

## **Sino-African Diplomacy: An Evolution Of Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Over the last 80 years the relationship between China and the rest of the world has evolved and expanded. China's international image changed from that of a developing country to that of an international juggernaut in a relatively brief span of time. The formation of the first Asian and African People's Conference in 1955 created an opportunity for Beijing to interact with African countries in a way it had not previously done. The skillful work of future Primer Zhou Enlai would solidify the connection between several African nations and China through his unique approach to diplomacy. This paper uses personal accounts of Zhou Enlai and historical records to describe the Chinese government's interactions with Africa, and to demonstrate how those bonds forged a path to recognition for the new Chinese government by the global community.

### **1. Introduction**

In the period from the 1950's to the early 1970's the People's Republic of China made the first steps in establishing relations with countries on the African continent. Attempting to expand its sphere of influence, China made diplomatic efforts to connect with the countries of Ghana and Zambia by making appeals to solidarity and common interests. The role China saw itself playing was that of representative of the oppressed and minority groups. The work of senior State official Zhou Enlai included differentiating themselves from the western world which was characterized as colonizers and agents of capitalism. During this time, African countries, many of which were newly independent, needed investment and stable relationships to support their growth and development as sovereign nations. After the Bandung conference, financial and political arrangements between African nations and the People's Republic would expand rapidly. These relationships eventually contributed to official recognition from the United Nations. The modern success of states like China has set the conversation on strategic economic assistance and carefully managed projects.

Today China is respected internationally and is both economically and politically powerful. How it came to this position following periods of extreme political upheaval, occupation and the Cultural Revolution is a complex tale full of many lessons. How some of those lessons might apply to the global audience has not been fully explored. Closer exploration might yield strategies that could assist other struggling nations in replicating their successful transition from nascent to internationally respected nations.

### **2. Turning Outward**

As China's internal turmoil eased, focus shifted to international relationships. When major international forces began to consolidate power, making strategic alliances was crucial. With Eastern hemisphere politics being dominated by the USSR at explain time, the Cold War between Eastern and Western powers made the Sino-Russian relationship of significant importance to both countries. The official Chinese state position after World War II was of cooperation

and amiability with the Soviets. Both nations were concerned over the imminent threat of another world war and the spread of American capitalism. There were, however, major philosophical differences between the two socialist nations, and these eventually led to a breach in the relationship. The deterioration of Sino-Soviet cooperation was a slow one, flagged with ideological disagreements, and then later with issues related to imperialism. Differences over the interpretation of “peaceful coexistence”, originally proposed by Zhou Enlai, were one root cause for the breach. Touting the five principles of peaceful coexistence as central, the USSR stance was that communicating and holding peaceful relationships with non-socialist states was not just a momentary tactical ploy, but essential to long term stability<sup>1</sup>. Soviets used their interpretation to explain how the relations between communist and capitalist countries were to be maintained. The People’s Republic, however, saw relations as having two distinct and separate spheres. Peaceful coexistence being the means of dealing with capitalist nations. It represents a stable but inferior status as compared to inter-socialist states which would have fraternal relations “of a new type”<sup>2</sup>. This new type of international relationship was based on equality, collaboration and mutual respect.

In addition to philosophical differences over “peaceful coexistence”, Soviet relations within the socialist coalition also contributed to the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet alliance. The USSR assumed the role of leader in the coalition of socialist countries and used that position to exert influence over how other coalition members governed themselves. Attempts to follow the Russian model were not always successful. The instability in Hungary was in no small part the result of their attempts to mimic the Russian industrialization model. Opposition to Soviet inspired policies within Hungary evolved into serious counter-revolutionary efforts. The result of which was a Soviet take-over of the Hungarian government. Confidence with the Russian leadership began to fail as a result of the handling of the situation in Hungary. The Russian handling of the Hungarian uprising, the first if not entirely successful attempt to overthrow a communist regime, did not inspire confidence and damaged the relationship with China. Chairman Mao was reported to bluntly upbraid the Soviets in private for significant “mistakes” in their East European foreign policy<sup>3</sup>.

Simultaneous to the displeasure with Soviet foreign policy, China's desire to grow domestic industry and maintain independence from Soviet intellectual resources became a priority. By 1960 the uneasiness and displeasure had become disavowments of agreements and outward distrust. The need for stability and positive relations outside of Eurasia led to their relationship with the Soviet Union becoming more and more tenuous. Disillusioned with the Soviet brinkmanship on display, China had a strong desire to show the rest of the world how their vision of socialism was different from the Soviet one. The Chinese leadership had a strong desire to branch out and form solid connections with other parts of the world. The PRC desired international recognition and to establish and align with the nations that respected the new government of China. Using foreign support as a proxy for souring Soviet relations and thwarting American containment methods became useful to that end<sup>4</sup>. China focused much of their foreign policy efforts on non-aligned nations and found potential allies in Africa.

### **3. Former British Colonies in Africa Chart A Path to Independence**

During the most active period of European colonization of Africa, different European nations controlled African regions and resources. The various colonizers and their governments made unified efforts across the continent difficult. The colonies did not have central governmental structures, but instead colonial administrative structures that were in place for the primary goals of resource-extraction and local suppression. The paths to independence in Africa varied greatly depending on the colonial ruler. A variety of internal and external factors contributed to the end of European colonialism of the continent. For the purpose of this paper, focus will be on former British colonies, several of which are identified later as having formed substantial relationships with China.

Although no single event or person can be identified as the cause of decolonization, there are several contributing factors upon which scholars agree. U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met during the second World War to discuss the post war world. The Atlantic Charter was a joint declaration issued as a product of that meeting. Issued in 1941, the Atlantic Charter urged nations to “respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.”<sup>5</sup> At the end of the war, this agreement became one of the tools used to support decolonization efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa. The formation of the United Nations in 1945, which championed human rights and the right of self-determination for all nations, applied international attention to the morality of colonialism. The influence of the UN also supported the end of colonial rule. Coming out of World War II the European nations that ruled the colonies were burdened with rebuilding at home and did not have the resources to continue the suppression and control of the colonies. African nationalism also gained momentum in post war Africa. Though the process was slow, internal freedom efforts in combination with external pressures combined

to finally end colonial rule. The British ruled colonies were the first to gain independence, led by Ghana (then called the Gold Coast) in 1957, and followed by Nigeria (1960), Sierra Leone (1961) and Uganda (1962). Tanganyika (1961) joined with Zanzibar in 1964 to form Tanzania. That same year Nyasaland, renamed Malawi, declared its independence and Northern Rhodesia became independent as Zambia.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4. Ghana**

The African Nationalist movement was instrumental in Ghana's independence. Africans were conscripted for military service in both World War I and World War II. Their experiences in other parts of the world, and with whites encouraged the growing desire for self-rule, having been disavowed of the notion of white invincibility. The ex-soldiers, along with the educated middle class were not appeased by the plans of the British after World War II, which called for Ghanaian political participation along traditional line (chiefs that were selected by colonial agents) and a gradual evolution that would eventually produce an independent nation. The United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was a political group formed in 1947 by a group of intelligentsias determined to hasten change. The organizational goal was self-government "in the shortest possible time"<sup>7</sup>. Most pivotal to the value and effectiveness of the UGCC was their recruitment of Kwame Nkrumah to serve as the organization's secretary general. Although born in the Gold Coast, Nkrumah had spent the decade prior to 1947 furthering his education in the United States and working to promote Pan-Africanism, the principle of political unity for all the indigenous peoples of Africa, in England and France. The combination of his education and experiences prepared him for the work needed to help catalyze the independence movement. Upon his return from London he joined the UGCC. Having observed the successful fight for independence in India, and the effectiveness of participation by the masses, he was tasked with organizing and promptly founded new chapters of the UGCC. Manner and style appealed to the masses. Following an incident in Accra in 1948, where three ex-soldiers were killed during a protest, nationalism grew rapidly. Nkrumah whose radicalism and popularity with the masses threatened and frightened UGCC leaders, founded a new organization, the Convention People's Party (CPP). More militant than the UGCC, the goal of the CPP was "self-government Now"<sup>8</sup>. With a broad coalition of Ghanaians that include farmers, low-wage workers, and youth in addition to the middle class and well educated, the CPP managed to create a national movement. The actions of the citizenry caused a revision of the constitution in 1951. The changes were deemed insufficient by the CPP and promoted non-violent, "positive action" strategies similar to those used by Gandhi in India. Disruptive strikes, boycotts, and mass rallies led to activity. The arrest of organization leadership including Nkrumah. His arrest did not dampen people's resolve. In elections for the expanded Legislative Council the CPP won 34 of 38 available seats<sup>9</sup>. Nkrumah himself was elected even though he was in prison at the time. Faced with the inevitable, the colonial governor released Nkrumah and asked him to form the first African led government of the colony. Though the leadership group included three British officials, the majority of members were CPP party members. This leadership group served two three-year terms, and though other local opposition groups arose, Nkrumah and the CPP held political power until independence was granted in 1957. Nkrumah was the first Prime Minister and President of the decolonized country. When Ghana claimed independence from British rule, it already had western style universities and an educated class that desired social and economic improvement. The Ghanaian economy was relatively strong, primarily based on cocoa and gold, which made them relatively prosperous. Having an experience with colonial administration unparalleled elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, the thought of the time was to apply western principles in ways to which Ghanaian people would benefit the most<sup>10</sup>.

#### **5. Tanzania**

Though their paths would differ, the peoples of Zambia and Tanzania were familiar with the desire for independence, as Tanzania has been a hotbed for many of the national liberation movements in southern Africa<sup>4</sup>. Colonized by Germany in 1885, German East Africa as it was called at that time, was rife with resistance almost from its inception. From 1891-1895 the Hehe resisted German expansion and engaged in a guerilla war that eventually ended in the killing of their chief. The Maji Maji Resistance, from 1905-1907 was a coordinated revolt that united several tribes in response to German forced labor. In retaliation German colonials destroyed fields and villages, which resulted in a famine that was estimated to have killed 120,000 Africans from fighting or starvation. In the twenty plus years of German colonial rulers, numerous small uprisings occurred in response to unfair and brutal treatment.<sup>11</sup> After the defeat of the Germans in World War I, the League of Nations declared the region, now known as the Tanganyika Territory, to be managed by Britain via mandate. This status remained in place until 1947, when the Trusteeship

Council of the United Nations made Britain administrator of the region. Upon gaining control of the region in the 1920's, British colonial governors made limited attempts to allow some administrative responsibilities through local councils and courts. Though a legislative council is also established, Africans were not permitted to be members until after the end of World War II. At that point, because of the UN trusteeship, local political development is required. Thanks to the efforts of the original German overseers and the missionaries that came to the area, a system of schools had been established and a class of educated civil servants was present. The Tanganyika Territory African Civil Servants Association (TTACSA) was formed in 1922 as a social organization. This group is credited by some scholars as the first to think of the region as one unit, and to posit the possibility of independence. In 1929, some TTACSA members in Dar es Salaam founded the Tanganyika African Association (TAA) another social organization which consisted primarily of teachers and lower level civil servants. The TAA played an essential role in the development of nationalism in Tanganyika due to their role in the Meru land case. In 1951 the British administrative government evicted 3,000 Meru people from their land so that it could be occupied by European settlers. Not willing to abide by their decision, the Meru first formed a tribal organization under Kirilo Japhet called the Meru Citizens Freeman Union to deal with matters locally. When that was unsuccessful, they call upon the TAA, to which Japhet also belonged, to plead their case before the United Nations. Though the UN Council agreed with the Meru, the local government still did nothing to address or reverse the evictions. As a final effort, Japhet and some of his fellow TAA members, including future President Julius Nyerere to share the information nationally. The issue of land appropriation resonated with Tanganyikans and this case presented the first opportunity for peoples throughout the nation to focus as a unit on an issue. In 1954 Nyerere, who had been educated abroad and recently returned to his home country, started the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), a political organization whose purpose was to secure self-rule for the indigenous population.<sup>12</sup> Thanks to the Meru land case, the populace was primed for nationalist efforts and the TANU received widespread support. The TANU won the Legislative Council elections in 1958, 1959, and 1960, with Nyerere becoming chief minister after the 1960 election. Internal self-government started in May 1961 followed by independence in December 1961. In 1964 Tanganyika merged with neighboring Zanzibar to form Tanzania. Julius Nyerere became President of the new nation.

## 6. Zambia

The path to independence in Zambia was very different than that of Ghana or Tanzania. Originally known as Northern Rhodesia, the diversity of Zambia's colonial populace, the financial and political might of the mining industry and its proximity to the white-majority colonies, created a unique environment. In 1923 neighboring colony Southern Rhodesia, white was predominantly white, was granted self-rule. In 1928 huge copper deposits were found in the Rhodesia territory, so much so that the area gained the name the Copperbelt. Two large mining conglomerates controlled mining in the region; the American-controlled Rhodesian Selection Trust and the South African-controlled Anglo-American Corporation. The industry was a financial boon for the colony and attracted white settlers into Northern Rhodesia. While working conditions in the mines were far from optimal, African mine workers bore the additional burden of the "color bar", a policy which capped their compensation and limited their access to the better, skilled positions. A strike in 1935 by African miners was unsuccessful, which was not the case when white miners went on strike in 1940. A ten-year extension of the color bar was among the concessions were made for white miners, thanks in part to the powerful and politically connected Mineworker's Union (MWU). When the price of copper began to drop in the period after World War II, the need to reduce costs made the support of the African mine workers very appealing to industry owners. To bolster profits, and as an attempt to appease the growing calls for increased political power for Africans, Britain merged North Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1953, forming the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The rationale for creating the federation included the ability to limit the spread of black nationalism as well as the spread of the apartheid settler nationalism found in South Africa. In addition, the federation afforded an opportunity to create a multiracial partnership that would allow for gradually increasing African political participation while preserving European control. The Federation was a troubled one with increasing political power being gained by the white settlers, and increasing distrust and frustration being experienced by the native peoples. Riots and unrest grew, culminating in the need for states of emergency in 1959. Sensing the inevitable, RST Chair began brokering negotiations between nationalist leader Kenneth Kaunda and the colonial governor. A new constitution with increased voting rights were agreed upon for Africans. A two-stage election was held in 1962 led to an African majority in the legislative council <sup>13</sup>. The council passed resolutions calling for Northern Rhodesia's secession from the federation and asserting full internal self-rule under a new constitution. In addition, the call was made for a new national assembly based on broader, more

democratic voting policies. The federation was dissolved in 1963, and Northern Rhodesia became the Republic of Zambia in 1964.

Against the developing political landscape, African countries were a subject of many development debates. With many different national identities and ethnic groups having been grouped together due to the border established by European imperialists during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, tensions over whether these states consisting of various indigenous and ethnic groups could survive were prescient. As Dr. Kimche recalls in his writings about the political climate in Africa, “the struggle for independence against the colonialist powers engendered a certain built in dynamism in the colonies themselves and provided the cohesive forces which gave the nationalist movement strength and kept it together”<sup>14</sup>. With the common heritage of colonial subjugation now being cast aside for self-determination, the calls for Pan-Africanism as a united front became more and more present in the minds of leaders<sup>7</sup>. Receiving the aid of the western powers such as the United States would symbolically mean accepting dependence on new masters and so other relationships through business and mutual trade were desired across the continent. For these reasons and many more, the influential conference of the Association of Oppressed Peoples in 1955 in Bandung would become critical in the relationship between African and Asian states.

## **7. Zhou Enlai -Development of A Statesman**

Zhou Enlai played an instrumental role in the development of Sino-African relations during the 1950’s, 1960’s and 1970’s. He was a skilled diplomat and served as the Chinese foreign minister from 1949 to 1958, and as head of government, Premier, from 1949 until his death in 1976. His leadership, vision and oratory skills helped propel the People’s Republic of China from a fledgling revolutionary state into a respected world power.

From a young age, Zhou Enlai made waves in his community. Raised by his Aunt and Uncle, Zhou came from a family of government clerks who originated in Shaoxing and later moved to Tianjian. Zhou adopted mother taught him to read and write, and he took a strong interest in politics at an early age. He began with organizing students and his stated goal at the age of 14 was “to become a great man who will take up the heavy responsibilities of the country in the future”<sup>15</sup>. The Confucian background in which he was raised in combination with the teachings he received at the Nankai Middle School would instill a sense of discipline and establish important connections that remained with him later in life. This environment was also said to heavily influence the way he saw the role of compromise and adaptability amongst shifting political landscapes.

Educated and eager to learn more about the world, Zhou studied abroad in Europe for a few years in his early adulthood. His time spent in Paris, from 1920 to 1922, saw him organizing Chinese nationals as well as absorbing the political theories of Marxism and communism. It is regarded that the prevailing sentiment of the time was that due to Chinese sentiment feeling more like a semi colony of western and Japanese design, the national psyche would require an engaged citizenry that was aware of the affairs of the rest of the world<sup>16</sup>. He was an activist and organizer in college and joined an underground Communist cell during this period. After being expelled from school for his participation in protests, he spent several years in Europe learning about the Russian and French revolutions, hoping to gain lessons that could be applied in China. He also joined a Communist cell in Paris. Other activities during his formative years included service in the Nationalist Army and participation in other revolutionary organizations. His early years and experiences provided perfect training for someone destined for a career in public service. The importance of his statesmanship and diplomatic skills during the international emergence of the People’s Republic of China in the 1950’s and 1960’s cannot be underestimated. The philosophical underpinnings of his successful navigation of the Sino-African were developed in these formative experiences.

## **8. Bandung and Beyond**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many African and Asian people lived in colonies or territories ruled by imperialistic foreign powers. Independence activists, many of who were educated in Europe, began to form alliances to search for guidance and solidarity as they strived for self-rule in their native lands. The Association of Oppressed People held a conference in 1927 in Brussels Belgium, and among its patrons was Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru, who would eventually serve as Indian Prime Minister, sought foreign allies and created ties with movements for independence and democracy all over the world. On recounting the experience, Nehru would voice it as a beneficial opportunity, stating that “Contact between the various peoples was bound to bring understanding and success nearer to all”<sup>17</sup>. After the Second

World War another large conference was to be held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 and attending would be 29 African and Asian states. Appearing at this conference as well, Nehru would recall the Brussels conference as an experience that changed his political thinking, as he had always sought for peace and believed that the shared planning and goals was a path towards it<sup>7</sup>. Nehru laying himself out as an arbiter to the event made peace a priority, as Western and Eastern powers were consolidating under the cold war and a clear message from non-aligned nations was desired.

As part of its purpose for attending the Bandung conference, China wanted to resolve some of its public perception issues. At the time, the Communist Party was establishing itself as the dominant force within the country and sought to establish full diplomatic recognition, as opposed to the Republic of China in Taipei. Through sending Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, the party wished to accomplish several other goals, including improving China's global image as well as reiterating its stance on the five points of foreign policy (with particular emphasis on non-interference with local affairs). Being an exemplary statesman, Zhou took this opportunity to make a clear case for why relations with China were not only beneficial to new African nations, but important for ideology. It was no secret that racial identification provided an element of bonding over the importance of solidarity between nations. As the rhetoric of resisting colonial and bourgeois forces was employed in talks, the "color factor" made a connection between China and African nations which allowed them to distinguish themselves from the Soviet and European blocs. Race and ethnicity had been used as a tool of oppression for both groups during imperialism. Though their histories had not been identical, all these nations shared the common experience and lowered expectations assigned to people of color. It was in these meetings that Zhou Enlai also made very moderate stances on issues of national recognition and commitments to larger regional alliances. Downplaying the nature of his own revolutionary government, Zhou projected a sense of composure and sincerity which did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries. In referring to his strategies, scholars have referred to his classical Confucian teachings and what his implementation of the "golden mean" did for his diplomatic relations. The golden mean is identified as the ability to achieve compromise in even the most difficult of circumstances<sup>18</sup>. The president of the Philippines was quoted as saying his speeches were "electrifying" and captivated those present with his tact and candor<sup>19</sup>. As a result of Zhou's masterful statesmanship, China emerged from the conference with an improved global image, and this accomplishment would serve their goals of countering the West, projecting solidarity with the Marxist countries, and even getting recognition in the United Nations.

In the aftermath of the Bandung conference, Egypt became the first African country to formally recognize the communist government of the People's Republic of China the following May. Chairman Mao specifically commented on the status of Africa as "a partner in the struggle against imperialism" making clear ideological connections between Africa nations and the People's Republic. Both had a strong need to branch out and form solid relationships with other parts of the world<sup>20</sup>. Though participation by countries south of the Sahara in the conference had been limited, the display of solidarity and reasonableness carried positive connotations when Beijing reached out to more African nations looking for supportive relations. From 1963 to 1965, Premier Zhou Enlai made visits to 10 different African nations to promote Chinese friendship and support their independence movements. While China sought to establish state relations and gain support, African leaders viewed Beijing as a less threatening version of communism than what the Soviets had on display<sup>21</sup>. Soviet support and allegiance required a commitment to socialist politics and a willingness to adhere to the model they set forth. The Chinese philosophy was more accommodating and allowed room for non-alignment and autonomy. Zhou's visits to Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Ghana, Mali, Guinea, Sudan, and Somalia all made positive impacts. With this work to cement China as an ally against anti-colonial forces, they also worked to put into place mutual prosperity for their fellow developing nations.

## 9. Brothers Across The Sea

China's investments on the African continent began in earnest following the high-profile state visits. As opposed to the Western ideas of aid, assistance and paternalism, Zhou made China's stance more of a fraternal one. Technical support and expertise were to be shared, with the expectation of the local development of technology and know-how. This approach put them in direct contrast to the Western powers like the United States and their fledgling aid programs. To set themselves apart from Western American idea's, big country "chauvinism" Daguoshawenzhuyi (大国沙文主义) was something Chinese diplomats tried to stay away from<sup>22</sup>. On the surface, strategic diplomacy was important for resource relationships, but this fed into their later expanding ideas about development and experimentation in foreign aid packages<sup>3</sup>. The Chinese conception of foreign aid was proclaimed as one not intent on repeating the same spending patterns of the west, but of investing directly in projects for short- and long-term needs. The idea of turn-

key projects was popular, where they could be “constructed quickly by Chinese experts and handed over, ready for the recipients to just turn the key and start production”<sup>23</sup>.

The ideal of equality and mutual benefit, Pingdeng Huli (平登护里), became evident when Ghana was rewarded for its pro-Chinese stance. Ghana, a country with copious valuable resources, acquired loans early in their independence. The Sino-Ghana Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation by which China agreed to a 20-year interest free loan of 7 million Ghana pounds, for example, also stipulated that China would send to Ghana experts and technicians, train Ghanaian technicians, and supply Ghana with equipment and materials<sup>24</sup>. When visiting the country Zhou laid out an eight-principle plan for their foreign aid based on equality, mutual benefit, and respect for sovereignty. These plans for loans at low or no-interest showed commitment to long term borrowing relationships and cultivating further business partnerships down the road. Later, when talking with Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, Zhou Enlai would provide advice on development plans, helping to scale down plans that were “too ambitious”<sup>25</sup>. This followed a pattern of Chinese influence on joint projects, but not immediately striving to force their model of growth and government onto others. When Nkrumah was ousted in a coup in 1966, it was his contact in Beijing, Zhou Enlai, who treated him with dignity and respect, and helped to assure his safe passage to Guinea, where he lived in exile.

## 10. All Railroads Lead To China

In 1963, Chinese newspapers would recall the anniversary of the Bandung conference as a momentous occasion with people performing and celebrating the struggles of the African people in the streets of Peking<sup>26</sup>. This made for compelling storytelling to the Chinese people, and the state at the time wished to promote appropriate cultural ideas about unity and foreign friendships. The social and political upheaval of the Cultural Revolution brought chaos inside the country through the late 1960’s, but outside they were still trying to project the image of a powerful and stable state. Tanzania and Zambia, supporters of China, had long had an ambitious infrastructure project created as part of the development plans of the newly independent nations. The plan was for a 2000 kilometer stretch of railroad, leading from the rich copper mines in the heart of Zambia to the coastal ports of Tanzania, which represented a huge economic opportunity for both countries. Many including the World Bank would declare the project not feasible, yet in a 1965 state visit by President Julius Nyerere, Premier Zhou Enlai offered China’s assistance in building this huge railway. The particular offer presented gave assurance that full ownership would belong to Tanzania and Zambia upon completion and that they felt “duty bound” to help those countries in the process of being emancipated. Since the project had been looking for funding from German, Canadian and American firms, President Nyerere was skeptical of accepting. History reports that one of Zhou’s responses was that having Chinese offers on the table might spur other consortiums of backers to put up funding even if they did not accept the Chinese deal<sup>27</sup>. On the ideological side, solidarity between peoples of color was a motivator for the Chinese, as it would make for a project that economically cut off other white-minority ruled countries. Funding the railway project would support Zambia’s economic competitiveness against neighboring South Rhodesia, a former colony that was white-controlled and was a direct economic competitor. In 1967 the agreement was made official with construction on the railway beginning in 1970 and being completed five years later in 1975. As one of the largest infrastructure projects to date on the continent, it had a tremendous impact on Chinese economic engagement with African countries. Infrastructure projects were very attractive to African nations. They provided opportunities for much needed development in their home countries while also facilitating greater trade opportunities with China. They also provided opportunities for joint Chinese and African labor. The effect they had on public image was huge as well. China’s famous stance of making “helpful” investments was made material by visible structures and for decades afterwards not just Africa, but the world would be reminded of China’s aid programs through the finished product, the trans Tanzania Zambia (Tan-Zam) railway.

## 11. Moving Forward

The legacy of the actions of Zhou Enlai during his time in high government cannot be overstated. His role in the relationships between Africa and China was titular. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the political climate shifted and many who had participated in high levels of government were repudiated. Zhou was able to escape with his reputation still relatively intact, as the current government recognized the important contributions he had made to the country. As China has transformed and grown into a significant world power, its interests and engagements in Africa have grown as well. Western fears have been that this relationship would spell doom for the African countries that are involved with China by either ceding away their autonomy or by allowing the spread of authoritarianism.

Though there are certainly questionable actions the Chinese government has undertaken with some of its African allies, the full picture of their involvement on the continent is nuanced and supports the beneficial nature of the alliance for both sides.

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