donations comprised stadiums, hospitals and public buildings, awarding of scholarships to Congolese students, dispatching of Chinese medical teams, and since 2003, troops’ contribution to the UN’s peacekeeping mission, MONUC. Even limited, the china’s involvement was crucial and significant. For instance, the troops’ contribution played a key role securing the DRC’s national territory integrity during wars and President Xi reminded Congolese Premier Bruno Tshibala during the 2018 FOCAC summit in Beijing.

In fact, the Sicomines agreement is a clear expression of China’s Government global ambitions in the International affairs. It has been widely presented as a show of force in terms of Chinese government’s ambition to secure access to DRC’s raw materials after securing the Angola’s oil since 2004. The State Owned Enterprise CREC’s quest for mining titles was given considerable political backing by the Chinese government. This arrangement, unusual in the Congolese context, has created confusion over the labeling of agreement since its inception, in terms of whether it is an aid, a trade agreement, an investment deal, or all three. The Chinese government uses a variety of tools to facilitate its overseas economic engagement (Brautigam 1998). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development classifies a loan to a developing country as official development assistance if it is provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies; is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective; and is concessional in character and conveys a grant element of at least 25 percent (Brautigam, 2011). The Sicomines agreement includes components of development assistance, of investment, and has potential implications of increasing bilateral trade between China and DRC because all agencies and institutions involved are officials.

To understand the Congolese motivations initiating the Sicomines agreement, as David G. Landry highlight “it’s warmly important to analyze the government’s context or more specifically Kabila’s political need. After his father’s assassination in 2001, Joseph Kabila 29 years old became the world’s youngest head of state. Kabila who trained at the People’s Liberation Army National Defence University in Beijing had honed his leadership skills as commander in the Congolese Land Forces during the Second Congo War” (David G 2017). In the early years of his presidency, he focused on building peace and consolidating his base of power. In 2006, three years after the end of war, he was elected president in the DRC’s first democratic and general election since its

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7 https://www.politico.cd/actualite/2018/09/07/a-tshibala-le-president-chinois-promet-de-soutenir-fermement-la-sauvegarde-de-sa-souverainete-de-la-rdc.html
independence. As part of his election program, Kabila announced his ambitious *Les Cinq Chantiers* program, a key part of his post-war state building strategy. The five sectors at the heart of his program were infrastructure, job creation, education, water and electricity, and health. Following the election, he started looking for the funding to bring *Les Cinq Chantiers* to reality (David G 2017).

During this post-war period, the international community had a considerable presence in the DRC. Indeed, the funds brought into the country by the United Nations, other international non-governmental organizations and bilateral donors were not devoted to the type of post-conflict state building planned in *les Cinq Chantiers*. The Congolese government’s plans to secure funding in this regard were limited. The DRC’s Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility program with the International Monetary Fund had been prematurely ended in early 2006 due to misreporting of budgetary spending and non-implementation of certain structural measures. However, since the country was not following an IMF program, the Paris Club donors could not provide the country with loans either. Financial support offered by the IMF to the country between 2006 and 2009, when the country re-started its IMF program, comprised of a 2009 disbursement of $195.5 million under the IMF’s Exogenous Shocks Facility. This served to facilitate the DRC’s adjustment to sharp drops in export revenue caused by the global economic crisis.

Furthermore, the DRC had no alternative to bring a life its state building program planned in *les cinq chantiers*. The Chinese option was absolutely inevitable and, as a result, CREC’s interest in mining reverberated all the way up to the highest political level in the DRC for a century agreement.

Facing the reality, in 2007, the Congolese Government and China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding for an enormous resource for infrastructure valued at a total of over US$ 9 billion (David G 2017). This represented the first stage of negotiations of a deal granting the Chinese consortium and DRC’s Gecamines respectively 68 and 32 percent stake in a new joint venture named the *Sino-Congolais des Mines* (Sicomines). In exchange, the Chinese consortium would provide the DRC with turnkey infrastructure projects of a planned public project for state building financed by Eximbank (Kabemba 2016) and the DRC, as part of the deal, Congolese exploitation licenses 9681 and 9682, both located in the Kolwezi District, would be allocated to the Chinese consortium led by CREC.

A further document, the *Convention de Collaboration*, was signed in 2008 by the involved parties. That document specified that two tranches of infrastructure financing, reportedly worth US$ 3 billion each would be disbursed in addition to the loan mine development. The financing would be disbursed to the contractor of each project. However, the Congolese government would act as a guarantor for the mining loans. The Congolese government also agreed that the project’s feasibility studies should ensure Sino-hydro an internal rate of return of 19 percent. Otherwise, it agreed to adopt all measures likely to better conditions of cooperation in order to reach the 19 percent of internal rate of return for Sino-hydro. Furthermore, this document outlined the deal’s tax and reimbursement parameters, and stipulated that the Congolese parliament would need to pass a law safeguarding the provisions in the 12 months following the Chinese government’s approval of the deal (David G 2017).

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9 [http://www.clubdeparis.org/](http://www.clubdeparis.org/) The Paris Club comprises 18 OECD countries and the Russian Federation. It is ‘an informal group of official creditors whose role is to find coordinated and sustainable solutions to the payment difficulties experienced by debtor countries’.
Following the multiple rounds of negotiations, an Avenant (amendment) was made to the Convention. It capped the size of the infrastructure loans at US$ 3 billion, thereby reducing it by about half. It also removed the Congolese government’s guarantee for the mining loan (but not for the infrastructure loan). Two other amendments were added to the agreement in the same year, which saw different firms added to both sides of the venture, but with their total shares remaining unchanged at 68 percent and 32 percent, respectively.

The above story happened between 2007 and 2009. Someone may object that all this happened before the trade war and therefore Sino-American competition was not yet on the agenda. The reality is that today Washington is supporting the renegotiation or outright cancellation of these contracts. The President’s plans to revise all the contracts the DRC has signed with China were largely inspired by the United States. The very active US Ambassador welcomed the idea of contract renegotiation. After the 2018 DRC’s elections, Kikaya bin Karubi, former diplomatic adviser and close friend of Joseph Kabila confirmed the fact declaring that “the Sicomines agreement has created countless misunderstandings between the former regime and the Western community, mainly the USA”. Obviously, it’s clear as Joseph Kabila was presented as China’s ally (since Sicomines deal) the current Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi is well under US protection and explains all why he doesn’t yet visit China despite Xi Jinping’s multiples invitations. The real underlining reasons of Washington opposition to China-DRC’s Sicomines deals are linking to the overall Sino-US struggle world primacy because that agreement give China access to the Congolese strategic minerals related modern technologies.

Concluding Remarks – Towards China Africa triangles?
This article has argued that the China’s strategic move is a common feature defining real China’s Post-cold war involvement in Africa. This article contends that the perceived shift in China-Africa Angle is result of both China’s internal and post-cold war international system variables. It used lessons from history to demonstrate why the new China’s growth model and the Sino-US struggle for global primacy affect Sino-African cooperation. Therefore, as China has emerged as global power and engaged in a struggle for world primacy with the US, China-Africa Angle could no longer exclude influences of triadic dynamics. For instance, US-China-Africa, EU-China-Africa, Russia-China-Africa, Japan-China-Africa connections, ignoring inter and intra active triangular relations erode analytical merit and policy potential of artificially limited studies. The China-African strategic triangles, as analytical paradigm, have potential of identifying the common fields where great powers can work together in Africa for common destiny in a world plenty of uncertainty.

Firstly, this article has implications for foreign policy-related studies. It introduces and discusses the issue of whether an African country, DRC for instance, is capable of anticipating events, especially caused by great powers, and adapt, adjust its foreign policy in a changing international environment. Realist scholars believe

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that anytime developing countries side great powers to seek protection—a real debatable subject in today’s international system where developing countries are adopting hedging diplomacy. Alignment depends on the type of the international system. Secondly, it addresses the issue of how to strengthen fiscal and custom administration, promote manufacture industries and services sectors to join the global value chain opportunities in order to become a real geo-economic bloc. 

In recent decades, the phenomenon of global value chains has led to the deconstruction of the production process for many goods, with different components being produced in different countries and these intermediate goods being traded extensively.

The development of global value chains has made it easier for developing economies to become involved in the production and trade of manufactured goods. It is no longer necessary for a country to be skilled in the production of a complete and sophisticated product to contribute to its manufacture. It can start with simpler, labor-intensive activities and gradually move up the value-added chain. China is probably the best recent example of a developing economy benefiting from global value chains.

References


