

Promoting Independent Development: China's Governance Assistance to Africa under the Global Civilization Initiative

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The Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) is another important public good to the international society contributed by China following the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative. It responds to the core concerns of developing countries about how to implement the first two initiatives. As public goods promoting development, the three initiatives primarily benefit developing countries and aim to encourage them to serve as the engine for global recovery and growth. According to the current mainstream opinion in international development studies, the lack of governance capacity is the root cause of underdeveloped countries' backwardness. Therefore, the aid system dominated by Western countries has demanded economic and political reforms in developing countries since the 1980s in exchange for development assistance.

As China's aid to Africa progressively expands in scale and influence, the relationship between China's assistance and African countries' governance capacity has been widely discussed. There are two main research approaches. One approach tends to demonize China's motives for aiding Africa from the perspective of geopolitics and ideological competition, labeling the Chinese achievements as either communist expansion or new colonialism at the expense of local human rights. Another approach mostly summarizes and analyses China's aid policies and practices towards Africa from the viewpoint of responding scepticism, with field research and comparative analysis as its

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main methods.

However, neither of the approaches looks into how China perceives Africa's root cause of underdevelopment, nor do they address the core concern of Africa and other underdeveloped countries, which is whether China will instrumentalize aid to impose its model on them. The GCI provides a conceptual interpretation of China's core understanding of development patterns followed by other developing countries and offers guidance for China's assistance to African governance in practice.

Respect for Independent Choices: The Core Concept of GCI

With mounting deficits in global development and governance, the governance capacity of recipient countries in Africa has once again become the focus of international attention. Against this backdrop, enhancing governance capacity in African nations has emerged as an imperative issue that should be addressed with Chinese assistance. Based on China's development model for modernisation, the GCI states how China sees the world and guides China's aid to Africa in the new era.

Independent choice as the core of modernization

As a consensus in development studies, the lack of governance capacity is the major reason behind the underdevelopment of Africa. During the rise of Western civilization, Western countries consciously separated the West from the non-West, believing that the Western civilization was naturally superior to others, and committed bloody colonial disasters.

In the 1980s, leading development aid organizations, including the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, in their reflection on why their substantial financial and technical assistance for developing countries had achieved little results, concluded that government corruption and a lack of regulatory mechanisms in recipient countries were the main reasons and thus put forward the structural adjustment theory, which holds that adoption of market economy and democracy

in politics are the basis for growth of developing countries.¹ Subsequently, Western countries began to push the model of conditional aid, attaching their assistance to conditions including political reform, market economy reform, government performance and so on. After the end of the Cold War, African countries were corralled into electoral politics by the “third wave” of democratization. However, democracy has failed to achieve the expected results. Instead, together with tribal and religious conflicts, military coups, terrorist attacks and other unstable factors, it has led to failed and fragile African states such as Somalia.

On the question of how to improve African countries’ governance capacity, the GCI stresses that their independent choices should be respected. Chinese President Xi Jinping stressed that “the Communist Party of China (CPC) would neither import foreign development models nor export the Chinese model. We will not ask other countries to copy the Chinese practice.”² The report to the 20th CPC National Congress made it clear that China “stays true to the principle of equality of all countries big or small, strong or weak, and rich or poor, and it respects the development paths and social systems independently chosen by all the world’s peoples. China stands firmly against all forms of hegemonism and power politics, the Cold War mentality, interference in other countries’ internal affairs, and double standards.”³ The GCI advocates “the principle of independence and exploration of diversified paths towards modernization,”⁴ and once again underlines China’s development experience as a testimony that a successful development model must be in line with a country’s national conditions, history and culture, and the international community

1 See Giles Mohan, *Structural Adjustment: Theory, Practice and Impacts*, New York: Routledge, 2000.

2 “Keynote Address at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting,” December 1, 2017, https://www.gov.cn/govweb/xinwen/2017-12/01/content_5243852.htm.

3 “Hold High the Great Banner of Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects: Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” October 16, 2022, http://www.qstheory.cn/yaowen/2022-10/25/c_1129079926.htm.

4 “Full Text of Xi Jinping’s Keynote Address at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting,” March 15, 2023, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202303/16/WS6412496da31057c47ebb4b23.html>.

should respect the right of all countries to explore development models independently.

Civilizations should be equal and learn from each other

All civilizations are of equal value. International aid originated from the assistance extended by former colonizers to their colonial domains following the latter's independence. Therefore, Western centrism has inevitably left its mark on how to evaluate the civilization of aid-recipient countries. From the perspective of the members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC), developing countries, mostly in Africa, can only get out of ignorance and succeed in development by adopting the Western development path to transform themselves.⁵ The belief got more entrenched when the US became the sole hegemon after the end of the Cold War, who packaged Western values and systems as universal and indiscriminately promoted them to Third World countries.⁶ Its stand contrasts with that of China, which advocates that "all civilizations are rooted in their unique cultural environment. Each embodies the wisdom and vision of a country or nation, and each is valuable for being uniquely its own. Civilizations only vary from each other; just as human beings are different only in terms of skin color and the language used. No civilization is superior over others."⁷ Every civilization is unique, and copying others dogmatically and blindly to remould itself will produce catastrophic consequences. Therefore, developed countries are in no position to criticize developing countries' development models and export their own models and values.

Civilizations should learn from each other. "Exchanges and mutual learning of civilizations form an important drive for human progress and

5 Cheryl McEwan, *Postcolonialism and Development*, London: Routledge, 2009, p.122.

6 Tian Wenlin, "A Century of Great Changes Calls for a 'New View of Civilization,'" *Contemporary World*, No.4, 2023, p.37.

7 "Deepening Exchanges and Mutual Learning Among Civilizations For an Asian Community with a Shared Future: Keynote Speech at Opening of Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations," Xinhua, May 15, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2019-05/15/c_1124497022.htm.

global peace and development,”⁸ President Xi said, “Countries should replace estrangement with exchange, clashes with mutual learning and superiority with coexistence.”⁹ The GCI advocates respect for different development models explored by different civilizations, and encourages mutual learning and building platforms and networks for equal dialogue to promote multi-level communication among various elements of the civilizations. By so doing, common development can be achieved to shape new forms and patterns of human civilization.

Respect the centrality of people in civilizational development

Civilizations should be inclusive and respect each country’s independent choice rather than imposing one’s will on others. However, accepting and implementing the neoliberal policies represented by the Washington Consensus was once necessary for developing countries to be viewed as civilized by Western countries and a prerequisite to receiving aid from them. African countries that accepted the West’s political reform conditionality received massive financial support, while others with independent development plans were either forced to stand up against the West or classified as “failed states” or “rogue states.” The end-of-history concept proposed by Francis Fukuyama reflects the Western countries’ superiority complex about their development model. They posited that the Western model is the only correct development path, and non-Western models are reasons for backwardness.

But in recent years, the turmoil caused by the Western push for democracy has prompted some countries and political parties in Africa to criticize the Western model. Meanwhile, they have also begun to rediscover the socialist concepts and models that took shape during their national liberation movement in the 20th century and combine them with traditional

8 “Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping at UNESCO Headquarters,” Xinhua, March 28, 2014, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-03/28/c_119982831_2.htm.

9 “Full Text of Xi Jinping’s Keynote Address at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting,” March 15, 2023.

African communitarianism.¹⁰ Against this backdrop, China, based on its own development experience, which combined the particularity of its conditions and the universality of modernization, has encouraged African countries to draw on its experience in light of their conditions, while making it clear that “it neither interfered in other countries’ internal affairs nor imposed its will on others. It will never seek hegemony no matter how strong it may become.”¹¹

All civilizations ultimately aspire to take good care of their people, and whether people’s well-being is improved is the fundamental criterion to evaluate governance effectiveness. Since the end of the Cold War, wars and conflicts have mostly erupted in developing countries. The ability to ensure a safe and stable internal and external environment reflects a nation’s governance effectiveness. It is also important for a civilization to safeguard its people’s right to life and development. China’s people-centric development path has proved that wars and exploitation are not sine quibus non for development. “China advocates the importance of inheritance and innovation of civilizations. Countries need to fully harness the relevance of their histories and cultures to the present times and push for creative transformation and innovative development of their fine traditional cultures.”¹² The GCI advocates the shared values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom for all mankind. “History shows human civilization has thrived and prospered through inclusiveness and openness.”¹³ China encourages developing countries to put their people first and explore poverty reduction and modernization paths that align with their national conditions.

10 Deng Yanting, “Socialist Exploration in Africa’s De-Westernizing Transformation,” *World Socialism Studies*, No.5, 2022, pp.79-91.

11 “Carry Forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence To Build a Better World Through Win-Win Cooperation: Address by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People’s Republic of China at Meeting Marking the 60th Anniversary of the Initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence,” June 29, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0629/c64094-25214109.html>.

12 “Full Text of Xi Jinping’s Keynote Address at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting,” March 15, 2023.

13 “Xi Jinping Replies to Letter from Greek Scholars,” Xinhua, February 21, 2023, http://www.news.cn/politics/2023-02/21/c_1129382028.htm.

Enhancing Independent Development Capacity: The Theme of Chinese Assistance to Africa

Based on recipient countries' economic and social development needs and China's own development experience, China's aid to Africa can be divided into distinctive phases. But respecting their sovereignty and supporting their independent development capacity-building has been a consistent theme.

Helping newly independent African countries explore the path to industrialization (1956-1977)

The Bandung Conference of April 1955 raised the mutual understanding between China and other developing countries. It was then that China began to support the national liberation of Asian, African and Latin American countries through aid. China's leader at that time, Mao Zedong, even made supporting the international anti-imperialist movement a criterion to evaluate whether a CPC member was politically qualified.¹⁴ Then Premier Zhou Enlai also stated that China is willing to do its best to help newly independent African countries develop their economies while China is still building its economy.¹⁵ Later, Zhou announced China's eight principles for foreign aid during his first visit to Africa in 1964, clearly proposing that China's aid fully respects the recipient countries' sovereignty and aims to help them gain the capacity for independent development. In December 1964, Zhou pointed out in the government work report that under the guidance of proletarian internationalism, China provides grants and loans with no or low interests to (African) countries to support their national liberation and economic growth.¹⁶

When selecting aid areas, China focused on helping African recipient

14 Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, *Mao Zedong's Selected Diplomatic Writings*, Central Literary Publishing House, 1994, p.531.

15 "Statements by Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai on the Current International Situation, China's Foreign Policy and the Liberation of Taiwan (Part II)," *People's Daily*, June 29, 1956, p.2.

16 "Government Work Report," *People's Daily*, December 31, 1964, pp.1-3.

countries build a basic industrial system. After the Bandung Conference, China's leaders focused on aid to African countries to help them realize economic independence. As Premier Zhou stressed, the priority was to meet the basic survival needs of local people and assist in agricultural and industrial sectors, satisfying the countries' immediate needs while benefiting their long-term development.¹⁷ In 1958, the CPC Central Committee directed for the first time that efforts should be made to help recipient countries build industrial systems. Premier Zhou also instructed that projects built with China's help should be mostly small and medium-sized, and their construction should be accelerated to reap quick development results. During Guinean President Toure's visit to China in September 1960, China and Guinea signed an agreement on economic and technical cooperation, the first between China and an African country. In the agreement, China provided Guinea with an interest-free loan of 22.5 million rubles to support its building of match factories, cigarette factories and hydropower stations, among other projects.¹⁸ There was initial disagreement on how the loan should be used, with China suggesting supporting productive projects while Guinea wanted to use the fund to construct its parliament building. After rounds of discussions, Guinea cancelled the parliament building project, and the Chinese leaders appreciated the decision. At the same time, China also provided grants to support the construction programs in other African countries. China supported Tanzania in building the highly mechanized Mbarali farm, where Chinese experts trained local employees in mechanizing their daily operations. Tanzanian people widely praised the project; they believed "the farm served as a model for Tanzania's agricultural development, and it's not only grain production base, but also a talent training school."¹⁹

17 Office of Diplomatic History Studies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, ed., *Chronicles of Zhou Enlai's Diplomatic Activities (1949-1975)*, Beijing: World Knowledge Publishing House, 1993, p. 377.

18 Shi Lin, ed., *Foreign Economic Cooperation of Contemporary China*, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1989, p.41.

19 Shi Lin, *Foreign Economic Cooperation of Contemporary China*, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1991, pp.230-233.

China's aid helped newly independent African countries establish a basic industrial system, which enhanced their independent development capacity and won their support. The most notable example was the Tanzania-Zambia Railway project, which strengthened the relevant countries' national independence and self-reliance and was called the "road of friendship" by the African people.²⁰

Improving Africa's technological level (1978-2011)

The third plenary session of the 11th CPC Central Committee, held in late 1978, shifted China's focus from ideological struggle to economic development and made the strategic decision to reform and open up. Meanwhile, as most developing countries had completed the mission of decolonization and national liberation, economic growth and poverty alleviation became their top priorities.

Against such a backdrop, China reiterated its stance on promoting the African countries' independent development and reducing their reliance on donor states. At the fifth conference of Chinese diplomatic envoys stationed abroad in July 1979, Deng Xiaoping stressed that foreign aid should continue to adhere to the eight principles proposed by Zhou Enlai, but specific aid methods should be changed according to reality on the ground so that recipient countries can truly benefit from aid rather than relying more heavily on the donors. Part of the free aid could be converted into low-interest loans, and the recipient countries should figure out the economic costs and benefits themselves to improve the effectiveness of aid funds.²¹

Regarding aid methods, China focused on technical assistance in this period to enhance the independent development capacity of recipient countries. First, to avoid improper operation of China-aided infrastructure projects due to the lack of management experience of the recipient country,

20 Wei Song, "Seeking New Allies in Africa: China's Policy towards Africa during the Cold War as Reflected in the Construction of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway," *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, No.1, 2015, p.59.

21 Shi Lin, ed., *Foreign Economic Cooperation of Contemporary China*, p.70.

China launched comprehensive technical cooperation to improve the recipient country's management and operation capacity. Second, China cooperated with the UN and other multilateral international organizations to provide technical training for African countries. From 1983 to 1994, 99 developing countries and nine international organizations received multilateral and bilateral assistance jointly provided by China and UN development agencies, and more than 1,500 technical personnel were trained.²² Third, China increased its support for capability building in project operation to ensure the repayment ability of preferential loan projects. To expand the source of aid funds, China launched preferential loans as part of its aid package in 1995. Unlike interest-free loans, preferential loans are subsidized by the government and cannot be forgiven. The project's expected economic benefits must be relatively high to ensure the loans can be repaid on schedule. Also, China began to promote in-depth cooperation between its enterprises and those in recipient countries, training many local management and technical talents to improve the projects' operational efficiency and profitability. Fourth, China continued expanding its cooperation with other developing countries in human resources. By the end of the 1980s, 43 African countries had sent 2,245 students to China.²³ Since 1998, various short-term training courses or seminars have been held in China. In 2000, China established the African Human Resources Development Fund. In 2004, China increased its financial input in this fund and established an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism for human resources development cooperation. The program to send abroad young volunteers for foreign aid was launched the same year. In 2005, 12 Chinese volunteers were sent to Ethiopia for the first time under the program.²⁴

22 Dai Lunzhang, ed., *China's Foreign Economic Relations Toward the 21st Century*, Beijing: China Price Press, 1997, p.141.

23 Niu Changsong, "A New Paradigm of Educational Cooperation between China and Africa," *Comparative Educational Research*, No.4, 2010, p.23.

24 Yang Guang, ed., *Middle East and Africa Development Report (2006-2007)*, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2007, p.251.

China's foreign aid in this period promoted in-depth economic cooperation with other developing countries. With the spread of China's technological and management experience, China's economic growth model has been widely recognized. African countries spoke highly of the Beijing Consensus,²⁵ and even those that are US regional allies have held high regard for the key points of China's growth model.²⁶

Enhancing exchanges on governance experience (2012-now)

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has actively advanced the modernization of its national governance system and capacity. It has made the sharing of governance experience an important part of its international exchanges, actively promoting more communication and mutual learning with other developing countries, and fostering the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

China adheres to the principles of sincerity, real results, affinity, and good faith and is committed to the greater good and shared interests during its exchanges of governance experience with Africa. During his visit to Tanzania in March 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed the principles of sincerity, real results, affinity, and good faith in China-Africa relations and China's Africa policy. About sincerity, President Xi pointed out that there is no one-size-fits-all development model in the world, and all should respect the diversity of world civilizations and development models. China would continue to firmly support African countries in exploring development paths that suit their respective national conditions and increase exchanges of governance experience with African countries, which will enable both sides to draw wisdom from each other's time-honored civilizations and development practices, and better promote the common development and prosperity of

25 The Beijing Consensus, proposed by Joshua Cooper Ramo, former foreign editor for TIME magazine, refers to China's foreign investment, trade and aid models that are different from those of the West, and in particular refers to the special development cooperation model between China and Africa. See Joshua Cooper Ramo, "The Beijing Consensus," *Foreign Policy Centre*, 2004, pp.1-78.

26 Karima Brown, "Mladlana Trumpets Chinese Labour Model," *BD*, May 26, 2005; "China's Growth Debunks Capitalist Myth," *The Nation*, January 3, 2006.

China and Africa.²⁷ In addressing the fifth BRICS Leaders Meeting the same year, President Xi noted that BRICS countries still have a long way to go before delivering a decent life to all their three billion populace and fully meeting their aspirations for better livelihood. The five countries must rely more on their individual efforts and cooperate more strongly to fulfil this task. China will continue to enhance political trust among the five BRICS countries, increase the sharing of experience on governance, deepen the traditional friendship of people in the five countries, and work for mutually beneficial cooperation and win-win results. BRICS countries should follow the law of development, stick to innovation and scientific development, meet challenges head-on in the development process and promote modernization. Meanwhile, China and other BRICS countries should continue to step up coordination and cooperation under the frameworks of the UN, the G20 and international economic and financial institutions to safeguard their common interests. President Xi also expressed hope to “strengthen exchanges of governance experience, and draw wisdom from each other’s time-honored civilizations and development practice” at the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum and the China-Latin America and the Caribbean Summit.²⁸

In terms of guiding principles, China’s aid to Africa emphasizes enhancing the recipient country’s governance capacity. In September 2015, President Xi Jinping announced the establishment of the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development during the summits commemorating the UN’s 70th anniversary. In April 2016, the institute was officially established at Peking University, and it aims to summarize and share the successful governance experience of China and other developing countries and help developing countries train high-level

27 “Trustworthy Friends and Sincere Partners Forever: Speech by President Xi Jinping at the Julius Nyerere International Convention Center,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, March 25, 2013, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/zyxw/201303/t20130325_322189.shtml.

28 Xi Jinping, “Promoting the Silk Road Spirit and Deepening China-Arab Cooperation: Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the 6th Ministerial Meeting of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum,” *People’s Daily*, June 6, 2014; Xi Jinping, “Striving to Build a Hand-in-Hand Community of Common Destiny: Keynote Speech at the China-Latin America and the Caribbean Summit,” *People’s Daily*, July 19, 2014.

talents for public management. Launching the institute is an important measure to promote South-South cooperation and move towards common prosperity.

On the ground, China's aid in African governance capacity building covers all areas of the international evaluation system for African governance. In security and rule of law, China has shared experience in rules-based governance and accountability through training officials from African countries. For example, the China-Africa exchange program for legal professionals and seminars for auditor-generals have served as platforms for experience exchanges. In political participation and human rights, China has organized inter-parliamentary exchanges and political participation training to improve the participation in deliberating and administrating state affairs by African political parties and vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities and women. At the 134th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly held in 2016, China officially announced the donation of \$1.5 million in cash assistance to the IPU,²⁹ with more specialized programs to be launched, which include the parliamentary capacity building program for developing countries by China's National People's Congress and the IPU.³⁰ This and other programs are aimed at sharing China's experience and stepping up South-South cooperation with Asian and African countries to enhance their capacity for independent development collectively. Meanwhile, China has also invited diverse political parties and groups from Africa to participate in senior officials' training programs, to assist them in improving their countries' political environment and achieving mutual promotion between party politics and national unity.³¹

29 Zhang Dejiang, "Common Consultation and Cooperation, Joint Promotion of Democracy and Common Development: Keynote Speech at the 134th Session of the Inter-Parliamentary Union," *National Congress of China*, Issue 7, 2016, pp.4-5.

30 "Demonstrating China's Whole-Process People's Democracy in Foreign Exchanges and Discussions," China National People's Congress, December 13, 2021, <http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202112/f60ae081d20945629812cad102e7f81a.shtml>.

31 Luo Jianbo, "China-Africa State Governance Experience Exchange and Comprehensive Improvement of China-Africa Relations," *African Studies*, No.2, 2016, pp.227-243.

China has also emphasized the protection of the rights and interests of African women, holding programs such as the workshop on capacity-building for female officials from English-speaking African countries in social management to share China's results and experience in promoting gender equality, women's participation in social management, and protecting the rights and interests of women and children. In terms of training content, China focuses on sharing its experience in formulating ethnic policies and encourages African countries to protect the interests of ethnic minorities and curb discrimination.

To help African countries create and utilize the opportunities for sustainable economic development, China has launched training courses on governance capacity building for Tanzanian local chiefs, on construction of the "African Green Great Wall," on regional economic cooperation among African French-speaking countries, on economic and trade management in Kenya. It has also organized a seminar for senior customs officials from southeastern African countries, a training course on port planning, construction and management, and a program to enhance South Africa's local governance capacity. Through such activities, China sincerely and selflessly shares its governance experience with African officials to help them broaden their professional horizons and build service-oriented governments.³²

In the field of human development, China has organized various environment conservation programs, including those on regulatory capacity-building for shared water resources in Lake Tanganyika, waste-water reuse for forest cultivation, and the drought early warning and adaptation system. Training on the public health sector was also held, such as officials' seminars on standardization cooperation in medical and health public management between China and African countries. Such trainings were held to enhance the governance capacity of African technical officials in relevant fields and improve people's well-being.

32 "China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era," State Council Information Office of China, January 10, 2021, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1696685/1696685.htm>.

Challenges Facing China's Assistance to Africa in Governance

Assistance to Africa is an important component of China-Africa relations. China has been assisting Africa within its capacity while pursuing its own development and regards the aid to Africa as an important demonstration of South-South cooperation as well as China's responsibilities as a major country. The Chinese assistance to Africa includes support that helps African countries improve their socio-economic conditions and enhance their independent development capabilities in the field of governance. However, with the interweaving of profound changes unseen before, disruptive implications of the once-in-a century pandemic, and resurging Cold War and zero-sum-game mentalities, China's assistance to Africa in governance is also facing new challenges.

Continuous Western smear on China's aid to Africa

With the United States and other Western countries positioning China as a strategic competitor, China-Africa relations and China's aid to Africa have increasingly become a target for them to attack China's foreign policies. They have continuously slandered, smeared and attacked China's governance assistance to Africa to restrain the development of China-Africa relations and curb China's expanding influence in Africa, believing that China's unconditional aid has compressed the space for Western aid to Africa and reduced the positive externalities of Western aid in enhancing Africa's governance capabilities. For example, China's aid to Africa may conflict with some assistance from the Development Assistance Committee, making it more difficult for DAC members to regulate aid funds, increasing transaction costs and reducing transaction efficiency for DAC members.³³ Moreover, many Western countries criticize China for not joining the sanctions against Zimbabwe and continuing to provide the country with significant assistance

33 Ye Chengcheng, "From Divergence to Rationality: China's Aid to Africa in the Eyes of Western Scholars," *Contemporary World and Socialism*, No.1, 2021, p.164.

that has affected the domestic peace process and is not conducive to achieving political democracy and good governance in the country.³⁴ The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee even took “China in Africa: Neocolonialism?” as a hearing topic,³⁵ focusing on the impact of China’s aid on the US effectiveness in enhancing African governance capabilities. Some Western media outlets have hyped up China’s aid to Africa, misinterpreting China’s foreign aid as “neocolonialism” and falsely claiming that China has implemented targeted economic aid to bind the recipient countries in terms of economy, trade and even politics.³⁶ Some Western scholars even believe that China’s aid to Africa, guided by its selfish interests to obtain more natural resources and in disregard of local laws and regulations, has violated human rights on the continent.³⁷

Western countries also accuse China of tacitly aiding corruption in Africa, with some scholars claiming that China’s infrastructure construction projects in Africa undermine local norms and facilitate corruption.³⁸ They insinuated that there is a strong correlation between regions with many Chinese aid projects and a high level of corruption,³⁹ and argued that China’s aid is susceptible to political capture by elites in African recipient countries, which has indirectly hindered the improvement of African governance. The West also criticized President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda for using China’s assistance to consolidate his power and suppress the opposition by force,⁴⁰

34 Shuresh Moradi, “Hegemony and the Chinese Non-Interference Policy in Africa – a Friend or Foe?” *Chinese Studies*, No.3, 2019, pp.156-173.

35 “China in Africa: The New Colonialism? Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Fifteenth Congress, Second Session,” Serial No.115-117, Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., March 7, 2018.

36 “German Media: Who Will Balance Chinese-Style Neocolonialism?” April 18, 2022, <https://p.dw.com/p/4A4VA>.

37 T. L. Deych, “China in Africa: Neo-Colonial Power or ‘Win-Win’ Strategy?” *Outlines of Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law*, Vol.11, No.5, 2018, pp.119-141.

38 Ann-Sofie Isaksson and Andreas Kotsadam, “Chinese Aid and Local Corruption,” *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol.159, No.3, 2018, pp.146-159.

39 Gina Kelly et al., “The Dragon’s Curse? China, the World Bank, and Perceptions of Corruption in Tanzania,” May 2016, <https://www.aiddata.org/publications/the-dragons-curse-china-the-world-bank-and-perceptions-of-corruption-in-tanzania>.

40 David Whitehouse, “Uganda-China: Museveni Calls the Shots, Makes Civil Society Vanish,” December 29, 2022, <https://www.theafricareport.com/271374/uganda-china-museveni-calls-the-shots-makes-civil-society-vanish>.

while leveraging the Chinese influence to form a “coalition of the willing” with Kenya and Rwanda and carry out high-profile but controversial regional integration projects without the participation of Tanzania and Burundi, in order to play the leading role in African regional governance.⁴¹

Lingering misgivings about China’s aid model in Africa

China always adheres to the principle of non-interference in other countries’ internal affairs in its diplomacy toward Africa. It does not attach any conditions to its aid and develops economic and trade relations with African countries under the principle of equality and mutual benefit. Most countries and people in Africa welcome this aid model. However, with recent developments and changes in international and regional geopolitics, this aid model is being questioned by some Africans. On the one hand, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, through exaggeration of Western media, is portrayed as an obstacle to improving African countries’ governance. The West misleads some African people to believe that China’s principle of non-interference in internal affairs is not conducive to improving local governance. Some African scholars also hope that China can adjust the policy of non-interference and appropriately increase “active participation” while adhering to the principle.⁴² On the other hand, China’s sharing of development and governance experience with African countries is interpreted by some as a deviation from the principle of non-interference and an attempt to expand its political influence in Africa.

While China has shared its governance experience through multilateral and bilateral training programs to help African countries improve their governance capabilities, the effectiveness is under question. For example, participants in the training programs are selected through recommendation by the recipient government, and it is common that

41 Barney Walsh, *Ugandan Agency within China-Africa Relations: President Museveni and China’s Foreign Policy in East Africa*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, pp.73-91.

42 “Challenges Facing China’s Economic Diplomacy towards Africa and the Innovation of Chinese Policy Instruments,” Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, April 16, 2013, http://www.focac.org/lhyj/yjcg/201304/t20130416_7877485.htm.

some officials are frequent participants in the programs.⁴³ Besides, while some African officials recognize the practical value of the knowledge on macroeconomic governance that they learned in China,⁴⁴ most of the times these positive remarks have not been translated into actual policy moves in their countries.⁴⁵ Moreover, as participants in the training programs are mostly limited to local officials, many African youth have a limited understanding of China's governance model and development path. According to a study released in November 2020 by the African polling agency Afrobarometer, young people in Africa between the ages of 18 and 35 prefer the United States and its development model, with 55% of the respondents in Sierra Leone like the US model and only 13% like China's.⁴⁶

Challenges of the pandemic to Africa's governance capacity

The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously impacted Africa, revealing the prominent inherent contradictions in some African countries and exacerbating their governance crises. Military coups have occurred frequently in West Africa, and political instability has intensified with the pandemic. The sudden outbreak of the pandemic stressed out Africa's already scarce public resources, and the struggle to control mineral resources and obtain foreign financial support became the fuse of tribal, religious and border conflicts. Since the beginning of 2021, there have been significantly more coups and attempted coups in Africa than in previous years. Military coups occurred in Sudan, Mali, Niger and Guinea in 2021, and similar events happened twice in Burkina Faso in January and September 2022. Frequent military coups have accelerated regime changes, aggravating political instability in some African countries and leading to more serious crises in

43 Interview with officials from the Department of Foreign Assistance of China's Ministry of Commerce in March 2018.

44 Interview with Zambian officials in Lusaka, capital of Zambia, in June 2017.

45 Interview with the head of a Chinese enterprise in Lusaka in June 2017.

46 "AD407: Africans Regard China's Influence as Significant and Positive, but Slipping," November 17, 2020, <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad407-africans-regard-chinas-influence-significant-and-positive-slipping>.

political governance. In addition, the frequency of terrorist attacks on the African continent has increased, posing hidden dangers to political security. Due to impact of the pandemic, the international community has paid less attention to African terrorist forces, leading to a drop in counterterrorism funding and a resurgence of African terrorist activities. Multiple terrorist attacks have occurred in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, with the African Great Lakes region and northern Mozambique becoming new victims of severe terrorism.⁴⁷ Terrorism poses serious national security threats and presents greater challenges for African countries to achieve political stability and good governance.

The pandemic has also damaged the macroeconomic environment and exacerbated the economic governance crisis in Africa. Affected by the pandemic, the macroeconomic situation of Africa has deteriorated, and the problem of poor economic governance in some African countries has been exposed. Many African governments face serious fiscal and external imbalances due to their increasing public debt.⁴⁸ The recession in Africa has further reflected a weakness in economic governance capacity. The pandemic has also posed challenges to African economic governance in multiple aspects, with governance crises occurring in areas such as agriculture, oil and mining. Some countries closed their borders and restricted the flow of personnel and agricultural supplies during the pandemic, which disrupted the agricultural industrial chain and exacerbated the food crisis.⁴⁹ The oil and energy mining sectors have been severely impacted, with African oil-exporting countries losing approximately \$65 billion in crude oil revenue due to the drop in international oil prices.⁵⁰

47 Liu Huan, "China-Africa Cooperation Under the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Foreign Investment in China*, No.23, 2021, p.59.

48 Tarek Ben Ali and Ahmed Zidi, "Institutional Quality and Public Debt Accumulation: An Empirical Analysis," *International Economic Journal*, Vol.31, No.3, 2017, pp.415-435.

49 Dianiel Kyalo Willy, Yacouba Diallo and Hippolyte Affognon, "COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa: Impacts on Agriculture and Emerging Policy Responses for Adaptation and Resilience Building," May 1, 2020, https://www.aatf-africa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TAAT-Policy-Working-Paper-on-COVID19_FINAL-for-Dissemination_May-2020.pdf.

50 "Economic Report on Africa 2020," United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, December 15, 2020, <https://www.uneca.org/era2020>.

The pandemic has also led to the stagnation of Africa's integration process, severely affecting regional governance. On one hand, COVID-19 has hindered intra-regional trade and personnel flow, caused a reduction of intra-regional trade volume, and slowed down the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area. To put the virus under control, many African countries implemented border closures and restrictions on personnel and investment flows, disrupting cross-border trade and significantly reducing internal trade that accounted for approximately 16.6% of Africa's total trade volume.⁵¹ Some countries imposed export control to protect local supply, leading to the rise of protectionist forces in the region and a serious setback of regional trade liberalization. Some other countries abolished food value-added tax and restricted food exports to ensure food security. For example, in March 2020, Kenya reduced the value-added tax on all goods from 16% to 14%; in April 2020, Sudan banned sorghum exports to ensure domestic supply.⁵² These trade protectionist policies may exacerbate conflicts among countries in the region and hurt regional integration.

Advancing China's Assistance to Africa in Governance under Guidance of GCI

The GCI focuses on "four advocacies": advocacy of respect for the diversity of civilizations, advocacy of the common values of humanity, advocacy of the importance of inheritance and innovation of civilizations, and advocacy of robust international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation. The initiative provides a Chinese solution for promoting the exchange and mutual learning of civilizations and the progress of human civilization. The GCI originates from exploring and practicing the Chinese path to modernization and draws on the experience and lessons of various other

51 Yao Guimei, "The African Continental Free Trade Area and China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation: Impact and Countermeasures," *Contemporary World*, No.3, 2021, pp.59-64.

52 Paul A Kiwumi, "COVID-19: A Threat to Food Security in Africa," UNCTAD, August 11, 2020, <https://unctad.org/news/covid-19-threat-food-security-africa>.

civilizations. It contains the historical laws and practical logic of the human civilization's progress, and serves as another important solution provided by China in the new era to meet the common challenges of humanity.⁵³ Based on China's achievements and experience in promoting African governance capabilities in the new era, and combined with the current challenges China faces in this field, the GCI provides new ideas for China to assist in improving the effectiveness of African governance.

Supporting Africa's independent development based on respect of civilizational diversity

The GCI emphasizes that no civilization is superior to others and every civilization is special and unique. Different civilizations nurture different development models. By learning from each other's strengths and weaknesses through comparison and developing together through exchange and mutual learning, they create a new picture of human modernization characterized by diversity, and thus continuously enrich new forms of human civilization and shape new patterns of world civilization.⁵⁴ The diversity of civilizations determines the diversity of choices for development paths. Therefore, assistance in governance to Africa should respect the uniqueness of African civilization and support African countries in taking the path of independent development. For a long time, Western countries have often arrogantly demanded that African countries follow the Western development model, conditioning their aid on African countries adopting Western-style democracy. However, it has proven that the strong promotion and transplantation of the Western development model has not only failed to lead African countries on the path of modernization but has also brought about a turbulent situation, resulting in dissatisfaction that becomes the breeding ground for terrorism.

53 Gao Xiang, "Revealing the Law of Rise and Fall of Civilizations and Drawing the Path of Civilizational Development: The Theoretical Meaning and Practical Value of the Global Civilization Initiative," *Contemporary World*, No. 4, 2023.

54 Li Yuan, "Creating a New Era of Global Civilizational Development Through Deepening Exchange and Mutual Learning," *Contemporary World*, No.4, 2023, p.25.

In exploring their modernization paths, African countries attach greater importance to China's experience. Former South African President Kgalema Motlanthe said that Africa and China can learn from each other in economic, political and social development, and that China's significant contribution to the world by eliminating absolute poverty has inspired African countries to make efforts toward this end. Martin Edzima, head of the General Secretary's Office of the Gabonese Democratic Party, also recognized China as a reliable friend of Africa, saying that Gabon is eager to learn from the experience of the Chinese path to modernization.⁵⁵ From the policy implementation perspective, there are also many African officials that have advocated learning from China. For example, officials from the Zambian Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry believe that China's experience in building economic and trade cooperation zones is worth learning for African countries.⁵⁶ Officials from the Angolan Ministry of Industry and Trade also expressed willingness to learn from China's experience in attracting foreign investment, adding that it must be modified according to Angola's own situation and should not be blindly replicated.⁵⁷

China is willing to exchange development experience with African countries but will never impose its development model and values on others. As President Xi Jinping pointed out, "For any country to achieve modernization, it needs not only to follow the general laws governing the process, but more importantly consider its own national conditions and unique features. It is the people of a country that are in the best position to tell what kind of modernization best suits them."⁵⁸ When carrying out governance assistance to Africa, China must pay attention to the particularity of African countries' national conditions, value their autonomy and

55 Wan Yu and Liu Junguo, "China Is a Good Partner in Africa's Exploration of Modernization and Development," *People's Daily*, June 6, 2023, p.3.

56 Interview with Zambian officials in Lusaka in June 2017.

57 Interview with Angolan Ministry of Industry and Trade officials in Luanda in June 2018.

58 "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Keynote Address at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting," March 15, 2023.

communicate with African countries based on the principles of respect and equality. Sincere and objective discussions on civilization and development models should be conducted to unlock the internal driving force for Africa's transformation of governance model. China's approach has won the admiration of African countries. Mwendanga Musengo, Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, believes that the strong Africa-China friendship over time can partly be attributed to China's respect for Africa's independently chosen development path. China does not impose its own values and development model on others, and it conducts exchanges and cooperation with African countries based on equality and mutual benefit.⁵⁹ China should adhere to the basic policy and encourage African countries to independently explore their own development paths.

Optimizing evaluation of assistance projects based on equality and mutual learning

In carrying out governance assistance to Africa, it is necessary to understand the local needs based on equality and continuously improve the pertinence and effectiveness of aid projects through exchanges and mutual learning. Given the weak governance capabilities and the lack of mechanisms for government transparency in many African countries, strengthening information sharing and exchange can improve the effectiveness of assistance and the accuracy of its evaluation, helping China better understand Africa's governance needs and assess the effectiveness of African countries' learning from the shared experience. Especially for capacity-building projects, there are differences between China and Africa in terms of history and governance environment. In the past, training programs designed by China encountered various problems in implementation. Difficulties in technology transfer emerged even for non-agricultural technical assistance.⁶⁰ The evaluation of

59 Wan Yu and Liu Junguo, "China Is a Good Partner in Africa's Exploration of Modernization and Development."

60 Yuan Xiaohui, "Review and Prospects of China-Africa Agricultural Cooperation Under the Framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation," *Journal of International Economic Cooperation*, No.6, 2022, pp.43-51, 87-88.

governance capacity training is even more difficult.

Therefore, for China's aid to Africa in governance to achieve good results, it is necessary to conduct a professional and complete evaluation of training programs. When setting up training programs, scientific and comprehensive evaluation standards should be formulated, independent project evaluation mechanisms be established, and practical application of evaluation results be strengthened to make up for the shortcomings found in evaluation.⁶¹ In particular, China's rights and responsibilities in governance capacity training projects must be clarified. Currently, social organizations or public institutions are major organizers behind China's governance capacity training courses for African countries, but their rights and responsibilities are often not clearly defined, leading to confusion in project bidding, implementation and supervision. Clarifying the managing authority of these projects can better ensure training effectiveness and avoid a waste of resources caused by poor management.

Timely adjustments to specific issues identified in evaluation should be made to ensure the fulfillment of desired long-term objectives. First, the accountability of project executors should be strengthened during the design stage, to give play to the initiative of recipient countries and enhance their participation and awareness of independent development and self-supervision. Second, the recruitment process of training projects should be carefully supervised. Local management teams can play a role in the formulation of evaluation indicators to strengthen the recipient countries' sense of responsibility in receiving assistance. Third, more stakeholders can be brought in to improve the effectiveness of evaluation, with multi-dimensional assessment conducted by entities and platforms at different levels to avoid the training projects degenerating into formality with little substance and relevance, and in the worst case, irregularities witnessed in the process of implementation. At the same time, project sponsors must pay attention to local social and cultural features when establishing a

61 "China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era."

comprehensive evaluation mechanism, avoiding a simplistic copying of China's domestic standards for governance capacity which may lead to insufficient adaptability in training and application.

Enhancing African governance in a people-centered approach

The GCI adheres to the concept of putting the people first and highlights the people-oriented nature of modernization. “The people are the creators of history and are the strongest bedrock and force in advancing modernization.”⁶² Therefore, assistance to Africa in governance should attach great importance to the power of African people as the primary stakeholder. The state and the society are the two major actors in governance: state governance is realized mainly through institutional building and government, while social governance generally relies on the establishment and improvement of non-governmental organizations. But in either way, people play a central role. To promote its government capacity building, Africa has established multilateral organizations such as the African Training and Research Center in Administration for Development (CAFRAD) . China can strengthen cooperation with local African institutions like CAFRAD to support and advance its activities to improve the governance capabilities of African governments. Due to their complex and diverse social structures, the ability of African countries to manage the society is usually insufficient. Thus, social governance is an important means of compensating for the lack of government capacity. Compared to governments, social organizations represent a more inclusive group of people and involve a broader range of activities. This has enabled them to play a more effective role in addressing African economic and political inequality. Given this, China can cooperate with local social organizations in its assistance to Africa in governance, facilitate the establishment of friendly ties between non-governmental organizations between the two sides, and help African social organizations improve their governance capabilities.

62 “Full Text of Xi Jinping’s Keynote Address at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting,” March 15, 2023.

China's assistance to Africa in governance should pay special attention to enhancing the governance capacity of African youth. Africa has the youngest population in the world, and the younger generation of Africa should not only be the major participant in China's assistance to Africa but also be an important player in promoting African social development. As President Xi Jinping pointed out, "The future of China-Africa relations lies in our young people."⁶³ Paying attention to the growth of African youth is required to build a higher-level community with a shared future for China and Africa. It is also a necessary condition for strengthening Africa's governance capacity. Therefore, China's assistance to Africa in governance should empower African youth in education and help them assume the duty of improving national governance and sustaining the modernization drive. Through deep cooperation in education, China can help Africa cultivate young people with a global perspective and better provide talent support for Africa's development.

In essence, China's assistance to Africa in governance is aimed at helping African countries lift themselves out of poverty as soon as possible and accelerate their modernization process so that African people can live a better life. This is the starting point and ultimate purpose of Chinese assistance. Optimizing governance assistance to Africa, empowering young people and inspiring them in building governance capacity and making innovation helps Africa solidify the foundation of modernization and stay on the right course while breaking new ground in improving governance capabilities. The assistance is aimed at truly internalizing governance modernization as a core concern of the African people, at continuously promoting the independent improvement of national governance efficiency in African countries, and at enhancing local people's well-being and their sense of happiness and achievement. In this way, African modernization can contribute to the progress of human civilization.

63 "Full Text of Chinese President Xi Jinping's Speech at Opening Ceremony of 2018 FOCAC Beijing Summit," September 3, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-09/03/c_129946189.htm.

Conclusion

Strengthening governance capacity is crucial for Africa's independent development. From a historical perspective, the colonial history has inevitably left a Western mark on the trajectory of Africa's development. From slave trade and colonial rule to resource plunder, Western discourse has constantly rewritten and distorted African history. During the national independence and liberation process and later the "third wave" of democratization on the continent, the former Western suzerains again paved the way for African countries to adopt and follow Western development paths and policies. However, after a hundred years, the Western tutelage has failed to bring Africa out of its development difficulties and achieve poverty reduction. Therefore, African countries are turning their attention to the East, hoping to learn from the experience of China, a rapidly growing emerging power whose development path differs from that of the West.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has regarded strengthening the exchange of experience in governance as an important part of developing foreign relations and participating in global governance. In Africa, China hopes to promote the modernization process on the continent through exchanges, mutual learning and assistance in governance. Amid the dual impact of profound changes unseen in a century and the pandemic, Africa's governance capacity is facing an even more severe test. As a development partner with high expectations from African countries, China will continue to adhere to the spirit of the Global Civilization Initiative and exchange experience in governance with African countries on an equal basis. It will focus more on cultivating the foundation of African governance and optimizing evaluation and supervision models. Against the backdrop of increasing political mutual trust between the two sides, China's assistance in governance to Africa will inevitably evolve into an endogenous driving force for African reform. 