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China's Engagement with Africa: Post Cold War Period

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The role of China in Africa has become a topic attracting a great deal of attention in the world. After remaining dormant for a long period in world economy and politics, China's contemporary engagement in Africa reflects its emerging interest in Africa. However, the Sino-African multifaceted relationship and China's expanded presence in Africa bring new challenges to China's Africa policy. China's economic engagements in the continent have come under the intense scrutiny of the international community and African countries for shaking the fragile economies and undermining the process of constitutionalism and democracy in the continent. But on the other side, the African countries are yet to make use of the advantages they get from the China-Africa relationship. In this perspective, it is imperative to look into the current Chinese policy towards the African continent. Rather a critical overview of Beijing's engagement towards African countries in political and economic terms, and a roadmap to improve a better and resilient relationship between the two.

China's overall engagements with Africa can be divided into three major phases. First Phase, starting from the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 to 1978, the year of the beginning of China's economic reform. During this period, China supported the African national liberation movement and Sino-African political and economic relationships developed. The second phase started from 1978 to 2000, the year of the first Sino-Africa Forum meet. During the period, South-South economic cooperation was emphasized and economic considerations pronounced under the Open Door Policy of China. Four principles announced by Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang set the policy of 'Economic and Technological Cooperation' during this period. Those principles were: equality and bilateralism; effectiveness; multiple forms and common development; and focus from strategic-political engagement to an economic agenda along with a spirit of 'developing together'. The third phase started in 2000 and it is continuing today. The establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) in 2000 was a watershed moment in the Sino-African relationship since it shifted focus from single aid to a win-win relationship and engagement of China with the whole African continent. The FOCAC of 2000 got a major boost with the introduction of China's Africa Policy in 2006, the first Africa-specific policy of China in its diplomatic history. The document embodied a comprehensive and long-term plan for enhanced cooperation between China and African countries. Since 1991, the emerging dragon economy has spread to all parts of Africa in pursuit of economic and political ambitions in Africa than any other country in the continent.

Now the onus is on African governments to come together and agree on their common needs and aims. They could present a united front based on joint strategic approaches to improve and benefit from the relationship with China.

China's exceptional transformation from an agricultural, self-contained, and inward-searching nation, right into an international financial powerhouse in the mere course of three decades of reform, is still a source of inspiration and awe. The passing of Chairman Mao Zedong in 1976, accompanied by Deng Xiaoping's consolidation of power in 1978, may be taken as the key

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propellers of this development, as China spread out internationally and grew into a developed economy (Economy and Levi 2014). Also, China's pursuit for oil in the mid-and late-1970s had a deep bearing on the nation's economy when Hua Guofeng announced key initiatives including the ''great leap outward,'' and the National Development Strategy in 1977[1]. Furthermore, Jiang Zemin, Deng's successor and President of China from 1993 to 2003, together with Zhu Rongji who served as the Vice-Premier and then the fifth Premier of the People's Republic of China from March 1998 to March 2003, continued to trail the path of economic "transformation and open policy". Zhu's announcement of China's "going global" strategy during his speech on China's economic future in 1999, is further evidence of this continued strategy. These strategies supported the Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to undertake projects in overseas markets to upsurge their competitiveness. These leading national champions continue to play a major role in China's "going global" strategy to date. The open policy and reform helped increase China's wealth and project power globally. Today, China is being referred to as the leading developing nation among the comity of nations.

In pursuit of the path of economic transformation and open policy put forward by the previous Chinese leaders, President Xi Jinping on 10th October 2013 announced the opening of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road during his visit to Central Asia and Southeast Asia. Premier Li Keqiang revealed the new "Maritime Silk Road at the 16th ASEAN-China Summit in Brunei (Wong, 2014:2). Consequently, on 28 March 2015, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce published the first document, titled "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road". The ancient Silk Road, established over 2,000 years ago was a peaceful way to conduct interstate commercial activities and cultural exchanges. The Overland Silk Road that was more than 10,000 km long from China to Rome, can be traced back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) when imperial envoy Zhang Qian was sent to China's far West to develop friendly commercial relations (Irina, 2016). The Maritime Silk Road began when the Chinese started to venture into Southeast Asia, traditionally called Nanyang. By the time of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), Imperial China had established tributary relations with numerous states in Nanyang (Wong, 2014:3). In October 2012, Professor Wang Jisi was the first Chinese scholar to mention the need for China to revitalize three Silk Roads, to Southeast Asia, to South Asia, and to Central Asia (Bondaz, 2015:7). One year later, China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative saw the light of the day.

The initiative is considered as China's most ambitious effort since the new leadership came into being at the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012. The One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative is potentially ambitious – covering almost 65 per cent of the worldwide inhabitants, nearly one-third of worldwide GDP, and almost a quarter of the entire products and services the world transports[2]. As of 2015, the OBOR concept has expanded immensely as a vision that links China to Asia, Europe, and Africa in trade, development, and culture. Around 5.5 trillion yuan (US$900 billion) was proposed to be invested in 900 projects over two transcontinental Silk Roads to link over 60 nations.[3] The outward investment was proposed to come from a combination of newly-formed initiatives like the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank, the New Development Bank, and the Silk Road Fund, and from state-owned and private firms. The initiative has also attracted both national and international attention, as numerous Chinese and foreign firms are attempting to seize the opportunities that are likely to arise. It is nothing less than a Chinese call on the international community to cooperatively work towards a "harmonious and inclusive" world. In essence, the initiative is an updated – but much more detailed and operational – version of the "harmonious world" as suggested by the former Chinese leader Hu Jintao, in 2005.

1. Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

2. "China's One Belt, One Road: Will it reshape global trade? Podcast, July 2016. Retrieved from www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/china/chinas-one-belt-one-road-will-it-reshape-global-trade

3. Challenges and risks of 'One Belt, One Road'. ShanghaiDaily.com, July 27, 2015. Retrieved from: http://www.shanghaidaily.com/business/benchmark/Challenges-and-risks-of-One-Belt-One-Road/shdaily.shtml

The initiative represents a more positive approach by Chinese President Xi Jinping in meeting the global expectations concerning China's international obligation and leadership. China is also of the view that the initiative should not be constrained by the geographical limits of the ancient Silk Road, instead the 21st-century context must be reflected. Therefore, the OBOR initiative is an extension and intensifying of China's "opening up" and "going global" strategy with a regional focus on Asia, Europe, and Africa. On the one hand, Africa remains among the key global growth areas and China has prioritized interaction with the continent through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Moreover, as the OBOR strategy develops, the African continent will be incorporated into this grand vision to further strengthen the historical bonds between Africa and China. For those African nations which are already included in the OBOR initiative, this means that new resources are available, in addition to those available under FOCAC. In 2014, China's MOFCOM announced that to "reinforce aid to recipient nations along the 'Belt and Road'… newly-added aid capital will mainly go to these nations" (MOFCOM, 2014). But more importantly, it also signifies that the areas of cooperation that are being promoted under the initiative and FOCAC, such as industrialization and infrastructure will receive even stronger political support from China, which is expected to assist in fast-tracking the execution of key projects in those areas.

In contrast to FOCAC, the OBOR initiative is not limited to bilateral relations between China and African nations but aims to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa collectively. African Belt and Road initiative nations can profit from the new connections among these regions, for instance, expanding cooperation with nations along the Maritime Silk Road in South Asia and Southeast Asia. If executed successfully, the OBOR initiative may lead to the creation of a single Asian-European or perhaps even a single Asian-European-Africa trading bloc, which would challenge the present US-centered trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific trading bloc system (The Economist 2016). Being a part of these potentially emerging new structures will be of benefit for the entire OBOR initiative nations, including those in Africa. The overall goal of this paper is to examine China-Africa relations while centering on the implementation and likely inclusion of more African countries in the OBOR initiative.

The Economic Motivators of the OBOR's Initiative:

Despite China's exceptional and speedy rise, the country continues to face a few critical financial and foreign policy challenges. As a result, a part of Chinese policy advisors has cautioned numerous thoughts to address those challenges, and Chinese leaders have followed a number of those thoughts and advanced them into the mega-venture now known as the OBOR initiative (Chung, 2015). However, whilst this could strictly be the case, the Chinese authorities are eager to additionally emphasize that OBOR comes with no political strings attached. The drivers of OBOR may be considered from economic, domestic, and strategic dimensions. First of all, whilst a few would possibly argue that OBOR is designed as an economic development strategy or a political method, there's no question that OBOR has a prime financial component. As an extension of China's economic development strategy, OBOR is meant to doubtlessly effect fifty-five percentage of the world's gross national product (GNP) and 70 percentage of the world's population (Xiaoyu, 2016). From a financial perspective, OBOR is designed to address the funding increase that has left huge overcapacity and a want to locate new markets abroad. The organizational shape of OBOR additionally shows that it is, at least initially, an economic development strategy.

Nevertheless, the funding is really on constructing economic and political ties among China and host governments. That means constructing mutually beneficial relationships with neighboring states, that can benefit China via means of taking up a number of China's lower value-added services. China's sources of GDP growth are coming beneath snowballing strain. In addition to this trouble, the Chinese management is going through problems in handling the transition to a "new normal" of slower and greater sustainable economic growth because of the economic challenges, overcapacity within the industries, debt burden, and monetary dangers soaring over the Chinese financial system. Excess capacity in Chinese factories is a critical issue. It is expected that by promoting investments along the path of executing OBOR tasks, new opportunities and markets might be created for Chinese companies which might have a multiplier effect at the manufacturing of products and offerings domestically, thereby creating greater jobs and better earnings for the Chinese people. The OBOR initiative guarantees to improve China's growth whilst creating space for the Chinese economy to move up the value chain, in which productiveness and wages – essential determinants of consumption – are higher. Also, primarily based on the massive Chinese forex reserves, amounting to nearly $four trillion, China wants its investments to earn a reasonable amount of profit.

Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure in Central Asia has significantly restrained economic development in the region, affecting trade in particular. China's plan for the OBOR initiative addresses this issue of infrastructure gap. The National Development and Reform Commission, China's main economic planning agency, asserts that the initiative intends to promote regulatory harmonization with its neighbors and encourages "opening up" in every nation in which it invests (NDRC, 2015). OBOR isn't conceived as an assistance program, and the Chinese authorities could reap high economic and monetary rewards from the initiative, like the United States did in the first half of the nineteenth century, when it embarked into a huge infrastructure-constructing spree to open new markets on its western frontier. As the leading trading nation, China's key priority is to reduce the charges of transporting its products. Projects which are already financed through the OBOR initiative all report data on the logistic time and the costs that could be reduced as a result of their completion. Naturally, the establishment of the OBOR initiative is anticipated to decrease the costs of trade and allow China to benefit more from global trade.

The infrastructure upgrade ushered by the OBOR enterprise is likewise anticipated to incredibly benefit several countries that lie along the Silk Road routes, since it may also serve the import and export activities of these states. And this brings out another purpose of China's strategy; one of the most important aspirations of the OBOR initiative is to additionally facilitate increased market access to the numerous economies along the exchange routes for Chinese companies. As infrastructure development in countries along the OBOR routes impacts growth in their economies, call for Chinese services and products is likewise anticipated to rise. In March 2015, the Chinese authorities asserted that the yearly trade with nations along the OBOR initiative might exceed $2.5 trillion by 2025. Hence, the initiative is supposed to make contributions to develop regional trade and energy links, gain access to products and services, and provide an outlet for the Chinese funding-led growth to continue in more regions. China is also pushing for lessening its reliance on internal infrastructure investment and the related growth that accompanies it.

By financing capital-intensive infrastructure schemes in distant places, the Chinese regime can briefly relieve internal overcapacity in steel, cement, coal, solar panel manufacturing, and other such sectors. Also, as China's domestic infrastructure reaches full capacity, China's equipment manufacturers, construction companies, and other businesses which have thrived at the country's construction boom need to discover a new land of possibility. The initiative is a way to benefit those sectors and create possibilities for them. The Export and Import Bank of China and China Development Bank did a have a look at mortgage practices in 2013-15. This exam displayed that 70 per cent of foreign credit was given on the condition that a part of the budget is used to buy Chinese products and involve China's labor. Therefore, it is not surprising that maximum lending under OBOR is conditional on the involvement of Chinese companies, whether or not in construction, operation of projects, or in the distribution of materials. As a result, the initiative acts as an indirect subsidy for companies, in particular state-owned enterprises (SOEs), struggling financially from industrial overcapacity.

OBOR would be used as a means to reform China's SOEs as numerous SOEs could be restructured in a mixed-possession system, supposed to elevate their performance and profitability. Since the early 2000s, China has emerged as an important source of financing for African infrastructure plans. According to the China Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS-CARI), in the 10 years between 2004 and 2014, African nations borrowed nearly $10 billion for railway schemes from China, facilitated through the China Export-Import Bank (Exim) (John Hopkins University SAIA, 2016). Also, as a latest survey from students at Brookings Institute reveal, there's a further spike in African infrastructure investments from Chinese companies as three major railways, property deals, and other infrastructure agreements have been struck in Africa, totaling nearly $7.5 billion in investments (Gutman *et al.*, 2015). China sees the infrastructure plans as an investment opportunity which additionally creates an export marketplace for its booming steel and construction industries. Despite years of consistent economic growth, Sub-Saharan Africa stays hobbled because of infrastructure gap. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2014), excessive shipping costs lead to 75 per cent increase in the price of the product in the region, with only half of its streets paved and nearly 600 million people lacking access to electricity.

Chinese companies, many of them state-owned and grappling with a financial slowdown at home, have stepped into the breach, earning $50 billion a year on new ports, highways, and airports throughout Africa. In April 2016, the state-owned China Railway Construction Corp introduced that it is going to construct a $3.5 billion railway line in Nigeria and a $1.9 billion actual property venture in Zimbabwe. Also, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (one of the kingdom's biggest lenders) signed a $2 billion deal with the government of Equatorial Guinea to handle many infrastructure projects all over the country. These offers align with the Chinese OBOR method of building infrastructure in Africa and other developing countries to integrate their economies, stimulating economic growth, and in the long run leading to increase in demand for Chinese exports. Other strategic motivations behind the OBOR initiative include loosening the dependence on the US dollar, diversify foreign-exchange reserves and gradually increase the importance of the Renminbi as an international currency. In this attempt, China has the assistance of Russia and other rising states where the volatility in their currencies has stricken politicians. For the purpose of investing in projects in which the Chinese foreign money is utilized in loans, China established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2015 and became a member of the European Bank for Reconstruction. This step proved to be successful as the International Monetary Fund included the Renminbi within the special drawing rights (SDR) basket reserves. The Renminbi is included along the US dollar, the Euro, the Yen, and the British Pound . Greater lending of the Renminbi via OBOR will boom the use of the foreign money and assist the improvement of China's offshore renminbi bond marketplace.

Currently, around ninety percentage of Chinese forex is within the United States and Euro-held government securities, because the regime has traditionally used the reserve to buy the US treasuries. Under the OBOR initiative, reserves are more and more being used by the Chinese regime to fund global infrastructure projects. Nonetheless, China will endure to prioritize its trade and geopolitical ties with the US. Other steps taken by China to support the OBOR initiative include the launch of the USD forty billion Silk Road Fund in December 2014 , that is supported by China Investment Corporation, China Development Bank, and the Export-Import Bank of China. The inauguration of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in January 2016 was conceived initially as a regional financing mechanism for the OBOR initiative by merging monetary reserves with Chinese infrastructure expertise (Weiss, 2017). In addition, a number of China's richest provinces are interested to invest in OBOR as well. In April 2015, provincial government in Guangdong announced their plan to make contributions to 67 OBOR projects, totaling USD 55.4 billion. Also, China's comparative advantages, which includes a global financial center in Hong Kong and a regional financial center in Shanghai, reinforce its leadership role. Additionally, the latest surge in fast-growing, revolutionary companies – like Alibaba, Wanda, and Huawei – shows that China is nicely positioned to put in force such a formidable initiative.

Most notably, the OBOR initiative will significantly sell China's outward overseas direct funding in growing international locations, and also will create a platform for China's financial transition, facilitating the technical and technological transfer. The OBOR method intends to similarly combine China into the worldwide financial system through funding. One of the important tasks of the OBOR strategy is to upsurge investment cooperation so as to improve regional economic growth, development, and integration. However, Africa isn't in the vicinity of the OBOR direction and so it is difficult for the continent to take absolute advantage of the OBOR initiative. This is already visible in the area of investments. According to Huiping Chen (2016), China's outward FDI to the continent of Africa account for a very small per cent compared to its general outward FDI with different regions (see discern 1). Hence, there's a want for greater concerted attempt to enhance this, and the OBOR initiative affords adequate possibility for redress. The inclusion of African nations into the OBOR initiative should assist in creating manufacturing jobs and investments in China and Africa in addition to dealing with the thorny issue of industrial overcapacity in China even as China's own economic growth slows. It is likewise our view that African nations have to take action at different levels to take advantage of the OBOR initiative.

Finding a Place for African Countries in the OBOR Initiative :

China's commitment to construct a gigantic network of roads, rail lines, and ports, and other infrastructure in 67 nations across Asia, Europe, and Africa, for $1 trillion, is widely seen as one of its major foreign and economic policy goals[4]. For that reason, the OBOR initiative has been viewed as an ambitious and promising plan by the international community. Despite the enthusiasm demonstrated by the Chinese for this grand initiative, nonetheless, the strategic aims of OBOR are interpreted differently by individuals. Recently, international relations scholars have compared OBOR with the US-led Marshall Plan in the post-World War II period, but scholars from China argue that the OBOR and Marshall Plan are not comparable[5]. The reason why they are not comparable lies in policy purposes and goals. For the Marshall Plan was officially an American initiative to provide financial assistance to rebuild war-devastated European countries whilst stopping them from pursuing communist regime and following the then USSR.

In contrast, the OBOR projects' emphasis is placed unto more potent and closer financial cooperation, on joint infrastructure projects, the enhancement of security, and environmental, technical, and scientific collaboration. The other different distinction is the end-goal of these projects. While the Marshall Plan hand-picked only Western nations and excluded all nations and areas they thought were ideologically near the Soviet Union, Chinese projects are open to all the economies alongside the land and sea Silk Roads, no matter their ideological and societal leanings. Many countries have shown great interest in the OBOR initiative. But interestingly, China has been promoting the initiative chiefly with a focus on Asian and European nations. Only since early 2015 Africa has become a focus of the Initiative.

On 20th January 2015, shortly before the initiative's vision document was published in March, former chief economist of the World Bank, Justin Yifu Lin, raised the idea that China should also include Africa in the initiative, expanding it to "One Belt and One Road, One Continent" and that the initiative's "core task in Africa should be industrial relocation and infrastructure construction" (China Daily 2015). A focus on infrastructure, proposed by Justin Yifu Lin is completely in line with an agreement signed between China and the African Union (AU), which aims to link all 54 African nations through transportation infrastructure projects, including modern highways, airports, and high-speed railways. In 2015, the African Union (AU) launched Agenda 2063, intending to accelerate the modernization and industrialization progress of African countries. Since the continent launched the AU's Vision 2063, Africa has been identified as the future driver of global growth. The reality is that Africa we knew 30 years ago is fast transforming and all indicators are pointing to the continent of peace and security underpinned by good governance and enhanced economic growth and development.

However, it will be crucial to determine how OBOR can complement Agenda 2063 to create the 'Africa we want'. The OBOR initiative provides a strategic possibility to dock development approach with Africa's Agenda 2063. Justin Yifu Lin in addition argued that this could offer fundamental possibilities for Chinese companies to extend their overseas market, and the method will bolster numerous African economies and benefit China in the meantime. Besides, in current years, African economies have performed well, displaying amazing development capacity and vitality. The degree of socio-economic development of African countries isn't a bottleneck stopping them from becoming members of the initiative. On the contrary, the engagement of Africa with the initiative will additionally give a boost to China-Africa economic cooperation.

China-Africa cooperation is at the juncture of an unprecedented possibility in history. At present, China is restructuring and upgrading its industrial structure and shifting out labour intensive manufacturing due to the rising cost of labor. China's labor-intensive industries are losing their comparative advantages. Africa is a great associate to host China's labor-intensive industries. So, as an initiative of economic cooperation with overseas nations to promote common development, Justin Yifu Lin echoed that the initiative and Africa's development strategy "share similar spirit" and that combining the two "will not only create new momentum for Sino-African cooperation but present a new approach for South-South cooperation as well (Global Times, 2015).

In another call for Africa's inclusion in the initiative,

4. See Charles Clover and Lucky Homby, "China's Great Game: Road to a New Empire." *Financial times*, October 12, 2015. Retrieved from https://next.ft.com/content/6e098274-587a-11e5-a28b-50226830d644#axzz3pCLXHStT.

5. The 'Belt and Road Initiative' Is Not 'China's Marshall Plan'. Why Not? The Diplomat, January 26, 2016.Retrieved from:www.thediplomat.com/2016/01/the-belt-and-road-initiaive-is-not-chinas-marshall-plan-why-not/

Lin Songtian, Director of the Department of African Affairs at China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, echoed in October 2015 that "Africa-China cooperation is a relationship that is blessed with shared needs, benefits and opportunities, which will make the African continent a significant foothold for the OBOR initiative" (FOCAC 2015). The initiative targets to "link Asian, European and African nations more closely and promote the mutually beneficial partnership to a new level and in new forms (NDRC, 2015). Although China attached great importance to China-Africa relations, the OBOR document only provides detail concerning Europe and Asia. Europe was mentioned 12 times, Asia and its sub-regions mentioned over 30 times, while Africa was mentioned only 6 times (WWF, 2016). Nonetheless, from the Chinese viewpoint, they assert that the African continent is the last stop for the OBOR initiative, which means that more African nations will be included in the OBOR initiative.[6] Sun asserts that China's interests have been well-articulated by the Chinese leadership in their emphasis on employment creation in Africa through their ambitious proposal to build African regional infrastructure networks in 2014.

The institutionalization of the OBOR initiative does not alter the general paradigm of China's Africa policy. However, the geographical challenge to the initiative is best explained by the fact that out of the sixty-seven countries which are a part of the initiative, just 3 countries (which constitute simply four per cent) are from the continent of Africa (see Figure 2 below). In 2015, the summit of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum (FOCAC), which serves as the bulwark of cooperation between China and the continent from 2000, elevated China-Africa relations to a "comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership." Although the OBOR initiative was not included, regardless of the initiative's intention of providing connectivity with the African continent, due to the openness and versatility of the initiative, Africa continues to stand out as an affordable and preferred option. It will provide a treasured opportunity for China and Africa to share development possibilities in addition to fortifying their existing relations.

The dearth of clear references in the vision documents on the extent and the possibility of Africa's participation in the initiative is an indication that the inclusion of Africa was initially not foreseen and that details remain to be defined. In this context, it is not surprising that China's latest Policy Paper (Xinhuanet, 2015) published in December 2015 does not include any references to the Belt and Road initiative. The only reference incorporated in the FOCAC Johannesburg Action Plan (2016-2018) is that the "African sides welcomes the Chinese side's championing "the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road", which include the African continent, and that China and Africa will foster mutually beneficial partnership in the blue economy" (FOCAC, 2015c). This is now the only Pan-African statement that allowed Africa to consider itself a part of the Maritime Silk Road. Since 2013, China's state media has published numerous diverse Belt and Road Maps with varying indications of Africa's participation in the Maritime Silk Road. Most of the maps include a route through the Indian Ocean towards Kenya, passing Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan, and Egypt before continuing in the Mediterranean Sea.

Other maps display the Maritime Silk Road leading from the Indian Ocean directly to the Red Sea through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea. In most cases, these maps do not provide any indication on ports along the African part of the Maritime Silk Road. However, the latest version published by the Chinese news agency Xinhua (see Figure 3) displays that the route has reached Africa's east coast, specifically an area that is part of modern Kenya – Nairobi, as part of the Maritime Silk Road.[7] This is consistent with the most historical link to Africa that relates to China's 14th-century maritime fleets, which initially saw the bilateral trade between China and Kenya during the early 15th century (Wekesa 2015). Also, with the violence between North and South Sudan being far over, the need for an alternative route to export oil to China is needed[8]. These facts help clarify why Kenya is China's nominated African hub for the

6. "Why African Nations Welcome China". The Diplomat, February 16, 2017.Retrieved from www.thediplomat.com/2017/02/why -african-nations-welcome-china/

7. Kenya is also the only African country included in a recent Xinhua New promotional video explaining the Belt and Road Initiative (see https://twitter.com/XHNews/status/709752281692921856

8. Zhou (2014) argues that the fifteen months long standoff caused by disagreement on transit fee remittance between South and North Sudan affected oil production and export to China

One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. Notably, the other cities on the map are port cities, while Kenya is nearly 500 km further than the closest port situated in Mombasa. This is not only an indication that China sees Kenya as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, but also that the new railway and economic corridor that China is currently building in partnership with Kenya from Mombasa to Nairobi is part of the Maritime Silk Road.

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