

*Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  
University of Constantine -3- Salah Boubnider  
Faculty of Political Science*

## *Course Lectures on China's Strategy in Africa*

*Intended for: Second year Master's Degree in Political science  
Specialization: Security and Strategic Studies*



*Prepared by :  
Dr.Fatima Birem*

University year 2025-2026

## Introduction

For many years, China was stereotypically viewed as a country whose foreign policy interests were largely confined to the Chinese world in East Asia. While this perception may have been accurate for a certain period, it has become increasingly outdated in recent years. China has begun to move beyond this traditional view, engaging with new regions to expand its influence, broaden its strategic options, and create alternatives to its existing policies.

Following the end of the Cold War, China experienced rapid development in its economic, technological, and military capacities, achieving annual growth rates of 7 to 10 per cent and securing a leading global position in the manufacture and export of arms. Confronted with the accelerated transformations of the post-Cold War international system, China was compelled to define its role in global politics. In this context, Africa emerged as a strategic platform for advancing China's objectives: on one hand, to pursue its national interests, and on the other, to expand its influence. To achieve these goals, China relies on a combination of economic, military, diplomatic, and cultural instruments to ensure the effectiveness of its strategy on the continent.

Over the past two decades, Sino-African relations have undergone significant developments across political, economic, and cultural domains. The scope, nature, and areas of these relations have changed significantly. One of the clearest indicators of this transformation is the adoption of a "New Africa Policy," by the Chinese authorities, which was designed not only to respond to China's growing and immediate economic needs but also to accompany China's accelerated rise on the international stage, enhancing both its economic weight and geostrategic leverage.

In this context, the course on China's strategy in Africa holds particular significance for political sciences students. It aims to equip them with the skills required to understand China's strategies as a major international power and to assess their implications for the African continent. Students are therefore expected to develop the ability to analyze China's diverse strategic approaches

and draw conclusions about the opportunities and challenges they pose for African states, as well as their impact on China's position and role within the international system, particularly in the context of its competition with other major global powers.

This is precisely the objective pursued by this course booklet, designed for second-year Master's students specializing in Security and Strategic Studies, in alignment with the curriculum established by the relevant supervisory authorities. An academic and methodological framework has been developed, with the primary aim of ensuring comprehensive coverage of all aspects and requirements of this module. Accordingly, the booklet is structured into 11 lectures distributed over approximately 15 weeks, at a rate of one lecture per week, although some lectures may cover a two-week period.

The lectures have been distributed as follows:

- **Lecture 01:** The Strategy: definitions, characteristics, functions, and foundational principles
- **Lecture 02:** Chinese strategy before and during the Cold War
- **Lecture 03:** Chinese strategy and its evolving dimensions in the post–Cold War period
- **Lecture 04:** China's Strategic Capabilities and Capacity-Building
- **Lecture 05:** The role of strategic culture in shaping Chinese strategy
- **Lecture 06:** A Theoretical–Analytical Approach to Chinese Strategy
- **Lecture 07:** The development of Chinese strategy in Africa
- **Lecture 08:** The dimensions of China's interest in Africa
- **Lecture 09:** The objectives of Chinese strategy in Africa
- **Lecture 10:** Policy Instruments and Mechanisms of Chinese Strategy in Africa
- **Lecture 11:** Challenges of Chinese strategy in Africa.

## **Lecture 01: The Strategy: definitions, characteristics, functions, and foundational principles**

Strategy, as a subject, has attracted growing attention from thinkers, academics, political elites, and both formal and informal institutions, due to its strong relevance to developments in international politics. Its appeal has led the term “strategy” to be applied to a wide range of actions, including those not inherently political. Today, the word is used across many spheres of life, making its precise meaning often difficult to determine.

This broad usage highlights the importance of studying strategy with scientific rigor and objectivity, and of defining its essence—particularly for political science students, for whom the subject intersects with numerous topics in their studies.

### **First: The Historical Use of the Term ‘Strategy’**

The earliest writings on strategy appeared over two millennia ago, authored by Chinese military thinkers, and were later followed by works from Greek, Roman, Arab, and European military scholars and intellectuals, addressing fundamental and detailed concepts and principles of warfare. This body of knowledge ultimately gave rise to a new discipline within the human sciences, commonly referred to as the “military art” or the “art of war.” Although strategy originated within the military and wartime context, it gradually developed a broader, more comprehensive meaning due to profound social transformations, changes in the nature of warfare, the evolution of state administration, and the increasing complexity of human needs. The interconnection between war, on the one hand, and politics and society, on the other, partially shifted the concept of strategy from the battlefield into the political sphere, positioning military action as just one of the various domains of strategy, alongside political, economic, and other means through which it pursues its objectives.

As state affairs became more extensive and complex, particularly in foreign relations and governance systems, the need to rely on all available means grew

increasingly urgent. This was reinforced by the expansion of strategic planning to involve multiple decision-makers alongside the head of state. Consequently, strategy became closely integrated with policy in all its dimensions, with military means regarded as one of the principal instruments employed to achieve state objectives, especially as warfare grew more comprehensive and intense.

## Second: Definition of Strategy

Following from the previous discussion, definitions of strategy have varied across different eras, reflecting the diversity of intellectual and political schools associated with each leader or thinker. This section will examine several definitions, beginning with those rooted in the science of war and extending to the concept of comprehensive strategy, through which all available means are mobilized to achieve the state's objectives.

### 1- Narrow Definitions of the Concept of Strategy

A review of the literature on the concept of strategy shows that the term originated in the military domain, particularly in writings addressing strategic issues related to theaters of war. The word *strategy* is originally derived from the Greek *strategos*, literally meaning “leader,” and also denoting the “art of commanding forces,” a meaning consistent with the concept of strategy in ancient times.

- The Chinese thinker **Sun Tzu**, in *The Art of War*, conceived strategy as the art of planning and directing military operations to achieve victory.
- **Carl von Clausewitz** famously defined it as "the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war"
- **Archduke Charles** defined it as the “science of war”, encompassing the planning and conduct of military operations, as well as the disruption of the enemy’s military forces; in short, it is the science of generals and commanders.

- **Mao Zedong** described it as “the study of the laws governing war and the factors controlling its overall conduct.”
- In Soviet military thought, Marshal **Vasily Danilovich Sokolovsky** defined strategy as “a body of theoretical knowledge addressing the laws of war as an armed struggle defending the interests of a particular class; it includes methods for defining war, anticipating enemy actions, preparing for future conflicts, directing operations, organizing armed forces, and the principles of their use, alongside the material and technical foundations of war.”
- The French Marshal Ferdinand Foch defined it as “the art of reconciling wills that employ force to resolve their conflicts.”
- The Encyclopaedia Britannica describes it as “the science and art of employing all the resources of the state to achieve the aim of war.”

Accordingly, it can be concluded that these definitions are:

- Predominantly military in nature, narrowing the scope of strategy to military and combat operations. They treat war as the primary means for achieving a state's objectives.
- They make the term *strategy* synonymous with military strategy, i.e., the use of armed forces to accomplish national goals.
- They reflect a continuing debate over whether strategy should be considered an art or a science.
- They overemphasize the notion that the political objective is the strategic aim of war, since in some cases achieving a military objective may not guarantee the realization of broader political-strategic goals.

Historically, linking strategy to the military domain, especially among strategic thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries, was justifiable. At that time, connecting strategy to military activity reflected the realities of European societies and powers engaged in extensive wars to achieve political objectives. Armed conflicts dominated interstate relations more than any other activity, and the frequency of wars in Europe over the past centuries serves as clear evidence of this reality.

Thus, associating strategy with military traditions implied that war expressed a major political objective, as the outcomes of wars waged by states were linked to their fate, to their very existence. Victory ensured their survival and continuity, while defeat meant destruction or collapse. Accordingly, the plans formulated by a state—or, more specifically, the strategy it adopted to wage a war it intended to win—were fundamentally linked to its supreme policy. In this sense, the objectives of war were regarded as an extension of political aims.

### **B. Expanded Definitions of the Concept of Strategy:**

Based on the previous criticisms, contemporary strategic studies scholars have attempted to overcome earlier limitations that had reduced the concept of strategy to a single dimension—namely, the military domain. As a result, strategy has become more closely linked to policy and is no longer defined only in military or war-related terms.

In addition, the transformations that European societies experienced from the mid-18th to the 19th century across political, economic, social, and industrial fields had a significant impact on the role of the state in society and its development. The state is no longer viewed primarily as a military institution, but rather as a political and social entity responsible for meeting the needs of society. Its role is no longer limited to ensuring defense and survival; it must also respond to the needs of the population within its territory.

Consequently, strategy has taken on a comprehensive character, or rather, it has assumed a national scope in both meaning and substance. The concept of national—or grand—strategy has thus emerged, from which various complementary strategies derive, including political, economic, and military strategies, among others. The objectives of the state are broader than purely military purposes; encompassing goals relevant to both war and peace alike.

Some of these definitions are as follows:

- **Thomas Schelling:** Strategy is not about applying force efficiently, but about using potential sources of power to limit the opponent's capabilities and influence their behavior. For Schelling, strategy assumes that the parties in a conflict act rationally, guided by interests and careful calculations of gains. This requires using the elements of power at one's disposal to shape the behavior of all participants, especially in an international environment that is inherently competitive, conflictual, and characterized by bargaining, whether in war or peace.
- **André Beaufre:** Strategy is the use of force to achieve political goals. This definition recognizes that power is not limited to military means alone; it includes all material and non-material resources. Beaufre views strategy as a method of thinking—expanding the range of options and alternatives when addressing events. As he puts it, “strategy is not a rigid doctrine, but a way of thinking that allows events to be studied, prioritized, and matched with the most suitable and effective means.”
- Strategy is a plan or pattern of action that aligns a state's objectives, policies, and actions into a unified whole. A well-designed strategy guides the use and monitoring of resources, directing them to critical areas based on knowledge of capabilities, weaknesses, external changes, and the anticipated moves of competitors.
- The *Political Encyclopedia* presents strategy in its broadest sense, connected to a state's foreign and domestic policy to achieve its objectives. It defines strategy as: “The science and art of developing carefully considered, sequential, interactive, and coordinated plans to employ resources in all forms of wealth and power, aimed at achieving the nation's overarching goals.”

This means that strategy has three key dimensions: objectives (ends, linked to opportunities), resources (means), and the plans that link the two.

In procedural terms, strategy can be defined as: the planning process required to mobilize resources and capabilities, guide policies, and employ available

means and tools to address a particular situation and achieve specific objectives, whether short-term, medium-term, or long-term.

Accordingly, no state can effectively practice strategic action without a clearly defined and precise mission.

The purpose of strategy is to create a high level of efficiency, achieved through several fundamental elements:

- Clearly defined objectives, organized within a system of priorities, moving from intermediate to ultimate objectives.
- Available resources and capabilities to be used in accomplishing these objectives.
- Alignment between objectives and means, as a state cannot operate effectively when there is a mismatch between the means at its disposal and the goals it seeks to achieve.
- Consistency between the state's mission and the environment in which it operates; in other words, strategy works when the state's mission reflects the prevailing environmental conditions.
- Sub-plans that provide flexibility, enabling strategy to respond to emerging events or stages where adjustments can be made before returning to the main strategic path.

However, the process of linking objectives and means through planning also presupposes another indispensable element in strategic action: capability. This refers to the ability to employ available means to achieve defined objectives—the skill or art of adapting means to reach the desired ends. Many states possess resources and have objectives, yet fail to achieve them due to a lack of skill in effectively employing their means. Conversely, some states with relatively limited resources can accomplish a significant portion of their objectives through effective application and strategic skill.

**Third: The Difference Between Strategy and Related Terms:**

**a. Strategy vs. Tactics:** Strategy is a general plan developed to achieve a goal, while tactics are the design of a single battle plan and are therefore temporary and phase-specific.

**b. Strategy vs. Geostrategy:** Geostrategy examines a state's strategic position, whether in war or peace, by analyzing its geographical elements and factors, including location, size, shape, maritime access, borders, climate, resources, and population.

**c. Strategy vs. Planning:** Planning is an internal administrative process that occurs in controlled environments, whereas strategy is external, guided by observation and induction. Strategy operates in unpredictable environments that are not governed by fixed rules, where opportunities may arise requiring unanticipated resources, or threats may emerge that necessitate measures not previously considered.

**d. Strategy vs. Foreign Policy:** Foreign policy comprises the actions and behaviors of a state toward other states to achieve its objectives, within the limits imposed by international rules and the state's power. Foreign policy functions as an instrument of strategy within its external environment (regional and international). Therefore, the relationship between foreign policy and strategy is analogous to that between means and ends, with strategy serving as the overarching framework within which foreign policy operates.

**Fourth: General Characteristics of Strategy**

Developing a strategy for action is vital to achieving goals and requires the fulfillment of several key conditions in its formulation, the most important of which are:

**1. Clarity, realism, and coherence of objectives:** Since strategy is the process of selecting the most appropriate means to achieve national objectives, these objectives must be clear and sound. They should also be consistent and non-

contradictory, whether within a single strategy or between the overall strategy and its sub-strategies, particularly those related to different sectors of the state. Objectives must also be realistic and aligned with national capabilities, resources, and both material and moral potentials. In addition, strategy must take into account the overall international system, as well as the strategies and tactics of other international actors. This condition is important for the following reasons:

- Coping with changing and uncertain conditions.
- Facilitating the monitoring and evaluation of performance, particularly in assessing the effectiveness of using power resources to achieve influence and shape the behavior of opponents, that is, to achieve defined objectives.
- Ensuring that clear and coherent objectives enhance focus and enable the selection and effective use of appropriate means.

**2. Rationality and specialization:** This refers to the scientific analysis of reality and available alternatives, as well as the rational selection among them. It involves identifying objectives, examining alternative methods for achieving them, and determining the relative costs of each option in order to select the most suitable approach.

**3. Continuity:** Strategy is characterized by permanence and continuity. As long as the objectives pursued by the state are ongoing, strategic planning itself remains a continuous process.

**4. Dynamism and flexibility:** Strategy must include a degree of flexibility that enables it to respond to unexpected or unforeseen situations. It should not become a rigid framework that limits movement or reduces the ability to maneuver. Flexibility, as a key characteristic, is driven by the rapid changes that shape various aspects of life, whether social, practical, or technological. It requires adapting the state's objectives in light of these changes. The importance of flexibility is particularly evident during the implementation and follow-up phases of strategy.

**5. Strategic ambiguity:** The ambiguity of strategy stems from the ambiguity of power itself, as power is a broad concept with multiple interpretations and fluidity. It is therefore necessary to adopt alternative objectives when pursuing a specific goal, since if an adversary identifies a precise objective, it may seek to undermine it by all available means. Hence, strategy must include alternative options to anticipate and mitigate potential disruptions.

**6. Knowledge of the other party:** A thorough understanding of the opponent, including its capabilities and means, allows for the identification and exploitation of its weaknesses.

**7. Gradual progression of objectives:** Each achieved objective should be viewed as a means to attain the subsequent objectives. This requires adopting a phased approach in implementing strategy. In this context, a state seeking to achieve a goal may face several options:

- Acting immediately to achieve it without compromise.
- Adjusting to reality and available capabilities by replacing a major objective with a more attainable partial one.
- Progressing toward it gradually through structured phases that ensure continuous advancement without regression.

### **Fifth: Means of Building Strategy**

An effective and successful strategy cannot be discussed, regardless of its cognitive coherence, theoretical realism, or intellectual idealism, unless it is supported by the necessary means and capabilities to translate abstract ideas into practical applications. These means can be classified as material and moral, as follows:

**1- Material Means:** These include all economic resources, such as natural resources, production capacity, financial and commercial conditions, as well as military capabilities. When sufficiently available, these means provide the state with freedom of maneuver, substantial support, and strong motivation to

accomplish, achieve, and defend its political and national objectives against potential threats.

**2- Moral Means:** Moral means encompass a system of ideological and civilizational ideas, the level of internal political mobilization, and a clear vision regarding external affairs. Combined with material means, they form an integrated civilizational matrix that drives the state to exercise external influence, maintain internal cohesion, and implement its strategy to secure national gains and protect national interests. Foreign policy, reflecting a state's conduct toward its external environment, typically relies on persuasion, diplomacy, and alliances. These are essentially moral means, dependent on skill and a value system capable of co-opting allies, isolating opponents, and defeating enemies.

Thus, the formulation of any strategy under specific circumstances is directly linked to both material and moral sources of power, which play a decisive role in a state's strength or weakness at the international level.

However, the process of linking objectives and means through planning also presupposes another indispensable element in strategic action "**capability**". This refers to the ability to employ available means to achieve defined objectives—the art or skill of adapting means to attain the desired ends. Many states possess resources and objectives yet fail to achieve them due to a lack of skill in utilizing their means effectively. Conversely, some states with relatively limited resources can accomplish a significant portion of their objectives through effective application and strategic expertise.

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## Lecture 02: Chinese Strategy Before and During the Cold War

Studying the content of Chinese strategy in the post–Cold War period requires examining the history of this strategy. To understand the present of a state and anticipate its future, one must know its past, as it provides insight into the behavior of that state.

Chinese strategy during the Cold War can be divided into two phases:

1. The rule of **Mao Zedong**
2. The rule of **Deng Xiaoping**

### First: Mao Zedong's Rule: 1949–1978

When analyzing Chinese strategy or defining its core interests, no researcher can ignore the historical period 1839–1949, known in China as the “Century of Humiliation,” which spanned 110 years. This era left a deep imprint on the Chinese collective memory as a dark period marked by humiliating military defeats at the hands of foreign powers, indescribable human tragedy, and the loss of national sovereignty through the cession of parts of the homeland to other countries.

This painful memory was strongly present when **Mao Zedong**, the first president of the People's Republic of China, proclaimed the founding of the republic on October 1, 1949, following the victory of the communist revolution, declaring that the Chinese people, who represent a quarter of humanity, “have now risen.”

The period following the end of World War II and the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century was characterized as an era of competing ideologies, represented by the Soviet and American blocs.

Conflicts, beliefs, and ideas became one of the main driving forces shaping state behavior. Ideologies turned into a tool of indirect strategy adopted by most

states, serving as an effective means for targeted propaganda warfare, political smear campaigns, and similar activities.

China was not immune to this ideological climate with all its pressures and influences. Its strategy was heavily infused with ideological elements, perhaps even more rigidly than the Soviet Union, especially during the early phase of the Cold War. The Chinese accused the Soviets of straying from Marxism when they adopted the policy of peaceful coexistence.

Mao acted as the Godfather who rejected the rules of the international system and sought to overthrow it, believing that true change could only come through revolution. Consequently, the main approach of Chinese strategy during his period was radically offensive and adversarial, rooted in Marxist thought and ideological principles such as class struggle and proletarianism.

Mao's foreign policy was thus characterized by resonant, hostile rhetoric and firm opposition to the great powers—the United States and the Soviet Union—alongside a policy of isolation from international organizations and pursuit of economic self-sufficiency. It was also closely aligned with Third World countries, regarded as China's natural allies, as they constituted the main force in the global struggle against the hegemony of the two great powers and against imperialism and colonialism.

### **Second: Phase Two: “Deng Xiaoping Era” (1978–1992)**

The overall failure of Chinese foreign policy during the Mao period, coupled with China's relative isolation from 1949 to 1977, prompted the ruling Chinese Communist Party to begin calling for the need to restructure this policy in a new way. However, these calls gained practical traction only after Mao's death in 1976. Accordingly, the 11th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1977 adopted a strategy that would later be known as “comprehensive political opening to the world.”

With Deng Xiaoping's rise to power in 1978, a fundamentally different approach was adopted. He reversed the radical orientation that had defined

Maoist strategy, introducing a less confrontational, more pragmatic, and more assertive approach.

Deng aimed to achieve international openness by significantly increasing China's participation in governmental, non-governmental, and particularly financial organizations, gradually leading the country out of the isolation imposed during Mao's era.

“Within this framework, Maoist strategy—centered on global class struggle and continuous revolution against imperialism—was abandoned in favor of an approach based on cooperation and shared interests. Deng's approach followed the principle of ‘hide capabilities and bide time,’ emphasizing “the concealment of national strength, the consolidation of domestic power, maintaining a low profile, and avoiding direct confrontation with the United States and other great powers.”

This strategy implied that China should remain largely inconspicuous on the international stage, focusing on economic development rather than active intervention in global affairs. Consequently, China concentrated on maintaining stable foreign relations, particularly with the United States, while at the same time diverting other powers' attention through foreign engagements, leaving them to shoulder the responsibilities of global leadership.

This approach has served China well, allowing it to focus on pressing domestic priorities and internal challenges. Accordingly, this Chinese strategy reflects two main types of priorities:

1. **The first priority emphasizes** economic security over military strength, as experience has shown that military capability unsupported by economic power cannot remain effective over time.
2. **The second priority prioritizes** cooperation over conflict among states. Economic diplomacy required China to abandon its prior custom of non-contracting, during the Mao era, under which it formed alliances only with selected socialist countries, and instead open its relations to any state

capable of supporting its pursuit of markets, resources, and political backing.

At this stage, China was still defining its proper place in the international system; its strategy remained transitional—from a hesitant rising power to a fully emerging great power. Nevertheless, it began to act decisively on key international issues, confronting and occasionally pushing back against the dominant power, especially when its security and strategic interests were at stake.

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### **Lecture 03: Chinese Strategy and Its New Implications after the Cold War**

Owing to the continuous growth of its position on the international stage, China has become one of the defining features of the post-bipolar era. It has consequently attracted the attention of various think tanks and specialized academic institutions across the world, seeking to uncover the underlying drivers of China's remarkable rise and to anticipate the future of this rising power with its regional and global ambitions. While China's growing economic weight is easily observable, it is the Chinese growth rates and their impact on the global balance of power that raise concern among the world's great powers and constitute one of the key research issues currently debated in academic circles.

#### **First: The Nature of China's Perception of International Changes**

China's understanding of the shifts affecting the international system after the Cold War led its strategy to consider the main dimensions of changing international dynamics, particularly in its regional and global interactions, to the extent that these were relevant to China's pursuit of a more effective role and presence.

In this context, post-Cold War Chinese strategy relied on an objective analysis of regional and global political realities, alongside China's self-perception and understanding of its role within this framework. This perspective clearly shaped China's foreign policy actions.

The outcomes of this strategic review included the following insights:

1. The post-Cold War world differs from the Cold War period in terms of power relations and strategic interests, particularly among the great powers.
2. Today's world is characterized by competition, especially in economic and technological domains, necessitating that China continue its modernization and economic growth along pragmatic and practical lines.

3. China adopted a new strategy based on clear principles, aimed at strengthening its global position as a political and economic power capable of contributing to the re-balancing of international relations.

It is widely acknowledged in international relations that the rise of a new power is often associated with the inherently violent nature of systemic change. However, China sought an exception through what it calls a 'peaceful rise' strategy—avoiding aggressive behavior toward Asia in particular and the world in general. In other words, China aims to create a non-violent political and economic environment that ensures a 'quiet ascent' and supports the continued development of its capabilities, especially economic ones.

In recent years, special emphasis has been placed on cultivating and developing soft power through targeted policies and initiatives. China has also recognized the importance of acting on two fronts: hard power (military) and economic and cultural power, in its pursuit of comprehensive national strength. By leveraging its various assets and points of strength, China has undertaken several measures to enhance its attractiveness and its capacity to influence others through "smart power".

Thus, in recent years, a new strategic landscape has emerged, leading China to shift its strategic choices toward enhancing its image as a great power and assuming greater responsibility. The Chinese leadership has expressed a desire for the world to perceive China as a 'responsible and contributing member' in international relations.

Several factors have contributed to this strategic shift:

1. Beijing's growing confidence in its international standing and ability to maintain high growth rates despite the global economic slowdown.
2. The Chinese leadership's perception that the time had come to expand its international influence, particularly as the global balance of power began shifting from West to East and the gradual emergence of a multipolar world took shape.

3. The expansion of China's economic capabilities and its increasing need to safeguard land and maritime trade routes, in light of the country's increasing dependence on imports.

## **Second: Stages of the Development of Chinese Strategy from One Leader to Another**

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when China transitioned from a **“strategy of gazes” (from ‘hiding’ to ‘commanding’ attention)** to a strategy characterized as a **“power that aspires to be”** or a **“responsible major power.”** Nevertheless, it appears clear that this evolution was largely driven by President Jiang Zemin. During his tenure, Zemin developed what can now be called a **“major-power strategy.”** Consequently, China not only accepted prevailing international rules and institutions but also became a highly capable and experienced actor in the diplomatic arena. Reflecting these changes, President Hu Jintao became the first Chinese leader to attend meetings of the Group of Eight (G8) – the world's largest industrialized economies.

Subsequently, Xi Jinping's rise to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2012, and to the presidency of China in March 2013, contributed to Beijing's adoption of a firmer policy stance. Xi emerged as China's most powerful leader since Deng Xiaoping, promoting concepts such as **“national rejuvenation,”** the **“Chinese Dream,”** and the **“responsible major power,”** through which he seeks to elevate China's standing as an active global actor rather than a reactive or a passive one, while simultaneously demonstrating greater support for and adherence to international norms and multilateral institutions. By adopting this approach, China seeks to project itself as more mature, responsible, and constructive, signaling that it has moved beyond the victimization narrative that once shaped its reactive posture and now aligns more closely with the mindset of a responsible great power, in line with its larger and more confident role in regional and international affairs.

Xi's plans represent a paradigm shift in the developmental strategy initiated by Deng in 1978, marking China's shift from focusing solely on domestic

economic growth to considering its relationship with the world and its position within it, following the country's remarkable economic achievements over recent decades. China's ambitions under Xi extend beyond economic dimensions to political ones, encompassing both regional and global aspirations. Actively shaping international norms and institutions, China asserts its presence strongly on the global stage. As Xi stated in a 2014 speech: "**China should not only be a participant in the race, but also a designer of the track and a setter of the rules.**" China also seeks to export its political values worldwide. In his speech, President Xi described the "Chinese one-party system" as "a new option for other countries and peoples who wish to accelerate their development while maintaining their independence.

In a different context, under the theme of "rebalancing globalization" and promoting trade liberalization, China launched the "New Silk Road" initiative, presented as a project of the century, with a commitment of \$124 billion to strengthen trade between Asia, Africa, and Europe. The initiative recalls the ancient caravans that once crossed Central Asia, while a more realistic comparison is the U.S.-funded Marshall Plan in post-World War II in Europe, which was instrumental in securing American global influence.

This historical overview highlights two key issues that clarify China's rise from a Chinese perspective. It also reflects the lessons the Chinese drew as their nation fell from the apex of the global power pyramid to its margins in a prolonged and humiliating manner:

**Firstly**, to prevent a repetition of the "century of humiliation," China's central authority must remain unified and coherent, and the country's economic and military capabilities must enable it to defend itself and protect its interests. On this basis, the Chinese Communist Party continues to reject the adoption of Western-style democracy. The strategy of peaceful rise also relies on China's efforts to maintain internal stability, safeguard national sovereignty, and, importantly, "dispel regional concerns" regarding Chinese intentions and

ambitions in the post–Cold War world, as well as to secure the Asian region from any large-scale war that could affect China's growth.

**Secondly**, the Chinese do not view their country's rise as a sudden event or a threat to others, but as a natural and logical process to restore China's historical and civilizational role, which was lost due to foreign interventions and Western colonialism.

Based on this, specialists in Asian affairs note that the new Chinese strategy combines enhancing relations with the outside world through trade and investment, exercising soft power, and strengthening the principle of “modernizing military capabilities,” with the goal of creating a favorable environment for China to conduct its foreign policy successfully.

China aims to maintain a global presence, presenting itself as attentive to international developments while balancing its position with other major powers. It positions itself as capable of keeping pace with changes in the international system and adapting to developments in the post–Cold War era, particularly in the areas of economy, security, and peace.

Professor Goldstein identifies two key elements of China's new foreign policy:

- The first element is the ongoing interconnection of core interests between China and the great powers, which engages these powers in the pursuit of greater benefits within a multipolar system. Nevertheless, China seeks to avoid “violence” in its foreign policy despite conflicting interests, through the operationalization of a “partnership mechanism.”
- The second element involves diplomacy which aims at cultivating China's reputation by projecting it as a “responsible stakeholder” within the international system—a pivotal actor seeking to align its interests with those of other global actors.

Moreover, China's new foreign policy is guided by two key principles:

- **The Principle of Consolidation:** This refers to ongoing efforts to maintain and strengthen friendly and constructive ties with countries across strategic regions, achieved through the systematic building of mutual trust and the cultivation of strategic partnerships.
- **The Principle of Assurance:** This denotes the concerted efforts by Chinese leadership to reassure other countries of the peaceful intentions underlying China's rise, emphasizing that China will not be a divisive challenge or a threat to stability in the international system.

### **Third: Factors for the Success of China's Influence and Impact Strategy**

China benefits from the current “strategic disorder” in the international system, positioning itself differently from other great powers. The United States, once the unipolar dominant power, is in relative decline and constrained by institutional limitations under President Donald Trump. The European Union, though theoretically capable of countering China, lacks political cohesion and will. Russia, under Vladimir Putin, maintains military strength but now serves as China's **secondary partner**, after historically playing the role of “**Big brother**” during Stalin's era.

Several factors contribute to the potential success of China's strategy:

1. **Linking Ideal Discourse with Constructive Action:** The ideal principles underpinning China's foreign policy, including the “principle of dialogue” in addressing international issues, have enabled China to safeguard its interests and maintain relations with various actors under diverse circumstances. This approach has, at times, reassured—and even attracted—countries in Southeast Asia, Africa, and other regions, while strengthening the foundations of China's strategic development over time.
2. **Leadership in the Global South:** China holds a prominent role among Southern nations as the largest developing country and one of the world's oldest civilizations.

3. **Rising global resentment toward the U.S.:** Growing international hostility toward the United States, driven by its unilateralist policies and the gaps they created, has been exploited by rising powers. In response, China continues to pursue multilateral diplomacy to foster more harmonious relations with its neighbors and the European Union, which could significantly reduce the political power gap with the United States in the coming years.
4. **Crises of the Western Liberal Model:** Particularly the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, among others, which exposed vulnerabilities in the model promoted by many Western states since the end of the Cold War. These crises created a challenge that facilitated the official and semi-official promotion of alternatives under the label of the “China model.”

China's resilience and success in overcoming these crises, coupled with its contribution to rebalancing the global economy, have positioned the Chinese model as a convincing alternative to the Western model for many. This success has also encouraged China to engage more assertively with the rest of the world, both in bilateral and multilateral forums.

From the preceding overview of China's strategy, it is clear that it is multidimensional. While economic growth remains the driving force, this approach makes China's rise more balanced and influential, enhancing its weight and international standing. As Xi Jinping stated: “**The increasing international role and influence of our country should be expressed through hard power, reflected in economic, technological, and security capacities, as well as soft power, such as culture.**”

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## Lecture 04: China's Strategic-Building Capabilities

China's advancement and influence in the international political system rest on several core pillars. State power is not limited to military capabilities; it also includes all material and non-material resources through which a country can influence the behavior of others externally. This influence is aligned with China's foreign policy objectives, aimed at safeguarding its national interests and goals. As a result, China now possesses multidimensional power, enabling it to claim—and actively pursue—the global position it deserves.

### First: Economic Power

China's economic power forms the backbone of its national policy and serves as a central pillar in its interactions with other great powers. As the role of economic factors in global politics has increased, so has China's international status, as well as its ability to negotiate, exert pressure, and maintain independence in political and economic decision-making.

Since 1979, China has implemented numerous economic reforms, becoming one of the world's fastest-growing economies. In the twenty-five years following 1979, China's national output grew at an average rate of nearly 10 percent. Its GDP rose from \$1.2 trillion in 2000 to \$6.1 trillion in 2010, and further jumped to \$11.39 trillion in 2016, securing its position as the world's second-largest economy after the United States. By 2017, China's GDP reached \$11.93 trillion, while the United States remained first with \$19.36 trillion. In 2018, China's GDP rose to \$13.28 trillion, compared to the U.S. at \$19 trillion, and by 2019 it reached \$14.4 trillion.

According to the IMF—International Monetary Fund's 2020 report, China has since surpassed the United States to become the world's largest economy, with a GDP approximately one-sixth larger than that of the U.S. (\$24.2 trillion versus \$20.8 trillion in 2020).

China's commercial influence extends across Southeast Asia and, beyond that region, into Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, which is the focus of our study.

China's economic power allows it to develop effective domestic and foreign strategies through:

1. **Maintaining internal stability** and reducing regional development disparities, particularly when coupled with the fair distribution of economic gains.
2. **Providing legitimacy for the Chinese political system** and securing the domestic front, enabling the leadership to focus on external affairs.
3. **Expanding its spheres of influence globally** through economic and political outreach, establishing ties with different countries worldwide including great powers, and securing support from weaker states via grants or loans—China has established a broad international presence. This extensive economic influence allows China to operate effectively within U.S containment strategies, enhancing its capacity to take strategic initiative and assert influence across the global stage.

## **Second: Advanced Military Power**

Building on the factors discussed earlier, these developments have influenced Chinese strategic thought, leading to changes in force structure and defense doctrine. China's military now relies on concepts of localized warfare, active defense of the country's peripheries, and limited use of air and naval power beyond its borders, reflecting its continental, maritime, and strategic interests.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) possesses a disciplined combat system composed of units, personnel, heavy military equipment, and aircraft—more than any other military institution in Asia. The PLA has approximately 2.5 million active personnel, making it the largest army in the world in numerical terms. Moreover, China possesses a mobilization-ready manpower

pool of approximately 300 million individuals eligible for military service, with nearly 9 million reaching conscription age annually.

China is the only nation, after Russia, to possess ballistic missiles capable of striking the U.S. mainland. Furthermore, it is the third country to demonstrate anti-satellite (ASAT) capabilities, thereby entering a new geopolitical dimension previously monopolized by the United States and Russia. This advancement provides China with a significant deterrent capability, insulating it from direct military confrontation with hostile states or those with which it is in conflict.

China possesses advanced nuclear capabilities, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), satellites, space stations, and both conventional and non-conventional weaponry. It remains exceptionally difficult to obtain precise figures for estimating Chinese military expenditures and capabilities—particularly its missile and strategic forces—as there are vast discrepancies between official Chinese data and the estimates provided by Western and American research centers.

The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China published its ninth white paper on national defense in June 2015, titled "China's Military Strategy." The document was aimed to underscore China's commitment to peaceful development and military transparency. The white paper noted that the strategy centers on the guiding principle of "Active Defense" and maintains the integration of strategic defense with operational and tactical offense. It stated that **“China will not attack unless we are attacked, but we will surely counterattack if attacked.”** The document further stipulated that, to implement the military strategic guideline of active defense under new circumstances, China's armed forces must uphold the following principles:

- **Enhancing a strategic posture conducive to China's peaceful development**, adhering to a national defense policy that is defensive in nature, and maintaining close coordination among political, military,

economic, and diplomatic efforts to proactively address comprehensive security threats facing the nation.

- **Striking a balance between safeguarding rights and maintaining stability**, through integrated planning for both, to protect China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests while ensuring security and stability along its periphery.
- **Preparing rigorously for the most complex and demanding scenarios**, upholding "bottom-line thinking" to ensure timely and effective responses under any circumstances.
- **Upholding the absolute leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) over the military**, enforcing strict discipline, and enhancing the professional competence and combat effectiveness of the forces. This includes strengthening ties between the government and the military, as well as between the people and the military, while boosting officers' and personnel's morale.
- **unleashing the comprehensive power of the "People's War" concept**, continuing to employ it as a core instrument for victory over adversaries, and advancing the transition from human-resource-intensive mobilization to a science- and technology-focused approach.
- **Expanding military and security cooperation**, deepening relations with great powers, neighboring countries, and other developing nations, and promoting the creation of a regional framework for security and collaboration.

### **China's Strategic Use of Cyberspace for National Security**

Over the past two decades, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has adopted a new strategy based on a simple premise: in modern warfare, it is not necessary to destroy an enemy's entire forces to win—disabling their key nodes can render them completely ineffective. Chinese strategists now argue that instead of relying on traditional firepower and massive head-on battles, the goal is to cripple an adversary's ability to fight through precision strikes. These attacks are carried out across multiple domains: land, sea, air, space, cyber,

electromagnetic, and even psychological. The focus has moved toward disrupting an enemy's ability to analyze information and send commands. When these "tightly integrated systems"—which modern militaries depend on for communication and intelligence—are dismantled, air and naval operations become chaotic and paralyzed. By mastering these "information influence methods," China believes it can effectively force an enemy off the battlefield.

Beijing has poured resources into information and communication technology (ICT) to prepare for future warfare, aiming for global leadership in this field by 2050. Beyond theory, China has created specialized Electronic Warfare (EW) units to develop Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) weapons. These are designed to be used against foreign aircraft carriers in a future conflict and are part of a highly secretive project known as "Assassin's Mace" weapons—advanced technologies meant to give China a decisive edge.

A major turning point came in 2014, when China adopted a much stricter and more organized policy toward cyberspace. President Xi Jinping personally took charge of the new Central Cybersecurity and Informatization Leading Group, signaling just how high a priority this is for the state. For China, the internet is a double-edged sword: it is essential for economic growth but also a potential threat to internal stability. Balancing openness with repression is a delicate and sensitive task for the leadership.

To formalize this, China implemented its Cybersecurity Law in June 2017. This law asserts that sovereign states have every right to regulate cyberspace according to their own national interests and international standards.

Ultimately, the most important takeaway is not the raw numbers or hardware, but how these quantitative and qualitative military capabilities enable China to safeguard its rise and assert itself as a Responsible Great Power on the world stage.

### Third: Advanced Technological Power

While China's exports were once primarily labor-intensive sectors, it has achieved successes in high-tech product markets since 2000. China now attracts not only manufacturing units but also Research and Development activities, enabling it to challenge the scientific and technological standing of many countries.

Today, China is the leading exporter of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) products. Its exports have grown rapidly, surpassing those of the United States, which allows it to emerge as an international player and even a technological superpower. China's strong innovation and renewal capabilities now threaten the high-tech industries of advanced nations.

China responded by adopting a comprehensive strategy in 2016 to achieve technological self-reliance by 2025, allocating hundreds of billions annually to develop national capabilities. This is particularly important because China relies entirely on imported semiconductors, which perform precise processing operations and are used in most personal and commercial electronic devices, such as mobile phones, computers, and televisions. These industries collectively account for one-third of China's exports to the world. The most critical aspect is the near-total dependence on American suppliers. China faced a major strategic exposure in April 2018, when the Trump administration imposed sanctions on **ZTE**—the world's fourth-largest telecommunications equipment giant. The company was forced to halt operations after suppliers stopped providing essential components. Although the sanctions were eventually lifted following high-level political negotiations, the crisis prompted President Xi Jinping to issue a special appeal to Chinese scientists, urging them to make extraordinary efforts to overcome this strategic exposure.

In 2016, China launched the world's first satellite capable of transmitting quantum-encrypted communications, while also completing the longest quantum-secured fiber link between Beijing and Shanghai. By 2017, China announced its roadmap to achieve global leadership in Artificial Intelligence

(AI) by 2030. To reach this goal, it initiated the establishment of a number of institutions and specialized companies, such as **Baidu** (AI and internet services), Tencent (gaming and social media), the e-commerce giant **Alibaba**, and **Flytex**, specializing in highly specific aspects related to the internet.

China is also making significant efforts to deal with the new wave of discoveries, particularly in fifth-generation mobile network technologies (5G). Beijing views this revolutionary technology as the backbone of its "Made in China 2025" strategy, which aims to transform the country into a "technological superpower." Conversely, the United States views this strategy as a grave concern and a direct threat to its national security—specifically regarding the global leader **Huawei**. As of early 2019, Huawei became the world's second-largest smartphone manufacturer after the Korean giant **Samsung**, commanding a 17% market share. Its revenue surged by 20% in 2018 to reach \$107 billion, placing it in the same league as American giants like **Google** and **Microsoft**. Having begun its 5G development as early as 2009, Huawei's wireless technologies consistently rank first in independent performance tests, recently winning the "Best 5G Network Technology" award at the 2019 Global 5G Summit. This technological dominance has escalated the conflict between China and the United States. Washington has blacklisted Huawei, barring it from competing for U.S. contracts, and has pressured allies to exclude the company from their own 5G infrastructure. Some allies responded to this request, such as **New Zealand** and **Australia**, while other allies are still examining these steps, most notably **Germany**, **France**, **Poland**, and the **United Kingdom**. According to the United States, the reason lies in the close ties linking Huawei's founder to the Chinese military, which could enable it to intercept communications in America and potentially launch cyberattacks against infrastructure.

The "**Huawei Affair**" signifies the deepening tensions between the two powers. It remains unclear whether they can avoid further escalation or if the situation will worsen, especially given the numerous allegations involving manipulation and the theft of technological secrets from American and Western

companies. Critics argue that China is attempting to make up for what it has missed in order to narrow the gap between itself and the advanced Western countries and eventually surpass the West and save substantial resources and efforts in scientific research. A notable example of this friction was the scandal involving a Huawei engineer who was accused of stealing information from a phone-testing robot developed by the American company **T-Mobile**.

#### **Fourth: China's Geographical Position**

China occupies a pivotal position on the geopolitical map of the Asia-Pacific region. Ranking as the world's third-largest country by area after Russia and Canada—spanning “9,572,900 km<sup>2</sup>”—this vast territory allows China to accommodate its massive population and provide diverse resources to meet their needs. However, such a large geographic area also imposes several constraints on China's internal stability and its ability to move beyond its regional sphere.

China's location and immense size leave it surrounded by “21 neighboring countries” across land and sea. This has drawn Beijing into numerous border disputes and territorial disagreements, constraining a foreign policy that increasingly regards stability and peace as strategic objectives for the continuation of economic growth. This challenge is underscored by the fact that approximately “70% of China's land borders and 66% of its maritime boundaries represent potential flashpoints.

These geographical realities are sufficient to explain the constraints placed on the nature of Chinese strategies and foreign policy. They also explain the tendency of Chinese diplomacy to avoid threatening its neighbors simultaneously and to follow a “peaceful approach” in order to preserve the stability of its security periphery.

### **Fifth: The Human Element**

While different approaches debate the importance of the human factor in national power, China's strategic investment in its population has amplified both its economic and military strength, allowing it to use its demography as a tool for international leverage and deterrence.

China's massive population has transformed it into a major economic power, making it the —largest integrated market in the world— and a military force of great numerical size. The importance of the Chinese human factor is not limited to numbers alone, but extends to the nature, qualifications, and distribution of this human composition both inside and outside the country, allowing it to be employed in multiple fields and in different ways.

Yet, despite the maneuverability provided by this "human mass," it also imposes strict limits on China's behavioral options. The Chinese political system derives its primary **legitimacy** from its ability to meet the material needs of its citizens. Consequently, addressing the requirements of this enormous population is the state's highest priority for maintaining domestic stability and ensuring the survival of the ruling regime against various Western pressures.

Thus, the human factor has effectively ended China's historical culture of isolationism and "strategic reserve" toward the outside world and foreign entities.

### **Sixth: China and International Organizations**

For over 40 years, China has pursued a strategy of international integration designed to lend credibility to its political power. Consequently, the advocacy for multilateralism has become a cornerstone of Chinese diplomatic activity in recent years. In addition to expanding its political influence in regional affairs, this diplomacy has helped reshape China's global image, overturning the pre-1990s stereotype of a China skeptical of multilateral frameworks. Since then, China has engaged extensively with most regional multilateral institutions, such

as ASEAN and APEC, evolving into a highly influential actor in Asian regional cooperation.

China has also used existing international institutions to project its capabilities, particularly by participating in agenda-setting—a move that represents a strategic effort to introduce incremental reforms. In this context, Realists argue that China's accession to major international organizations, especially economic ones like the World Trade Organization (WTO), is not driven by short-term commercial gains as much as the desire to secure a "seat at the bargaining table to exercise influence on the rules of the game." Essentially, China's entry into these organizations aims to reshape global economic rules to align with its own interests and to neutralize external pressures on its economy. This ambition was captured by a Chinese ambassador who, during the accession negotiations, vowed: "**We know we must play by your rules for now; but in ten years, we will be the ones setting them.**"

China continues to expand its influence in defining legitimate standards in international affairs. This stems from its recognition of the importance of "social" growth within the international community and the need for global perception to align with China's status and legitimate interests. For instance, China vigorously defends its definition of "legitimate warfare" within multilateral institutions like the United Nations. In recent years, Beijing has become increasingly active in UN peacekeeping operations and has successfully leveraged the UN General Assembly to champion its steadfast defense of the concept of sovereignty.

Within the framework of the UN and the **Security Council**, China counters American and Western policies aimed at **containment** through a quiet approach that avoids provoking these nations or making China appear as a habitual obstructionist to international projects and the majority will. While China does not share the Western powers' positions on many global issues, it expresses its dissent through "**principled opposition**"—often opting for non-participation or **abstention** rather than a direct **veto**, which would place it in immediate confrontation with other great powers.

Regarding the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF): As a member of both institutions, China has successfully asserted its own economic approach and policies. China has thus become a key actor that has supplanted the role of these two institutions by providing unconditional loans to developing nations. It adheres to the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs, overlooking issues of human rights and democracy, and extending loans to states that the international community considers “rogue,” particularly in Africa and South Asia. Despite threats from the World Bank and the IMF to impose economic sanctions on China, the latter continues to pursue the same policies without being subjected to effective punitive measures from either institution.

Another dimension of Chinese influence is visible in its economic philosophy within these organizations. China's economic approach has maintained the ability to manage the **exchange rate** of its currency in line with its national interests and economic goals. Beijing regulates and adjusts its currency value as economic developments dictate—a practice that has been a point of contention within the IMF.

Furthermore, the appointment of Chinese officials and scholars to positions within the IMF and the World Bank underscores China's growing role. Through these appointments, China seeks to influence institutional policies and increase its direct involvement in the global agenda-setting process.

However, Chinese influence remains relatively limited in some respects; it will likely take a moderate amount of time for China to fully develop its leverage. This timeline depends significantly on whether Western economies continue to face downturns while the Chinese economy maintains its growth trajectory.

China and Regional Organizations: China is widely considered a leading nation within the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. It has successfully asserted its importance by providing member states with strategic economic frameworks and innovative ideas, enabling it to exert significant influence over decision-making within the organization. Furthermore, China has sought to

ensure that APEC remains the primary vehicle for regional integration, preventing any other international body from displacing it or dominating the Asian economy. This framing is broadly consistent with APEC's long-standing role as the premier forum for regional economic integration in the Asia-Pacific. Beijing has strategically balanced its role as a sovereign state with its participation in APEC as a regional multilateral organization. Many scholars argue that without China's active participation, APEC would be unable to achieve its long-term objectives or fulfill its core mission.

### **Seventh: Ancient History and Political Acumen: (Political and Diplomatic Capabilities)**

China's long history, marked by its grandeur, gives the country a unique position that commands respect, admiration, and cautious attention. Its ancient civilization, which saw the rise of powerful empires, continues to shape China as a notable global power—even if this influence is mainly soft.

China's political and diplomatic skills also allow it to counter certain U.S. strategies aimed at containing it. Chinese diplomacy often emphasizes peaceful, negotiated solutions to complex issues, such as the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea. While China's global political influence may sometimes seem less active than its economic power, it remains strong and highly effective at the regional level.

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## Lecture 05: The Role of Strategic Culture in Shaping Chinese Strategy

Many scholars—and even Chinese decision-makers—agree that China has a strategic culture fundamentally different from Western approaches. China has a distinct view of foreign policy, which contrasts with common Western assumptions, especially those of Realist scholars, who often claim that China's policy is like that of any other great power, driven by competition and the pursuit of dominance. From this perspective, China's peaceful approach to international relations is seen as temporary, making potential conflict appear inevitable.

This raises two key questions: What forms the basis of Chinese strategic culture, and how does it influence China's foreign policy decisions?

### First: Defining the Strategic Culture Approach

The strategic culture approach argues that foreign policies are not “One-size-fits-all”, as Realism suggests. Instead, they are shaped by individual, historical, and societal factors that influence how decision-makers see their nation's role. These perceptions are not always fully rational but help explain international behaviors that classical theories, like Realism or Systems Theory, cannot fully account for.

The strategic culture lens assumes that every actor in international relations views the world through a specific, relatively stable "filter" or prism. This prism dictates which alternatives are chosen from the available options, ensuring that the resulting policies are acceptable and align with the state's internal doctrine and strategic identity. For the decision-maker, this influence is often subconscious; strategic culture acts as an involuntary tool that powerfully steers the behavior of a political unit within the international system. Ultimately, strategic culture serves as a yardstick for evaluating foreign policy. It functions as a form of collective memory, shaped by the interaction of various factors that create a unique perspective for interpreting phenomena in international relations.

## Second: Defining Chinese Strategic Culture

The strategic culture approach is key to understanding China's grand strategy. China has a distinct "prism" that strongly influences its interactions with other global actors. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has published a foundational text, *An Analysis of China's Strategic Culture*, which examines this concept in detail and explicitly contrasts it with Western strategic frameworks. The book shows how China's strategic culture shapes decision-makers' preferences, often operating subconsciously within the nation's collective memory.

On this topic, General Li Jijun notes: **"Culture is the root and the weight of strategy. In its historical evolution, strategic thinking gradually flows into the mainstream of a country's intellectual current—its strategic culture. The strategic culture of every country inevitably bears the imprint of its cultural traditions, shaping and defining strategic decision-making through complex and often unconscious means."**

In the same vein, Chinese authors and contributors to the manual *"The Science of Military Strategy"* argue that: **"Strategic thinking is always formed on the basis of a conscious national and historical cultural tradition. In formulating and implementing strategy, strategists are guided by a specific cultural ideology and a complex historical legacy."**

## Third: Characteristics of Chinese Strategic Culture

Chinese strategic culture is defined by several general characteristics:

### **The First Characteristic:**

Exceptionalism and the "Middle Kingdom" Mentality, the Chinese perceive themselves and their culture as distinct from all others. Rooted in the concept of the "Middle Kingdom" (Zhongguo), they view China as the center of the world, historically regarding others as subordinates or "barbarians." This worldview fosters the belief that no other culture stands on equal footing,

leading to the rejection of competing cultural hegemonies. Furthermore, they believe they possess a unique mastery of statecraft and governance, asserting that China holds a pioneering edge in the art of strategy—characterized by subtle skill and intelligence—alongside a sophisticated understanding of the use of material power.

### **The Second Characteristic:**

Emphasis on Internal Unity and Sovereignty  
There is a paramount focus on domestic cohesion and non-interference. The Chinese generally avoid entanglement in affairs that do not directly concern them, prioritizing internal harmony and national unity. From this perspective, internal solidarity is the ultimate guarantor of stability and enduring strength.

### **The Third Characteristic:**

Rejection of Direct Intervention and the Avoidance of War  
Chinese culture views war as a risky venture; a military leader must never act recklessly or exhaust available resources. Instead, the ideal is to achieve victory without conflict. A fundamental principle here is that unnecessary risk-taking is discouraged and carries a negative connotation. Long-term strategic planning therefore requires leaders to master tactics of evasion and strategic circumvention in order to win battles without fighting. Consequently, a core leadership task lies in “knowing the terrain” of engagement—understanding the vulnerabilities and strengths of both sides. If an opponent forces confrontation on terrain that exposes one's weaknesses, military might alone will not guarantee success.

We see the essence of this indirect approach in the precepts of Sun Tzu:

- “Know your enemy and know yourself; your victory will never be endangered.”
- “Nothing is more difficult than the art of maneuvering. What is challenging about maneuvering is making the crooked route the most

direct and turning disadvantages into advantages. Therefore, take the indirect path and divert the enemy's attention by distracting them with a secondary bait.”

- “He who masters the art of both direct and indirect combat will be victorious. This is the art of maneuvering. To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the pinnacle of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the pinnacle of skill.”

Accordingly, from the perspective of Chinese strategic culture, war in international relations is seen as costly and destructive. It must therefore be avoided, particularly because it may trigger internal schisms. If war becomes inevitable, victory must be secured at the lowest possible cost, while avoiding protracted wars of attrition. Effective leadership is thus defined by its brilliant capacity for strategic circumvention, overcoming the chaos of war while employing the fewest possible resources.

More broadly, this is accompanied by a sense of Chinese exceptionalism—the conviction that China can prevail with minimal losses not merely through raw power, but through an inherent strategic superiority over its adversaries.

#### **Fourth: Sources of Chinese Strategic Culture**

The sources of Chinese strategic culture primarily lie in **Confucian philosophy**, alongside geography, historical structures, and social values. Together, these elements form the reservoir from which China draws its strategic preferences. This does not mean that strategic culture strictly determines the nature of Chinese foreign policy; rather, it indicates that culture shapes and guides the decision-maker's preferences during the formulation of foreign policy.

Understanding and interpreting Chinese foreign policy cannot be confined to the analysis of **Marxist-Leninist theory** alone; it requires a deeper reading. While Marxism-Leninism certainly influences China's foreign policy, this

influence remains relatively limited, as Marxism often functions more as an instrument or means for achieving specific objectives.

Chinese culture is an extension of the broader **Asian cultural sphere**, which constitutes a distinct value system rooted in Eastern philosophy. The Chinese individual adheres to a particular set of values, foremost among them the belief that the family is the foundational pillar of society. Moreover, the Asian social ethos is deeply collective, maintaining a careful balance between individual and communal interests, with a clear preference for collective action over individualism.

Chinese culture is further distinguished by its unique attachment to tradition and **Confucian thought**. Contrary to common assumptions, Confucianism is better understood as an ethical and philosophical system rather than a religion. There is an inseparable relationship between Chinese society and Confucian philosophy, which advocates moral conduct in politics and places strong emphasis on peace and security—helping explain the pacifist tendency often associated with Chinese foreign policy.

Accordingly, Chinese policy is not merely the product of ideological determinants; the historical dimension also plays a central role. This does not diminish the importance of ideology, but rather places it alongside other key determinants. Tradition, history, and culture remain fundamental drivers in shaping foreign policy. For example, the legacy of the great “**Middle Kingdom**,” which dominated the Asian continent for centuries, continues to inspire modern Chinese aspirations to restore the glory of their ancestors. They perceive their civilization as the world's center and leader—the oldest in history and one that has made a monumental contribution to global civilizations. This largely explains China's contemporary drive to rise to the highest ranks of global status.

### **Fifth: Chinese Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy**

Chinese strategic culture perceives the principles of "gain and loss" through an exceptionally long-term lens. Strategies derived from this mindset prioritize maneuverability and manipulation, accepting relative losses as mere waypoints on a protracted journey. Along this path, the role of leadership is to avoid direct confrontation, exhaust the adversary, and maintain strategic patience.

To manifest this globally, China adopted the "Peaceful Rise" policy. This framework seeks to build regional and international power while simultaneously reassuring other nations regarding the trajectory of its growing influence. To mitigate insecurity and distrust among its neighbors and the wider world, China has championed pacifist slogans that form the broad outlines of its foreign policy.

Certain Chinese policies can be interpreted through several key elements, most notably:

- 1- Steady and composed observation of the international situation.
- 2- Firmly securing China's international position.
- 3- Restraint in reactive posturing.
- 4- Concealing available capabilities.
- 5- Buying time.

Guided by these principles, Chinese strategy revolves around two primary axes:

- 1- Dispelling fears associated with its rising power.
- 2- Countering U.S. policies in ways that avoid the appearance of direct confrontation.

The aforementioned does not imply China's total absence from proactive foreign policy, nor does it suggest that China has always maintained a pacifist domestic rule or an entirely docile external policy devoid of military force. Indeed, China has intervened in conflicts and resorted to military force when deemed absolutely necessary based on the assessments of Chinese decision-makers, primarily within its Asian periphery. However, recent practice indicates that China is pursuing a sophisticated diplomacy in dealing with great global powers—a strategy rooted in cooperation, communication, and openness as a means to bypass any resistance to the leading roles China now occupies regionally and internationally. This confirms an increasing desire within the Chinese leadership to act as a great global power capable of shaping the broad outlines of international relations and the global order.

Perhaps the most significant policy illustrating this orientation is the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013. Within this framework, China announced the establishment of a global development bank to assist the Global South, intended to supplement—rather than replace—entrenched institutions like the World Bank and other development bodies led by the Global North.

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## Lecture 06: A Theoretical and Analytical Approach to Chinese Strategy: The “Smart Power” Framework as a Performance Strategy

The patterns of power relations between states, whether at the international or regional level, are closely linked to the determinants of a state's position within its sphere, as well as the concentration or diffusion of power among its actors. Shifts in the international system have compelled states to recognize the value of what is now termed “**Smart Power**”—the strategic integration of **hard power** and **soft power**. This combination is more effective than either form used in isolation, giving rise to a distinct policy and overarching strategy: “Smart Power”.

Historically, **military power** offered unparalleled advantages in securing a state's political and economic interests. Yet, transformations in the modern era—particularly since the end of the Cold War—have elevated **economic statecraft** within the hierarchy of foreign policy tools. Military power no longer retains its **former primacy**, nor are its outcomes guaranteed. Alongside economic strength, a new form of power has emerged, grounded in **intangible elements**, especially cultural and normative values. Joseph Nye conceptualized this as **Soft Power**, which later evolved into **Smart Power** through the integration of multiple forms and modalities of influence. This strategic evolution has compelled states, particularly great powers, to adopt Smart Power to reinforce their international roles and prestige.

China is among the foremost global powers to have prioritized this strategy, employing it to **reposition itself within the international system** and secure an **active and influential role**.

Based on this premise, the following question arises:

Which **power paradigms** has China relied upon to generate the outcomes necessary to achieve its desired objectives on the global stage?

## First: Smart Power: The Primary Manifestation of the Transformation in the Concept of Power

### 1. Defining Power

Power has long been a cornerstone of intellectual traditions examining political phenomena. Despite its extensive history, it remains a concept lacking consensus among scholars regarding its precise meaning or the full range of its conceptual dimensions. Nevertheless, a complex understanding has emerged, linking power to the capacity of actors—whether individuals, groups, or states—to effectively perform specific actions.

In strategic thought, power is defined as: "**The effectiveness and weight of a state within the international arena, resulting from its ability to employ its available power resources to impose its will, achieve its national goals and interests, and influence the will, interests, and objectives of other states.**"

A state's power, in this sense, is determined by two elements: power resources and the process of managing and deploying those resources. Therefore, power resources do not gain weight or influence simply by existing; rather, their impact is tied to conscious intervention to transform available resources into influential energy and effective instruments.

In this context, a fundamental distinction can be made between:

- **Behavioral Power:** The ability to obtain the desired outcomes.
- **Resource Power:** The possession of resources that can be effectively leveraged to achieve desired outcomes.

Consequently, multiple perspectives exist regarding power in international relations, defined either by its components or its impact. Some researchers limit it to military, economic, technological, cultural, and ideological elements, while

others define it as the capacity to direct and alter the behavior of others in accordance with the state's goals and interests.

Thus, power is a dynamic and fluid concept, composed of a vast array of interconnected material and non-material variables. Material elements of power include the economy and military hardware, while normative and value systems, ideology, and religion are considered non-material elements of power.

## 2– Shifts in the Elements and Forms of Power:

In the post-Cold War era, the concept of power in international relations has undergone several transformations, primarily linked to political, economic, military, and social changes. Within this context, two levels of change can be distinguished: the first pertains to the constituent elements of power, while the second relates to the actors who possess it—particularly as non-state actors have come to wield certain power resources that influence international relations.

Regarding the shifts in the elements and forms of power: power is no longer confined solely to material components, with military force at the forefront. Instead, the post-Cold War world has underscored the significance of non-material elements, especially cultural-normative ones, leading to a diversification in the forms of power.

Historically, military power possessed unparalleled advantages in securing a state's political and economic interests. However, modern global shifts and developments have elevated economic statecraft within the hierarchy of foreign policy tools. The military instrument no longer retains its former primacy, nor are its outcomes guaranteed. Alongside economic strength, a new form of power emerged, grounded in intangible elements; this concept was developed by **Joseph Nye** as "**Soft Power**," from which "**Smart Power**" subsequently emanated. In this regard, both

the Industrial Revolution and the later Information Revolution played pivotal roles in reshaping these forms of power.

### **A – Hard Power: “The Primacy of Military Might”**

Hard power consists of tangible elements, primarily military and economic. Discussions regarding this form of power—especially military force—are deeply rooted in the Realist school of thought, where military strength is considered the most traditional and frequently used instrument for achieving state objectives. The application of military power varies in form, ranging from coercive diplomacy—the most subtle use of force—to direct military intervention, which represents the most explicit and direct application. While the use of hard military power has seen a relative decline in the post-Cold War era, it has by no means disappeared; it continues to be exercised and remains a potent influence in international relations.

The second component of hard power lies in economic power. Joseph Nye adopted a broader definition of hard power that extends beyond the military dimension, viewing it also as “the ability to use the carrot through economic instruments to influence the behavior of others.” A state’s economic power is anchored in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), per capita income, level of technological advancement, and its natural and human resources. There are two primary modes of employing economic power: the first involves sanctions, which may take the form of import boycotts, export embargoes, or investment restrictions. The second involves grants and economic assistance—essentially rewarding a state for aligning its behavior with the interests of another party or or as an attempt to encourage such a change.

The significance of economic power has surged amidst modern global shifts, becoming a primary objective for states and the foundation of their current and future strength. It has become a fundamental metric for measuring national power and, simultaneously, a vital tool in the

“international game.” Consequently, states have begun to rely on their economic capabilities more than their military ones in the global power struggle for two reasons:

- The relative increase in the cost of employing military force.
- The predominance of economic objectives within the values of post-industrial societies, particularly in an era of globalization and interdependence.

### **B – Soft Power: The Power of Attraction**

The term “**Soft Power**” is one of the relatively modern concepts in academic scholarship as well as in political and media discourse. It emphasizes the importance of non-military instruments in achieving foreign policy objectives. The concept gained wide recognition after it was introduced by the American scholar and former government official Joseph Nye, who explains:

*“I developed the concept of soft power in the late 1980s because I was dissatisfied with the prevailing view that American power was in decline. After I tallied up American military and economic power, I realized there was still something missing—the ability to affect others by attraction rather than coercion or payment.”*

Nye thus developed a concept of power that is perhaps more complex, focusing on non-material dimensions of power, such as culture and values, through the framework of soft power. He first alluded to this idea in the book “*Power and Interdependence*”, co-authored with Robert Keohane in 1977, where they discussed interdependence and influence through instruments other than hard power. Nye later developed the concept further in “*Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*” (1990), in which he argued that the United States possessed not only military and economic power but also soft power. He revisited the concept again in “*The Changing Nature of American Power*” (1995), and later in “*Soft Power: the Means to Success in World*

*Politics*” (2004), where he argued that in the information age political leaders must rethink the nature of power, more specifically how to integrate its softer dimensions into strategic plans for successful influence.

Nye views both military and economic power as examples of hard power, grounded in the principle of the “*carrot and stick*.” However, there is another, more indirect way of exercising power. A state may achieve the outcomes it seeks in international politics because other states want to emulate it and follow its lead, whether out of admiration for its values, imitation of its model, or aspiration to attain its level of prosperity, welfare, and openness. He therefore defines soft power as: “*The ability of a state to obtain what it wants through attraction rather than coercion.*”

Soft power thus represents the second face of power, whereby a state secures the outcomes it desires because other states admire its model and seek to emulate it, rather than because they are forced to do so. With the information revolution, a new dimension has been added to state power: the possession of technology and information, along with the capacity to produce advanced technology through innovation, creativity, and the dissemination of innovation.

Soft power also rests on agenda-setting power—the ability to structure the priorities of others. In this regard, states rely on several major sources:

- 1- Culture:** the values and practices that give meaning to a society, embodied in literature, art, and media.
- 2- Political values:** such as freedom of the press and the individual’s ability to criticize government.
- 3- Foreign policy:** a crucial component of soft power, as well-designed foreign policies encourage other states to follow the example of the state employing soft power (through the promotion of peace, human rights, and cooperation within international institutions).

Yet, according to Nye, the most important element among all these sources is credibility and legitimacy. If culture, political values, and foreign policies contradict internationally accepted norms, they may generate dissonance, especially when there is a gap between what a state says and what it actually does.

Accordingly, the global appeal of a state's culture, together with its ability to establish preferred rules and institutions that govern areas of international activity, constitutes a decisive source of power—particularly through values such as democracy, personal freedom, rapid development, and openness.

### **C- Smart Power:**

The criticisms directed at the concept of soft power led Joseph Nye to develop a further conceptualization: Smart Power. He introduced this framework in his later work, *The Future of Power*, defining Smart Power as: “The ability to combine the elements of hard power—namely the military and economic dimensions—with soft power into a winning strategy.”

Nye argues that there is an intrinsic connection between hard and soft power, as both share the capacity to affect the behavior of others to advance the interests of the state. This influence may be exercised directly through hard power or indirectly through soft power; accordingly, the strategic synergy between the two is essential for maximizing a state's overall capacity for influence.

A Smart Power strategy relies on five key analytical pillars:

1. Defining the desired strategic objectives and outcomes.
2. Identifying the power resources available across all dimensions.
3. Determining the targets and the specific context of the actors to be influenced.
4. Deciding which combination of power types should be employed.

5. Assessing the probability of success and the sustainability of the outcome.

A closely related understanding of power is found in the work of Alvin Toffler, whose tripartite definition parallels Nye's logic. Toffler conceptualizes the "quality" of power through three core elements:

- **Violence:** Regarded as "low-quality power," because it is inflexible and carries heavy burdens—most notably the provocation of retaliatory dynamics and the intensification of arms races.
- **Wealth:** A "medium-quality power," distinguished by its greater flexibility and range of application.
- **Knowledge:** The "highest-quality power," as it offers the most efficient capabilities. Knowledge allows states to secure positive outcomes without the wasteful expenditure of wealth or force, relying fundamentally on persuasion and the mastery of information.

## Second: The Smart Power Strategy

Smart Power refers to the strategic and flexible use of the full spectrum of statecraft—including diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural instruments. In the contemporary global landscape, a Smart Power strategy does not entail the mere accumulation of resources or the rigid preservation of hegemony; rather, it focuses on the contextual intelligence required to convert available resources into effective strategies that achieve national objectives.

In this context, a Smart Power strategy provides answers to five key questions:

1. What are the state's primary objectives? This requires absolute clarity in defining strategic objectives and prioritizing them within the state's broader national agenda.

2. What resources are available, and in which contexts? This involves identifying the precise stock of available resources and assessing how this stock may evolve under shifting circumstances or contexts.
3. What are the positions and preferences of the targets of influence? Strategists must possess an accurate understanding of the capabilities, priorities, and "malleability" of those they seek to influence, as well as the likelihood of successfully reshaping their preferences.
4. Which forms of power behavior are most likely to succeed? This concerns the deliberate choice between coercive hard power, persuasive soft power, or a nuanced strategic mix of both.
5. What is the probability of success? This entails a rigorous evaluation of the likelihood of achieving desired ends, whether at the level of grand strategy or within specific tactical operations.

Although the Smart Power strategy is most closely associated with the United States, as emphasized by scholar Joseph Nye, as we have noted previously, the practice itself is not exclusive to any single nation. Historically, various states—both great and small—have successfully executed strategies that embody these principles:

- **Prussia/Germany (19th Century):** Bismarck initially used an aggressive military strategy to defeat Denmark, Austria, and France in three decisive wars to secure Prussian dominance and unify Germany. However, once unification was achieved in 1870, he masterfully pivoted to a diplomatic strategy, leveraging alliances and positioning Berlin as the indispensable hub of European stability and conflict resolution.
- **China (Maoist Era):** Under Mao Zedong, China prioritized the development of its "hard" military capabilities—including its nuclear deterrent—while simultaneously deploying "soft" ideological appeal to cultivate allies among the revolutionary movements of the Global South.
- **Small State Strategy (Singapore):** Singapore demonstrates a sophisticated grasp of Smart Power by maintaining a formidable military

deterrent relative to its size, while simultaneously establishing itself as a regional diplomatic anchor within **ASEAN** and a global hub for intellectual and non-governmental networks.

- **France:** Historically, France has blended military projection with profound cultural influence. By integrating colonial elites into French political and educational systems, France exerted a "civilizational" attraction that often secured influence more effectively than direct coercion alone.

### **Third: Motivations and Mechanisms of China's Smart Power Strategy**

It is difficult to comprehend any state's strategy or policy in isolation from its intellectual foundations and the components that shape its strategic thinking. No political action or strategic performance arises from a vacuum; rather, it is anchored in political philosophy and strategic logic. In this context, political action serves as the practical application of theoretical foundations, transforming abstract ideas into tangible reality in pursuit of desired objectives.

Consequently, several key mechanisms distinguish the strategic performance of China's diplomacy of influence, which may be categorized as follows:

#### **1- Coordination with International Institutions as a Basis for International Legitimacy**

Chinese political thought emphasizes a departure from the policy of selectivity and unilateralism that characterizes the American discourse; instead, it stresses the necessity of relying on a multilateral system based on respect for the principles of international law and international legitimacy, through collective action under the authority of the United Nations.

In parallel with its efforts to expand political, economic, and commercial influence across dozens of states, China recognized years ago the strategic importance of strengthening its presence within international institutions, including the United Nations itself. After having long refrained from participating in peacekeeping forces—to the extent that it was once the only permanent member of the Security Council without troops contributing to UN missions—China gradually began to recalibrate its strategy.

Although 1989 marked its first participation through the deployment of military observers, China steadily expanded its contributions. The most significant shift came in 2007, when it deployed dozens of soldiers to support the UN mission in Darfur, Sudan. By the beginning of 2017, China had risen to 12th place globally among troop-contributing countries, with approximately 2500 to 8000 peacekeeping personnel, making it the largest contributor among the permanent members of the Security Council.

China has also become the second-largest financial contributor to UN peacekeeping operations after the United States, accounting for more than 10 percent of total funding. Moreover, unlike some peacekeeping contingents from other states whose deployments have been associated with scandals or violations, China has generally maintained a clean operational record, reinforcing the credibility dimension of its Smart Power strategy.

## **2- Development Diplomacy:**

Chinese aid, grants, and assistance in their various forms—economic, military, and even humanitarian (relief)—constitute one of the pillars of the diplomacy of influence and power (its Smart Power) in the external world. Development assistance is not justified by its solidarity dimension alone; rather, it is an integral part of a set of objectives. In reality, it is a means of economic soft power, and this is not a flaw from the perspective of international relations; for pragmatic states do not have permanent friends, but rather permanent interests.

In this context, a study prepared in October 2017 by the "AIDDATA" research center—which included an analysis of the assistance provided by China along with the development of a special equation, by the center to measure its results—shows that between the years 2000 and 2014, the Chinese government allocated more than US\$350 billion of official financing to 140 countries and territories around the world, in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Central and Eastern Europe.

The same study also shows that the annual official financial allocations now rival the United States; indeed, in some countries, China has become the largest source, and even the sole source, of official financing.

### 3- Reliance on Diverse Media Instruments

China recognized early the importance of media and its role in enhancing influence on the international stage. This awareness led it to transform the **Xinhua News Agency** into a major media arm responsible for promoting Chinese activities worldwide. The agency broadcasts in 11 languages, including Arabic, French, German, English, Japanese, and Spanish, enabling China to expand its narrative reach and discursive presence across multiple regions. China also invested heavily in its official broadcaster, China Central Television (CCTV), which transmits in the major world languages. Alongside these official media arms, China has not neglected the importance of protecting and shaping its image abroad, particularly in the United States. Within this context, the Dalian Wanda Group—owned by Chinese billionaire Wang Jianlin—expanded into Hollywood through several major acquisitions and deals.

These moves generated political concerns in 2015–2016, that was translated into a request by Texas Congressman **John Culberson** for the Department of Justice to examine Chinese ownership of entertainment and media companies following a surge in foreign investment; he noted in his letter that Chinese investments and acquisitions grew from US\$2 billion in 2010 to

US\$20 billion in 2016. Furthermore, in September 2016, 17 lawmakers issued a call to investigate Wanda's violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and to demand that the company publicly disclose its relationship with the Chinese government.

#### **4. The Military Instrument**

Parallel to the diversification of non-military sources of power, China—which faces several military and political challenges in its region—recognizes that regardless of the rise of its international influence and its soft/smart power tools, there is no substitute for military power, which may be used whenever strategic developments so require. For this reason, China has devoted special importance over the past years to strengthening its military capabilities. The 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party convened to acknowledge the necessity of bringing about "profound changes in the field of state security," asserting that "in addition to the requirements of the era which dictate the establishment of a strong state and armed forces with strong capabilities, we must follow the path of strengthening the army with Chinese characteristics." This includes the formation of modern armed forces with formidable power, comprising land, naval, air, missile, and strategic support forces, in addition to forming a highly powerful and effective body for the management of joint military operations.

The resolution emphasized the necessity of transforming the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) into world-class advanced armed forces. China has succeeded in achieving several leaps in this field; according to the latest ranking published by the "Global Firepower website" for world military strength in 2017, it occupies third place after America and Russia respectively. Meanwhile, China ranks first globally in terms of its force numbers, estimated at approximately 750,000 personnel, among whom 619,000 are capable of participating in military activities. The rapid growth of Chinese naval forces, alongside the strengthening of defense industries and the development of space

weapons, constitutes the greatest danger from the American perspective, which has for years monitored the development of Chinese military capabilities with great concern.

On October 13, 2017, “*The China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation*” announced the development of a laser weapon capable of hitting targets at a distance of 200 meters, while China continues tests of destructive anti-satellite weapons in space. In parallel, voices have recently risen warning the American administration that the decline in U.S. defense spending during recent years is met by China increasing its military budget by more than 10 percent during the past five years.

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## Lecture 7: The Evolution of China's Strategy toward Africa

Africa has transformed into an arena of political and security competition linked to the broader strategic choices of major international actors. However, this competition does not necessarily replicate the classical colonial rivalries of the nineteenth century. Rather, it carries a strong psychological and status-related dimension, centered on the preservation of rank and the enhancement of international role performance. Consequently, a major transformation has taken place: Africa has evolved from a traditional sphere of influence for European powers—most notably France—into a space of diverse, overlapping, and at times competing external actors seeking to establish a durable strategic presence, with China standing as the primary focus of our study.

China's entry into the African arena has been driven by two central factors:

- 1) China's progressive integration into international life has been accompanied by a growing desire to project its strategic weight even into regions that were historically distant from its traditional sphere of engagement.
- 2) On the other hand, the Chinese economy is in full expansion, and its remarkable development relies on a major need for energy; China is the second-largest consumer of oil in the world after the U.S.A. Therefore, to maintain high growth rates, it must import energy resources in a smart manner.

China's strategy toward Africa has witnessed a number of key shifts over the past half-century until today. These shifts have been linked to factors of Chinese strategy on one hand, and to the prevailing variables on the international stage on the other.

It can be said that there are three main stages of Chinese strategy toward Africa, during which it shifted between intense interest in the African continent; and considering it a "strategic interest zone" in the sixties and seventies (the period of Maoist China). Then a tangible neglect on the part of China toward the African continent from the late seventies until the early nineties (the period of

reformist China after 1978), and subsequently China's renewed and significant interest in Africa (the period of China's growing role in the world and Africa), which began in the late twentieth century and continues to the present.

### **First: Sino-African Relations from Antiquity to the Mid-1970s**

Relations between China and the African continent are neither a recent phenomenon nor merely a product of the Cold War and its aftermath. Substantial evidence suggests that commercial ties have existed between the two parties for hundreds of years. The origins of Sino-African relations date back to the second century BCE during the reign of the Chinese Emperor **Han**; furthermore, some researchers and historians contend that a Chinese presence in Africa also existed between the first and sixth centuries CE. These relations flourished under the **Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)**, most notably when the Chinese Admiral **Zheng He** conducted several expeditions to the eastern coasts of the African continent.

In the contemporary history of Sino-African relations, substantive engagement emerged following the ascension of **Mao Zedong** and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Prior to this, the Beijing government demonstrated little interest in African affairs, largely recognizing that most African territories remained under colonial rule. However, this perspective shifted during the Cold War as Beijing began to prioritize political engagement with the continent. China championed the "South-South" discourse characteristic of the Third World, rooted in a shared history of struggle against all forms of imperialism. Within the polarized atmosphere of the Cold War between the communist bloc and its capitalist rival, (Communist) China supported numerous left-leaning political movements in Africa as part of its policy to disseminate Maoist ideology and principles. During this era—as vast regions of Africa confronted European colonialism—China presented itself as a vital link in the struggle against colonialism and hegemony, serving as a model for how a "leftist" popular liberation movement could assert national identity and independence.

Subsequently, Chinese policy began to focus intensely not only on countering Western influence in Africa and the Third World but also on opposing the dual hegemony of the two superpowers on the international stage. Therefore, Chinese policy in Africa during the 1960s was a direct reflection of the ideological struggle between China and the former Soviet Union (USSR). This ideological conflict prompted Beijing to support any African country or movement—regardless of its intellectual foundations, political affiliation, or international alignments—provided that Moscow did not support it. This was especially evident in the civil wars of both Nigeria and Angola. In Nigeria, China supported the Biafran secessionist movement simply because Moscow was backing the Federal Government. Similarly, in Angola, China supported the UNITA opposition movement in its fierce and prolonged war against the Soviet-backed regime.

Egypt was the first African country to establish diplomatic relations with China in May 1956, supporting it during the nationalization of the Suez Canal. China rejected a French proposal to abandon its support for the liberation movement in exchange for recognition, and it was among the first to recognize the Provisional Algerian Government in 1958, followed by Algeria as the second African country to recognize China. By the late 1970s, 44 to 50 independent African countries had also established diplomatic ties with China.

To formalize its engagement with the continent, China articulated five strategic pillars:

1. Support for African nations in their struggle against both classical and neo-colonialism to secure and preserve national independence.
2. Endorsement of the policies of neutrality, non-alignment, and peaceful coexistence adopted by African governments.
3. Support for the aspirations of African peoples toward unity and regional solidarity.
4. Encouragement of the resolution of intra-African disputes through peaceful consultation and diplomatic mediation.

5. The insistence that external powers must respect the sovereignty of African nations.

China's strategic pivot toward Africa during this era was driven by several geopolitical imperatives:

- **Ideological Affinity:** Rooted in Maoist thought, China identified as a member of the "Third World." As a developing nation that had endured foreign occupation and waged a protracted war of national liberation, it viewed its historical trajectory as synonymous with that of African states.
- **The Pursuit of International Legitimacy:** Beijing recognized that African support was essential in its quest to be recognized as the sole legal representative of China. This became particularly urgent in 1963 during the diplomatic competition with Taiwan, as 17 African states initially favored Taipei compared to 14 for Beijing.
- **Sino-Soviet Rivalry:** Following the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, Beijing sought to counter Soviet influence in Africa. This competition was fueled by ideological disputes over the interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, with China accusing the Soviet Union of "revisionism" and abandoning true revolutionary principles.

On a practical level, China's strategy focused on providing African nations with technical, economic, and military assistance. These efforts were designed to undermine Western hegemony and lay the groundwork for a new international order. Conversely, African nations sought allies to bolster their national liberation struggles and required material support to fund their paths toward independence and development.

Consequently, China remained committed to deepening its ties with African states, which in turn played a decisive role in the 1971 vote to admit the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the United Nations. On October 26, 1971, the General Assembly passed a resolution in favor of the PRC with a majority of 76 votes, 35 against, and 17 abstentions. Reflecting on this victory, Mao

Zedong famously remarked, "It was our African brothers who carried us into the United Nations." This resulted in the expulsion of Taiwan, the PRC's ascension to permanent membership in the UN Security Council with veto power, and formal recognition of Beijing by 47 out of 48 African nations.

For this reason, African states represent China's first line of defense in safeguarding its interests within international organizations. It is therefore natural for the African continent to remain a priority in China's strategy under the successive political regimes that have governed the country. During this period, China's strategy in Africa focused on securing political support within the Third World framework and reaffirming China's alignment with it.

### **Second: From the Mid-1970s to the Mid-1990s**

From the mid-1970s onward, China's strategy in Africa entered a new phase marked by major transformations following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China focused on implementing broad domestic reforms, particularly in the economic sphere. Deng came to power with an economic program built on two main pillars: socialist modernization and the adoption of a socialist market economy, alongside efforts to ease international hostility toward China, especially from the West. Given these priorities, it was only natural for the Chinese leadership to abandon the idea of a dual ideological struggle directed both against the Western capitalist camp and the Soviet Union.

This transformation within China's decision-making circles had a significant impact on its foreign policy orientation. China distanced itself from its traditional allies in the Third World, gradually reducing its foreign aid and adopting a more flexible stance in its opposition to the West-dominated "irrational international order." This new direction was also reflected in China's relations with African countries. During this phase, Africa lost much of its status and strategic importance in Chinese policy, leading to a marked decline in China's diplomatic, economic, and commercial activity across the continent.

### Third: From the Late 1990s to the Present

From the late 1990s, a new phase began in which China renewed its focus on the African continent. This renewed engagement was influenced both by changes in the international environment on one hand, and by pressing priorities in China's own strategy on the other, particularly following the economic reforms and rapid growth China achieved by adopting a freer economy governed by market principles. This new approach affected China's relations with developing countries in general and with Africa in particular. Chinese-African relations shifted from an "ideological" commitment—which had strengthened during the Cold War through China's support for African liberation movements against imperialism—to more "pragmatic" relations based on mutual interests and interdependence.

China's return to Africa was part of a broader strategic vision in its foreign policy, initiated in the 1990s as the third phase of a series of reforms linking domestic development, external opening, and integration into the global economy. A major transformation in China's strategy occurred under former President Jiang Zemin, who visited Africa in 1996 and introduced a new plan for relations with the continent. This plan emphasized building strong friendships, ensuring equality in bilateral trade (mutual benefit), promoting unity and cooperation, pursuing shared development, and fostering a common vision for the future. These five principles became the core pillars of China's strategy toward Africa, during his speech at the headquarters of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), entitled "*Toward a New Historical Milestone in Sino-African Friendship*", Jiang Zemin articulated China's new strategy in Africa, stating: "*We favor Africa reaching solutions to its problems and conflicts through peaceful negotiations. The Chinese government supports the efforts of African countries to explore and choose the political system and development path that suit their national conditions.*"

Sino-African relations were further strengthened by the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) by the mid 2000. Its objectives included bilateral consultation, deepening understanding, increasing

consensus, and strengthening the bonds of friendship. It also aimed to encourage mutual cooperation, confront shifts in the international environment, meet the demands of economic globalization, and pursue shared development through negotiation and collaboration.

In “China's African Policy Paper” issued by the Chinese government on January 12, 2006, China's policy toward Africa was clearly defined. It stated: *“Proceeding from the fundamental interests of both the Chinese and African peoples, China will establish and develop a new type of strategic partnership with Africa, featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation, and cultural exchange. And mutual learning”*

Since then, visits by Chinese leaders to African nations—led by the Chinese President—have become frequent, as visiting these countries attained a prominent place on China's foreign policy agenda. Under President Hu Jintao, China established new principles and foundations for its Africa policy, which included:

- 1- Adhering to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, including respect for African countries' choices of political systems and development paths suited to their national conditions, non-interference in their internal affairs, and support for their struggle to protect independence, sovereignty, the integrity and territorial unity of African states.
- 2- China supports African countries in their efforts to strengthen unity and cooperation, and to resolve their disputes through consultation and peaceful means. China defends the endeavors of African nations to oppose external interference in their internal affairs. Furthermore, China supports the African Union (AU) and other regional organizations in implementing new partnerships aimed at achieving peace, stability, and development across the continent.
- 3- Developing a long-term, stable strategic partnership focused on friendship, mutual trust, and all-round cooperation.

- 4- Continuing to provide economic aid to African countries without conditions or political demands.
- 5- China's Calling on the international community, especially developed nations, to pay greater attention to peace and development in Africa.
- 6- China's Supporting African efforts to play a larger role in international affairs and strengthening consultation and cooperation on global issues of common concern.

China prioritized economic and social rights within the new partnership, a sentiment echoed by numerous Chinese and African leaders and officials. "Dr. *He Wenping*", Director of African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing, stated: "*In China, we do not believe that human rights should override sovereignty... we have a different view on this matter, and African countries share it with us.*"

Former Vice Foreign Minister *Zhou Wenzhong* was even more direct, stating: "*Engagement with Africa is about practical matters, not human rights, Business is business; We try to separate politics from business... I think the internal situation in African countries is their own business.*"

There are several reasons and variables behind the shift in Sino-African relations, which can be summarized as follows:

- 1- Structural reasons related to shifts within China's decision-making circles. Since Deng Xiaoping, the new political elite has replaced 'Maoist' ideological extremism with a pragmatic approach focused on economic development.
- 2- Africa's emergence as a promising oil-producing region.
- 3- The rivalry and competition with other major powers.
- 4- Systemic factors linked to international system transformations, where ideological and military variables have relatively declined in favor of economic

ones. China adapted to this by employing 'Smart Power' in its foreign policy, which was reflected in its approach toward Africa.

5- In addition, the African discontent with French and American policies allowed China to establish a strong presence in Africa. African nations found that China met their self-determined ambitions, such as non-interference in internal affairs, investment without preconditions, and pursuit of shared development on a mutually beneficial “win-win” basis. China does not conceal unequal economic agreements arising from unbalanced negotiations, nor does it seek to impose ideological or cultural values that dilute Africa's identity, unlike Western models. As a result, China has become a widely accepted partner in Africa, gaining broad access due to multiple factors: its permanent membership in the UN Security Council, significant economic capabilities to support African countries, and modern technology that can help build African capacities, creating a new model of partnership in the region often referred to as “soft power in Africa.”

6- Shared Historical Legacy: China and many African nations share friendly historical experiences, social challenges, and a mutual rejection of colonialism.

7- China's emergence as a new global actor: China's rise as a new global actor, alongside the relative decline of American power, made it an alternative development model for Africa—unlike the Western model, which imposes a Western vision without considering African characteristics and circumstances.

8- Speed and Flexibility: Greater efficiency in dealings compared to other countries or international organizations.

9- Affordability: The price suitability of Chinese products for African consumers.

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## Lecture 08: The Drivers of China's Interest in Africa

Relations between China and Africa are characterized by deep historical roots and long-standing foundations, to the extent that they have acquired strong strategic, economic, security, and cultural dimensions. In light of the increasingly prominent role that China now plays in the region, it is essential to examine the core drivers behind Beijing's interest in the African continent.

China's interest in Africa is largely grounded in the region's strategic characteristics across its various geopolitical, economic, and political dimensions. Consequently, China's role on the continent is based on several key factors, which may be summarized as follows:

### **First: The Geographical Factor:**

Africa is the world's second-largest continent in terms of area and population, after Asia. It spans both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. The continent is bordered to the north by the Mediterranean Sea, separating it from Europe, to the east by the Red Sea, separating it from Asia, to the west by the Atlantic Ocean, and to the south by the Indian Ocean. Africa thus has access to every corner of the globe: through the Mediterranean, it faces Europe; through the Atlantic, it faces the Americas; through the Indian Ocean, it looks east toward Asia; and to the south, it faces Antarctica across the Southern Ocean. The Equator passes through the continent, which encompasses diverse climatic zones, in fact, Africa is the only continent that extends from the northern temperate zone to the southern temperate zone.

Its total area is approximately 30.2 million km<sup>2</sup>, with islands covering 620,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Islands and peninsulas, such as Madagascar and the Comoros, account for about 2% of the landmass. This strategic location makes Africa a vital link between the world's continents, particularly in its northern and northeastern regions, which control key global transportation routes between Asia, Europe, and Africa. Consequently, Africa plays a central role in regional security as well as the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of pivotal

states across these continents. African nations' control over critical shipping lanes further enhances the continent's strategic importance, ensuring the security of Gulf states' exports—which depend on oil revenues for 90% of their income—as well as imports as well as key markets, in face of any potential military movements in the region.

Africa's geopolitical significance is reflected in the following:

- It lies at the center of major shipping lanes connecting all five continents.
- It oversees the Strait of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Cape of Good Hope, and is surrounded by islands overlooking the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait, in particular, is one of the world's most important waterways following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Together with the Strait of Hormuz, it forms a critical link in global trade routes extending from the Mediterranean through the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Gulf. The strait is wide and deep enough for all ships and oil tankers to navigate in two separate, opposing lanes; it is 30 km wide and 100–200 meters deep. Bab el-Mandeb is also the busiest route for commercial ships and oil tankers, handling 7% of global maritime traffic, 13% of world oil production, and approximately 12 million containers annually.

The Strait of Gibraltar functions as a natural maritime corridor linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. Situated between the southern tip of Spain and the northwestern coast of Africa, it stretches for about 58 kilometers and narrows to approximately 13 kilometers at its narrowest point.

Its strategic importance stems from its position at the intersection of Europe and Africa, marking the gateway through which the Mediterranean opens onto the Atlantic Ocean.

The Strait of Gibraltar still remains a vital artery for international shipping, serving Southern Europe, North Africa, and Western Asia. Beyond trade, it

plays a massive environmental role: the flow of water between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic keeps the sea from becoming a stagnant, salty lake. Without this constant "recycling" of water, the Mediterranean would essentially be an enclosed basin.

Therefore, China seeks to secure strategic footholds in certain parts of the continent, such as its base in Djibouti, in order to monitor the southern entrance to the Red Sea, a waterway of immense strategic and commercial importance due to its proximity to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, as well as its connection to global trade routes linking South and East Asia with Africa and the Middle East.

### **Second: The Economic Factor**

In addition to its distinct geographical significance, Africa possesses a wide range of valuable economic resources, which further enhance the continent's strategic importance. Today, Africa ranks among the world's richest regions in natural resources, encompassing not only diverse minerals but also energy resources of major economic significance to the global economy.

The continent holds approximately 10% of the world's proven oil reserves, ranking third globally in terms of oil potential. Africa's reserves are estimated at 125.6 billion barrels, with a projected lifespan of about 33.4 years based on current global production rates.

African oil has become a key element of China's policy on the continent. China's interest, which began in the early 1990s, is part of its broader "outward-oriented oil economy" approach to diversify energy sources. Analysts estimate that China alone accounted for about 40% of the global increase in oil demand in 2000. Today, China is the world's second-largest oil consumer, using roughly 10.6 million barrels per day, behind the United States, which consumes around 19 million barrels daily.

Specialized sources indicate that China's confirmed oil reserves would have been sufficient for approximately 21 years, starting from 1997, which

means they would have been depleted by 2018. This shift toward relying on foreign oil imports followed China's rapid economic growth since the early 1990s, which averaged nearly 10% annually. Given the energy-intensive nature of its economy, China was compelled to increase oil imports to sustain its massive production capacity. Historically, the Middle East—and the Gulf region in particular—was China's primary oil supplier. In recent years, however, Beijing has begun to reduce its reliance on oil from this region. This shift can be attributed to several key factors:

- **Regional conflicts and instability**, such as the Iraq War and the rise of terrorism. The persistent unrest in the Gulf region prompted China to adopt a strategy of diversifying its oil sources, including turning to Africa.
- **Intense competition and influence from the United States**, The intense competition with the United States and its deep-rooted influence in the Middle East—including a significant military presence.
- **Geo-technical considerations**, including the challenges and high costs associated with transporting oil. About 93% of China's oil imports travel by sea, requiring substantial financial and technological resources. These shipments also pass through strategic chokepoints, such as the Malacca and Hormuz Straits, which are prone to tensions and are closely monitored by the United States, raising additional security concerns for China.

Considering these factors, China began seriously diversifying its oil supplies toward safer regions, including Central Asia and Africa — the latter is the focus of this study. The question that arises here is: What are the reasons behind China's focus on African oil as a new supply source? There are several key factors underlie the global rush for African oil, the most important of which are as follows:

- **Diversity of oil types:** Africa produces about 40 different crude varieties, many of which are high quality due to low sulfur content, lighter density, and higher gas and gasoline content, reducing refining costs.
- **Superior crude quality:** African oil is generally lighter than Gulf crude, compatible with modern refineries, and helps consuming countries comply with environmental regulations.
- **Rapid growth of the sector:** Africa's oil industry has one of the fastest growth rates globally, with production increasing by about 30% over a decade compared to 16% elsewhere. For example, oil reserves in Africa doubled between 1985 and 2005, reaching 114.3 billion barrels (10% of global reserves).
- **Proximity to consumption markets:** African oil is relatively close to Europe and the Americas. This is particularly advantageous given political instability in the Middle East and potential disruptions in transport through the Suez Canal.

Africa's oil resources are divided into four regions: North Africa, East and Central Africa, West Africa, and Southern Africa, as outlined below:

- **North Africa** includes two OPEC members, Libya and Algeria. Libya's oil reserves are estimated at approximately 40 billion barrels, with a daily production of 1.6 million barrels. Algeria produces around 1.3 million barrels per day, with proven reserves of 12.4 billion barrels. Other oil producers in the region are relatively minor, such as Morocco, which produces 300,000 barrels per day with reserves of 100 million barrels, and Tunisia, producing 777,000 barrels daily with reserves of 1.7 billion barrels.
- **East and Central Africa** feature notable producers such as Sudan, which began exporting oil in 1999, as well as Chad, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The East African region is generally low in production, except for Sudan, which has historically been a significant producer of light crude oil. Before the secession of South Sudan, Sudan produced and exported light crude,

reaching 5 million barrels in 2007 according to the Sudanese Ministry of Energy, despite internal conflicts affecting several regions. At that time, proven reserves were approximately 1.25 billion barrels. The Democratic Republic of Congo produces only about 22,000 barrels daily, with reserves estimated at roughly 1.5 billion barrels. Chad began oil production in July 2003 from the Doba basin in the south, reaching around 225,000 barrels per day by 2006.

- **West Africa:** The main oil producers in this region are Nigeria, Togo, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Benin, São Tomé, and Príncipe. West Africa is considered the most promising oil-producing region in Africa, following the major discoveries in the Gulf of Guinea—a coastal strip extending from Nigeria to Angola—which reports indicate is among the most significant oil finds worldwide in recent years. Today, this region accounts for approximately 70% of Africa's oil production, with total output reaching about 9.5 million barrels per day. Nigeria leads the West African producers and ranks as the eleventh-largest oil-producing country globally, with proven reserves of 2.35 billion barrels. The region's significance also stems from its rapid growth rate, surpassing other oil-producing areas; production grew by an average of 30% over ten years, compared to 16% in other regions.

The oil of the Gulf of Guinea is particularly important for several reasons:

1. **High production and reserves:** Enhanced by the addition of new fields.
2. **Economic considerations:** Proximity of the region's coasts to global markets reduces transportation costs.
3. **Deepwater fields:** Most new discoveries are offshore in deep waters, providing an ideal solution to security challenges.
4. **Contractual advantages:** Differences in oil agreements favor the region. For example, in the Middle East, national oil companies produce and sell directly to foreign consumers. In the Gulf of Guinea, foreign companies extract and market the oil under production-sharing agreements, granting

them exploration rights provided they cover costs and then share revenue with the government after cost recovery—a framework well-suited to the limited capabilities of many African states.

- **Southern Africa:** The main oil producers in this region are Angola, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Angola has recently become a focal point for global oil companies, particularly after its oil production doubled to reach 2 million barrels per day, making it the second-largest producer in Africa after Nigeria. Angola exports 40% of its production to the United States, making it the eighth-largest supplier of crude oil to the U.S. globally, with estimated reserves of 25 billion barrels. Zambia produces 120,000 barrels per day, while Madagascar produces 90,000 barrels daily.

In addition, Africa possesses significant quantities of **uranium**, a key resource for the nuclear industry. The continent produces more than 18% of global uranium output and is estimated to hold about one-third of the world's uranium reserves.

Africa also holds 8% of the world's proven natural gas reserves and produces 80% of the world's platinum, over 40% of diamonds, and 20% of gold and cobalt, making it one of the last regions in the world with such vast resource potential. Oil fields are spread across many African countries, especially in North and West Africa, where extraction is relatively easy and fast. Crude oil can be efficiently transported from wells to floating surface vessels for initial processing and refining, making petroleum products ready for immediate loading and export.

Furthermore, Africa has enormous hydropower potential, estimated at 1,750 TWh. Despite this capacity, only about 5% is currently exploited, even though it represents 12% of global hydropower potential.

Regarding solar energy, many African countries have favorable conditions for electricity generation due to strong sunlight. “Greenpeace”

reported that building solar power plants on just 2% of the desert area would be sufficient to meet the world's electricity needs.

All these advantages, combined with Africa's status as an emerging oil region, have encouraged China to enter the continent vigorously through its oil companies to explore and exploit petroleum fields.

China's oil investments in Africa are carried out simultaneously at both the governmental and private levels. It is estimated that 25% of Beijing's oil imports come from Africa. The main African exporters to China are Sudan, Angola, Algeria, Gabon, and Chad. China is also striving to access the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea and to compete with the United States in oil investments there. Indeed, it has already secured a foothold in Angola, Nigeria, and Equatorial Guinea.

In addition, semi-desert regions of the continent have witnessed recent oil discoveries that are expected to increase production in the near future. Large quantities of natural gas have also been discovered across multiple regions. These increases are projected because large parts of the continent have not yet been geologically surveyed, and specialized studies indicate that these areas contain crystalline and metamorphic rock formations, which are among the richest in diverse mineral content. Thus, it can be said that Africa is poised to become a major future supplier of industrial minerals worldwide, and countries and continents currently facing gradual depletion or scarcity of their mineral resources will increasingly rely on Africa's production.

China also needs Africa as a market for its products, given that the Chinese economy is fundamentally export-oriented and therefore requires broad and expanding markets to absorb its diverse range of goods.

Africa's importance to China becomes even more significant when we consider that the continent's population reached one billion people in 2009, with nearly half belonging to the economically active population and more than one-third forming part of the middle class. By 2050, Africa's population is projected to

reach around two billion, including approximately 1.1 billion middle-class consumers, most of whom are expected to live in urban areas. As a result, projects related to water supply, energy provision, transport infrastructure construction, and network modernization will become vital across the continent. In this sense, Africa's most valuable resources are not limited to oil and diamonds alone, but also include its rapidly expanding consumer base, whose demand for food and industrial goods continues to grow.

Within the broader framework of competition among great powers seeking strategic positioning in the region, China has accelerated efforts to safeguard its interests in the face of leading international corporations. The region is witnessing intense global competition for investment in the mining sector, particularly following the expansion of investments in oil, uranium, and phosphate.

### **Third: The Political and Competitive Factor**

Africa holds major significance for several international powers, particularly the traditional ones with a colonial history in the region: France, in addition to newer actors such as the United States and China. With this growing number of actors, these powers have sought to strengthen alliances with a number of African states, both to confront what they describe as "international terrorism" and to secure oil fields in order to ensure the steady flow of supplies to Western and global markets. As a result, Africa has increasingly become a space of competition among the great powers, largely because of its strategic, economic, political, and security importance.

These great powers now view the region through a new geostrategic lens, driven by the shrinking arenas of competition as more powers expand their capabilities and interests. In this context, Africa has become a space where traditional French interests intersect with American interests and with the growing interests of powers such as China. The limited geographical space for strategic competition pushes these powers to expand into every region that already holds value or is expected to gain greater importance in the future.

A strong presence in the **Sahara** enables these states to establish links with North Africa and, through it, the Mediterranean, while also opening westward access to the Atlantic. At the same time, it provides strategic depth southward toward Central Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, and eastward toward the Horn of Africa.

Thus, the economic dimension alone does not fully explain China's growing interest in Africa.

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## Lecture 09: The Objectives of Chinese Strategy toward Africa

At first glance, China's strategic focus in Africa appears to be centered primarily on the **economic dimension**. However, a closer examination of other aspects and of the steps China has been taking reveals broader and more far-reaching objectives that it seeks to secure. The strategic goals behind China's presence across the continent extend beyond economics to include undeclared political and diplomatic aims at both the regional and international levels.

When we examine the evolution of Sino-African relations from the era of Mao Zedong to the present day, the differences and distinctions become clear, both in terms of their nature and their scale. Yet, despite these shifts, certain elements of continuity have remained constant. Perhaps the most enduring of these is the dimension of "*South–South solidarity*", which carries the banner of "anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and anti-hegemony," while also supporting Chinese unity. This discourse continues to be promoted despite changing contexts and evolving circumstances. Other dimensions, however, have undergone fundamental transformations since the early 1990s.

### First: The Economic Objectives of China's Orientation toward Africa

#### 1) Opening African Markets

The importance of the market is fundamental, As Karl Marx stated: "*Without production, no consumption; but also, without consumption, no production; since production would then be purposeless. ... Consumption creates the need for new production, and therefore provides the conceptual, inwardly propelling motive for production.*" In other words, the market must be studied before production begins, as the size and needs of that market dictate the specific quantities and types of goods to be made.

From this perspective, China's massive industrial output requires access to a vast market or to multiple markets. In addition, given the nature and quality

of this output, China also needs markets capable of absorbing such goods. The African market offers exactly these conditions since it is:

**First:** vast, as previously discussed, and is therefore capable of absorbing large volumes of imported goods, especially given the limited local production.

**Second:** a market where lower-cost and lower-quality products can find strong demand. Chinese companies do not always have a competitive edge over Western rivals in wide-open luxury markets. Therefore, they turn to the African consumer, whose limited income and standard of living make them more likely to accept Chinese products. Even when Western or local alternatives exist, Chinese goods align with the average African's purchasing power, offering them a degree of self-sufficiency and a better quality of life.

The structure of China's exports to Africa consists mainly of manufactured machinery, consumer goods, food products, and chemicals, while oil accounts for 70% of China's imports from Africa, most of which is sourced from Angola and Sudan.

## 2- The Search for Natural Resources

Securing natural resources, particularly energy, is one of the primary goals of China's strategy in Africa. By 2013, China became the world's second-largest oil importer after the United States, currently importing nearly seven million barrels a day. With its oil needs growing by an average of 30% annually, China is expected to surpass the U.S. in total oil imports in the coming years.

China currently obtains nearly one-third of its oil requirements from Africa, and its dependence on oil imports from the continent is expected to increase further in the years ahead. Angola has replaced Saudi Arabia as China's largest global oil supplier, providing around 15 percent of its total oil imports. China also maintains significant petroleum activities in Algeria, Chad, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of the Congo, and Nigeria.

Accordingly, much like the Western powers—particularly the United States—China has sought new states and regions capable of securing its growing energy requirements. To this end, it has mobilized its diplomatic, political, economic, and military resources with the objective of gaining control over emerging petroleum resources in Africa.

African oil exports to China increased from 10 percent in 2007 to 14 percent by 2011, largely driven by expanded shipments from Angola, Nigeria, and Algeria—countries that had traditionally served as key energy partners for the United States and Western powers. Over the past decade, China's imports of nearly all African raw materials—iron being the only exception—have grown at a faster rate than its imports from the rest of the world. Beijing has actively pursued exclusive contracts for the extraction and exploitation of strategic minerals, including cobalt and tantalum (essential for the production of mobile phones and computers), as well as coal, uranium, gold, manganese, diamonds, and zinc. These agreements were concluded with the governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Zambia, Kenya, Senegal, Egypt, Algeria, Chad, and Ethiopia, and are valued at approximately \$29 billion, with financing largely provided by the “China Development Bank”.

## **Second: China's Political Objectives in Africa**

China has consistently adhered to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in its foreign relations, whether with Africa or other regions—principles first articulated in the 1955 China–India Joint Statement.\* These principles reflect China's longstanding effort to project itself as a friendly, open nation while maximizing its political influence and economic competitiveness. They comprise:

- Mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty
- Mutual Non-aggression
- Non-interference in each other's internal affairs

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\* They were established by the Chinese leader Zhou Enlai at the Non-Aligned Movement conference in Bandung in 1955, serving as a cornerstone for the movement.

- Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit
- Peaceful coexistence.

The political dimension of China's African policy revolves around three central issues:

### **1. Securing African diplomatic support at the United Nations**

The United Nations provides China with a critical platform to advance its global objectives. Issues such as human rights violations, UN reform, Japan's potential permanent membership on the Security Council, and disputes over sovereignty in the South China Sea all require China to secure international backing to strengthen its position, expand its influence, and protect its interests. Africa's substantial representation at the UN—constituting over one-third of member states—represents a key leverage point for China in obtaining favorable votes.

Consequently, diplomacy forms a core element of China's global strategy, with Beijing placing significant emphasis on the UN's role in international politics. Recognizing that its current capabilities are insufficient to strategically confront the West, China views African support at the UN as a critical asset. By 1971, Sino-African relations had achieved a historic success when China secured recognition over the United States and Taiwan at the UN, gaining its seat—including in the Security Council—after persistent efforts dating back to 1949. African states played a central role in this outcome, as acknowledged by Mao Zedong: "*We regained our role in the United Nations thanks to the support of African countries,*" with 26 African nations voted in favor of the People's Republic of China, representing roughly one-third of supportive member states.

Since then, one of the main strategic objectives of China's African policy has been to cultivate a pro-China majority at the UN to block resolutions opposed to its interests, particularly those concerning human rights. The UN dimension remains the most vital aspect of Sino-African relations. At the beginning of the 21st century, voting on human rights issues at the UN—especially resolutions proposed by Western powers against China—became a

central concern for Chinese policymakers. African influence has extended beyond this, impacting matters such as UN reform and Japan's potential entry into the Security Council, positioning Africa at the heart of a diplomatic contest between Beijing and Tokyo.

An American official once highlighted the significance of Africa's role in supporting Chinese policy at the UN. According to a diplomatic cable published by **WikiLeaks**, Johnnie Carson, the U.S. Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, stated during a meeting with oil executives in Lagos: "*One of the reasons behind the Chinese presence in Africa is to secure the votes of African countries in the United Nations*". Tsang Bao-tseng; a researcher at the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; also acknowledged the positive role African nations play in obstructing Western projects at the UN regarding China's human rights situation: "*Since the 1990s, some Western countries submitted a so-called 'Human Rights Situation in China' resolution for seven consecutive years. It never passed, thanks to the support of developing countries, including African states.*"

China also relies on the African voting bloc to push for amendments to several international agreements, most notably the Intellectual Property Convention. This remains a major point of dispute between the United States and China, as the U.S. accuses China of appropriating American computer software and CDs. The issue is further intensified because the United States relies on intellectual property rights and licensing to address its trade deficit with China, whereas China regards international IP protection agreements as reflecting "the law of the strong".

## **2. Establishing a Multipolar International System (Supporting a Multipolar World)**

China's African policy can be seen as part of a broader strategy aimed at containing, surpassing, or weakening Western powers, particularly the United States. Former Chinese President Jiang Zemin emphasized in a speech at "the first China–Africa Cooperation Forum" in 2000 that the current global system

is unjust and lacks equality. Under these circumstances, globalization represents more challenges and risks than opportunities for the vast majority of developing countries. Therefore, these countries, including China, must work together to promote cooperation and consultation within multilateral international institutions to safeguard their common interests.

Similarly, during “the second China–Africa Cooperation Forum” in 2003, “Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao” stated that the purpose of China’s broader global strategy to build close relations with Africa is to counter Western dominance. China’s ‘South–South’ discourse with African states has been positively received and supported by African elites. Beijing promotes the idea that strengthening global multipolarity and expanding China–Africa cooperation will not only protect the rights and interests of developing countries but also contribute to the formation of a new international system.

Another strategic interest for China lies in Africa’s importance on the global and regional chessboard of power: globally in relation to the United States, and regionally vis-à-vis Japan and India. China seeks to leverage this advantage, as Africa combines a strategic geographical location, substantial and diverse economic resources, and significant numerical influence in formal international organizations.

### **3- The Strategic Isolation of Taiwan from the International Community**

Africa has been a critical theater for China’s policy of containing Taiwan and marginalizing its international standing. Beijing has successfully leveraged its economic statecraft—through targeted investments and development aid—to normalize relations with the majority of African states. This has persuaded them to adopt the "One China" policy, effectively withdrawing their diplomatic recognition of Taiwan.

Historically, Taiwan has been and remains present in China’s international relations and strategy. Since 1949, Taiwan has held China’s permanent seat at the United Nations. In terms of China–Africa relations,

African recognition of Taiwan continued until 1971, the year when China–Africa relations began to normalize. From that date, China's global position changed: international recognition, and African recognition in particular, shifted from the Republic of China (Taiwan) to the People's Republic of China, which became the legitimate representative of China at the UN and was recognized by most African countries. The twenty-two countries that recognized Taiwan before 1971 had declined to just one—Eswatini—by 2025. This represented a political and diplomatic victory for China's longstanding demand that all countries recognize “One China”.

"In China's regional and international struggle over the Taiwan issue, its strategy is fundamentally rooted in a concerted effort to marginalize Taiwan politically and diplomatically at every turn. Beijing actively works to leverage and invest in the African arena to achieve this goal. At the same time, it maintains a different policy toward Taiwan itself, offering incentives, proposals, and political and economic concessions, intended to achieve reunification with the motherland—a process driven by its core strategic principle: **“the long game”**.

When China expanded into Africa, it was well aware of the depth of Taiwan's relationships and their significance to impoverished African nations. It also understood that the continent would serve as a theater for a cross-strait diplomatic confrontation. Using its 'economic arm' and aid diplomacy as strategic tools, China began to diminish Taiwan's influence on one hand, while pressuring African states to sever formal diplomatic ties on the other. This Chinese pressure has been largely successful, not only in blocking official diplomatic recognition of Taiwan but also in preventing its return to the United Nations. Beijing's strategy has effectively marginalized Taiwanese diplomacy across Africa and the rest of the world. Ultimately, African nations adopted a realpolitik approach, leading them to cut ties with Taipei in favor of strengthening relations with the People's Republic of China.

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## Lecture 10: Mechanisms of Chinese Strategy in Africa

The effectiveness of China's strategy toward Africa is rooted in the tools and mechanisms through which it is executed. China has relied on several principal instruments, which may be broadly categorized as economic, socio-cultural, diplomatic, and military- security.

Accordingly, this section examines the means employed by China in its engagement with the African continent. Each instrument embodies a certain measure of power, from which it derives its influence and capacity to achieve the intended strategic objectives. Consequently, these instruments inevitably fall into two categories: hard power or soft power. Hence, the analysis focuses on four principal domains: economic, socio-cultural, diplomatic, and military.

In this context, President Xi Jinping stated: *“The growth of our country’s international role and influence must be expressed through hard power—embodied in the economic, technological, and security spheres—as well as soft power, such as culture.”*

### **First: The Economic Instrument/Mechanism (The Backbone of Sino-African Relations)**

The economic instrument constitutes the fundamental pillar of China's strategy toward Africa. It is characterized by its multiplicity, diversity, and intensity, and may be classified as follows:

#### **1. Financial and Developmental Assistance**

Africa receives the largest share of Chinese assistance, both financial and developmental; this aid is considered a strategic lever and a critical component in the enhancement of Sino-African ties.

This assistance takes multiple forms, including tied aid, grants, and loans, in addition to newer mechanisms such as government guarantees for investment

across selected sectors. Together, these instruments have established China as a reliable and enduring partner for Africa.

China views the assistance it extends to Africa primarily as a means of securing economic gains. This approach is distinguished by several defining characteristics: the provision of in-kind gifts, the construction of specialized facilities and prestige projects—such as presidential palaces and stadiums—and the deployment of technical missions to oversee these sites. Furthermore, Chinese foreign aid is frequently marked by a conflation of 'cooperation' and 'aid,' the opaque nature in its foreign assistance, as well as the bilateral structure that ties it to the use of Chinese firms and supplies.

China also adopts a sophisticated approach to administering its financial and developmental assistance to African countries in order to ensure effective use. Funds are deposited into secured accounts in Beijing, and a list of requisite infrastructure projects is established. Once Chinese firms secure construction contracts for these projects, the funds are transferred directly to their accounts. This mechanism serves three primary objectives:

- Ensuring the successful completion of infrastructure projects.
- Preventing the misappropriation of funds by corrupt officials.
- Enhancing China's reputation and perceived accountability among African populations and leadership.

Chinese assistance to Africa, including loans, has increased significantly, rising from \$800 million in 2005 to \$10 billion between 2009 and 2012. Furthermore, the 2012 Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit established a 2013–2015 action plan allocating \$20 billion in concessional loans to African states. The Johannesburg FOCAC summit in December 2015 subsequently adopted an action plan for 2016–2017, focusing on the establishment of a \$10 billion cooperation fund. During this summit, China also pledged to write off interest-free loans owed by Least Developed Countries (LDCs) falling due at the end of 2015, provide training for 200 African personnel, offer 30,000 scholarships, and grant \$60 million in financial

assistance to the African Union to combat terrorism, irregular migration, and organized crime. In addition, a \$60 billion support package in the form of investments, loans, and assistance was announced. At the 2018 summit, President Xi Jinping announced a further \$60 billion in support through government aid and institutional financing, alongside the cancellation of interest-free government loans due by the end of 2018 for LDCs and heavily indebted poor countries.

Debt relief constitutes another dimension of Chinese financial assistance. By canceling African debt, China seeks to counterbalance and challenge Africa's traditional creditors, namely France and the United States.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that China's assistance policy relies heavily on loans rather than grants, a strategy driven by two fundamental factors:

- **Strategic leverage:** China uses loans as a mechanism to consolidate political and economic ties with recipient states; once these strategic objectives are achieved, debts may be written off according to an agreed schedule.
- **Conditionality:** This is reflected in the fact that these loan agreements are tied to specific conditionalities requiring a significant share of project implementation to be allocated to Chinese firms.

## 2- Trade Exchanges:

Trade agreements concluded between China and 41 African countries, together with the establishment of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, contributed to stimulating trade between the two sides. This expansion was not confined to a specific subregion of Africa but extended across the entire continent, though unevenly. In addition, China's decision to open its markets to African exports aimed to address imbalances in Africa's trade balance.

Statistics indicate a significant increase in Sino-African trade over the past two decades. In the 1970s, trade volume stood at approximately one billion

USD. It subsequently rose over time, reaching a growth rate of 40.6% in 1997, with a total value of 5.67 billion USD—six times higher than the level recorded in 1990. This trajectory was further consolidated in 2000 with the establishment of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), designed to strengthen trade and investment relations between China and African countries. As a result, Sino-African economic relations entered a phase of accelerated growth, with bilateral trade rising from 10.6 billion USD in 2000 to 12.39 billion USD in 2002. Since 2005, this figure has increased by approximately 700% compared to the 1990s.

After wresting nearly half of African markets since 2000, China became the continent's second-largest trading partner in 2010, after the United States and ahead of France. Trade volume reached 160 billion USD in 2011 and 198.49 billion USD in 2012. By 2013, China had become Africa's largest trading partner, with trade exceeding 200 billion USD, surpassing the United States' trade volume with the continent.

To promote African exports to China, Beijing eliminated, starting in 2012, customs duties on nearly 60% of exports from 30 African countries with which it maintains stable diplomatic relations. Bilateral trade reached 222 billion USD in 2014 and increased to 390 billion USD in 2017, with expectations of further growth in the coming years.

Angola is China's largest African trading partner, followed by South Africa, Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt, and Algeria. It is noteworthy that Sino-African trade relations remain highly concentrated, with around 60% of Chinese exports directed to only six African countries—South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Algeria, Morocco, and Benin—while approximately 70% of imports originate from just four countries: Angola, South Africa, Sudan, and the Republic of the Congo.

Chinese exports to Africa mainly consist of manufactured goods, machinery, food products, and chemicals, whereas oil accounts for around 70% of China's imports from Africa, primarily sourced from Angola and Sudan.

Africa has thus become the second-largest overseas market for Chinese companies, accounting for approximately 30% of their total sales.

### 3- Chinese Investment in Africa

African countries have generally welcomed Chinese investment due to its developmental appeal, as China has achieved rapid and significant economic successes that many African states seek to emulate.

China holds significant financial reserves, amounting to nearly 3 trillion USD, a significant portion of which is directed toward outward investment across multiple sectors. Beijing has identified the African continent as a primary destination for deploying its financial surpluses, a strategy designed to yield multiple benefits—most notably the internationalization of major Chinese firms. Supported by the state, these enterprises do not reject globalization; rather, they engage with it on their own terms. This strategic orientation was underscored by a previous leader, who remarked: “*Globalization is a priority axis for the Chinese economy, and Africa, in particular, serves as a promising landscape for investment by Chinese companies.*”

Chinese investment in Africa is characterized by several key features, including the relatively low cost of Chinese projects on the continent; and the tendency of Chinese firms to operate in high-risk environments where security conditions are unstable—risks that Western companies are often unwilling to assume. Chinese investment spans multiple sectors, including energy, agriculture, mining, construction, trade and services, resource processing, manufacturing, and logistical and commercial support.

This process is largely facilitated by the “Export–Import Bank of China”, a state-owned financial institution that plays a central role in extending loans to African governments and proposing concessional financing under preferential terms.

Chinese companies operating in Africa generally rely on a three-pillar model: capital, expertise, and labor. While this model has certain advantages, it

also has implications for African economies. In particular, Chinese labor is often highly trained and highly productive, which in some contexts has raised concerns in countries experiencing high unemployment rates.

Chinese investment in Africa has increased significantly since the first Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit. Investment levels rose from 900 million USD in 2004 to 11.7 billion USD in 2006, reaching 12 billion USD in 2012, then increasing to 25 billion USD in 2013, before surging to 87 billion USD in 2014. By 2017, estimates indicated a level of approximately 100 billion USD.

The number of Chinese firms and industrial entities in Africa also expanded rapidly, rising from around 700 companies in 2005 to 2,000 in 2013 and 2,500 in 2017. China's investment focus has been concentrated in countries such as South Africa, Algeria, Sudan, Nigeria, Zambia, and Angola.

This expansion is attributed to targeted policies aimed at promoting and facilitating Chinese corporate investment across the African continent, which has become the second-largest market for Chinese construction and engineering firms. China has also become the largest provider of infrastructure project financing in Africa, accounting for approximately 30% of total funding in this sector, surpassing the United States, Japan, and the European Union. This has contributed to an increasing presence of Chinese expatriates across the continent. Additional sectors of activity include agriculture, energy, telecommunications, hospitality, manufacturing industries, pharmaceuticals, and medical products.

This shift suggests that the Chinese presence in Africa is no longer confined to the extraction of raw materials and the securing of oil supplies. Instead, Chinese firms have moved to the center of international competition, challenging established Western corporations. Furthermore, China has been welcomed by numerous African leaders and, arguably, their populations. Former Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade stated: "*China's approach to our needs is simply better adapted than the slow and sometimes patronising*

*post-colonial approach of European investors, donor organisations and non-governmental organisations... It is not just Africa that has much to learn from China. The West has much to learn as well."*

## **Second: The Socio-Cultural Instrument/ Mechanism**

The concept of soft power is no longer foreign to the Chinese political lexicon. The political report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (2012) underscored this shift, noting: "*In today's world, culture intersects with economics and politics, demonstrating that it occupies a larger space and plays a more significant role in the competition for comprehensive national influence.*"

In this context, China emphasizes culture as a primary source of leverage and a vital component of its proactive foreign diplomacy, particularly in Africa. Consequently, Beijing has implemented a strategic blueprint to disseminate the Chinese language and culture across the world. This is evidenced by the rapid proliferation of "Confucius Institutes"; Chinese leaders, recognizing that linguistic outreach multiplies cultural appeal, have expanded these programs to the point where nearly one million foreign students are now studying Mandarin.

To facilitate its presence across the African continent, China has effectively deployed these cultural tools, prioritizing educational scholarships and exchange programs for African students. Rather than merely hosting students in Chinese universities, Beijing has actively "brought the classroom" to Africa by opening dozens of Confucius Centers in major cities. The first such institute was established in Kenya in 2005 with Chinese government funding. By the end of 2019, the network had grown to 59 branches across 44 African nations.

Furthermore, China has bolstered its cultural footprint by establishing specialized institutes and universities. A landmark example is the 2005 agreement with Egypt to found the Egyptian- Chinese University (ECU) in Cairo, the first of its kind in Africa.

This institutional expansion is supported by a robust network of research centers and civil society organizations dedicated to African affairs, including:

- “The Institute of West Asian and African Studies” (IWAAS) at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.
- “The Center for African Studies” at Peking University and Specialized institutes at Nanjing and Xiangtan Normal Universities.
- “The Institute for African and Asian Development Research” under the State Council’s Development Research Center.
- “The Institute of African Education Research” at Zhejiang Normal University

Beyond academia, Beijing has intensified its media presence, with several print, radio, and television outlets launching broadcasts in local African languages. Complementing these efforts, Chinese airlines have inaugurated direct flights to various African capitals, transporting millions of tourists annually. Africa now welcomes over one million Chinese travelers each year, a figure that continues to grow at an accelerated pace.

### **Third: The Diplomatic Instrument / Mechanism**

The diplomatic dimension of Sino-Africa relations is centered on the following four pillars:

**1- Summit Diplomacy:** it is based on the various official visits conducted by Chinese leaders, foremost among them the President and senior ministers, who undertake a large number of visits. It also operates through multilateral forums, particularly since the establishment of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), as well as the ministerial meetings and conferences held within its framework from 2000 to the present.

**2- Public Diplomacy:** which is increasingly prominent through joint conferences and collaborative roundtables facilitated by Chinese think tanks in partnership with various African academic institutions. These intellectual

exchanges are complemented by the active role of friendship associations between China and African nations,

**3- Symbolic Diplomacy:** Often referred to academically as "*prestige projects*," this strategy employs the construction of landmark infrastructure to generate political goodwill and facilitate economic penetration. China has funded and built dozens of stadiums, sports complexes, and national parliaments across the continent.

**4- Health Diplomacy:** This mechanism is manifested through the direct engagement between Chinese medical personnel and millions of ordinary African citizens. China has maintained consistent cooperation with African nations in the healthcare sector, facilitated by frequent ministerial-level visits and summits with African leaders. These diplomatic efforts streamline the regular exchange of medical teams and the professional training of health experts. Furthermore, China provides numerous African countries with specialized medical equipment free of charge and implements joint programs to combat endemic and infectious diseases—such as malaria and HIV/AIDS—most recently extending to the collective response against the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Fourth: The Military Mechanism / Instrument**

Because access to African natural resources—particularly energy resources—has become one of the pillars of China's national security, it is only logical to witness Chinese efforts to protect its spheres of influence across the continent. China is no longer a passive observer of conflict dynamics in Africa; rather, it has become an increasingly active stakeholder, as these instabilities directly impact its strategic interests. Consequently, China's military presence in Africa has transitioned into an active and steadily expanding role.

It may be argued that this shift in China's strategy toward Africa has become a strategic necessity, complementing its multidimensional engagement with the continent. The absence of any dimension would inevitably affect the

others. Therefore, a Chinese military presence is viewed as a strategic necessity—not necessarily in an aggressive sense, but often in forms of cooperation with African states, particularly given the continent's persistent internal conflicts that have undermined development. As global dynamics shift, China has found it necessary to adapt its policy of non-interference to meet these new realities. However, in the foreseeable horizon, China's military expansion is unlikely to match the scale of the United States' global military deployment.

Among the most significant manifestations of China's military strategy in Africa are the following:

1. **Participation in Peacekeeping Operations:** China is an active participant in UN peacekeeping missions across the continent, including: Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China has currently emerged as the second-largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget, following the United States, with a contribution exceeding 10%.
2. **Arms Transfers and Defense Cooperation:** China has leveraged the supply of conventional weaponry as a strategic tool. Between 2007 and 2012, Africa accounted for 13% of China's conventional arms exports, valued at \$6.46 billion. By 2015, China became the continent's second-largest arms exporter after the Russian Federation. This engagement includes the establishment of small arms manufacturing plants in Sudan, as well as ammunition and light weaponry factories in Zimbabwe and Mali. Furthermore, Beijing has ratified military agreements with Namibia, Angola, Botswana, Eritrea, Zambia, and Sierra Leone. Africa has also served as a primary market for the K-8 trainer aircraft, supplied to Namibia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. Complementing these sales, Beijing provides professional military education for African officers through multi-month training programs in China.
3. For the first time since the 15th century, the Chinese Navy is active along the African coastline. As part of multinational task forces, Chinese vessels conduct regular patrols to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia.

4. One of the clearest indicators of the shift in China's policy toward African crises was its position during the Libyan crisis, where it notably chose not to exercise its veto power. The events in Libya provided a strategic opportunity for China to demonstrate its military logistical capabilities. The subsequent evacuation operations underscored a profound shift in its regional security policy; for the first time, a Chinese naval vessel was deployed to the Mediterranean, sending a powerful message to both the region and the wider international community.
5. **The Djibouti Military Base:** Another major development was the construction of a military base in Djibouti on the Red Sea. This followed a security and defense treaty signed between the two parties in February 2014, with the base becoming operational in 2017. It represents China's first overseas military base outside its territorial borders. This facility is a core component of China's strategy to revive the "Silk Road" in both its land and maritime dimensions, following President Xi Jinping's 2013 launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Practically, China has sought to extend its influence by establishing strategic anchor points along the Maritime Silk Road through what is known as the "*String of Pearls*"—a series of Chinese-developed ports which are critically important given that 90% of China's global trade is conducted by sea.

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## Lecture 11: Challenges to Chinese Strategy in Africa

Having examined the various mechanisms employed by China to achieve its strategic objectives in Africa, this lecture aims to evaluate the cohesion of China's strategic bets. This assessment is conducted in light of the challenges that exert pressure on the efficacy of its presence, thereby impacting its ability to realize its goals and implement its strategies.

These primary challenges can be summarized into three fundamental points:

### **First: The Challenge of International Competition in Africa**

International competition is defined as a state resulting from two or more nations independently seeking to protect and promote their interests within a specific region or state, without necessarily resorting to actions that damage the interests of the other party. While interests may be similar, the approaches adopted by each party to protect and maximize these interests often differ. However, should at least one of the competing parties adopt methods that harm the interests of the other or limit their capacity to achieve their objectives, the competition then transforms into a form of international conflict.

In recent years, the African continent has emerged as a preeminent geographical space of strategic importance. This has compelled several global powers—most notably China and the U.S—to enter the arena of competition to secure a foothold that serves their interests and expands their potential gains. Since the latter half of the 1990s, the continent has occupied a significant position in the grand strategies of great powers. This prominence is due to Africa's status as the world's strategic reservoir of natural resources, raw materials, and precious minerals. These resources are under increasing pressure due to intense competition among the world's leading consumer nations, driven by rising global demand and the depletion of global reserves and production rates in other regions of the world.

While the conflict of interests in Africa was historically rooted in Franco-American rivalry, recent years have witnessed China's emergence as a formidable global actor, positioning itself as both a competitor and a strategic partner to the United States and France. As previously noted, China frames its engagement by identifying as a fellow developing nation—one that has achieved an "economic miracle" and is uniquely positioned to assist impoverished African states. By leveraging its successful developmental experience as an alternative model, Beijing offers a paradigm that many Africans find more relatable than Western frameworks. Critically, China's strategy benefits from being unburdened by the direct colonial legacy carried by France or the imperialist reputation often associated with the United States.

Conversely, French-African relations rely on historical advantages, with Paris maintaining its presence through a distinctive foreign policy tailored toward Francophone Africa. For French policymakers, influence in Africa is considered an existential necessity. This sentiment is best captured by late President François Mitterrand's assertion: "*France will have no history in the 21st century without Africa.*" As some French analysts argue, France's vast imperial reach was not driven solely by economic motives, but primarily by the pursuit of political prestige. This served to compensate for domestic vulnerabilities and was a calculated attempt to reconstruct France's global standing, ensuring its European primacy and its status as a Great Power through established mechanisms of continued influence.

Consequently, France has adopted a defensive strategy in Africa, aiming to preserve its traditional spheres of influence, particularly in the Sahel region. However, French strategy has not been devoid of an offensive character, as evidenced by military interventions in Côte d'Ivoire (Operation Licorne), Mali (Operation Serval/Barkhane), and the Central African Republic (Operation Sangaris). Paris has effectively leveraged its Francophone ties to solidify relations with former colonies, establishing a cultural foundation for partnerships that it seeks to frame as collaborative rather than dependent—a

tactical shift that has, to some extent, allowed it to withstand pressure from competing global powers.

As for the United States, it based the recalibration of its strategy and the rebuilding of its role in Africa on the security variable. The American 'Global War on Terror' following the events of September 11, 2001, was one of the most prominent entry points the United States relied upon to penetrate the continent. Washington rearranged its strategic posture by forming a special military command for Africa (AFRICOM), with the goal of combating terrorism through training and providing logistical support to African forces. Although a military character prevails over the American strategy toward Africa, this does not negate American economic interests—especially in energy. Perhaps one of the desired goals behind this American militarization of the continent is the containment of its rival major powers, particularly China and France, in order to protect its economic interests there.

Competition in the energy and mineral sectors is a primary driver of great-power rivalry in Africa, particularly concerning conventional energy sources like oil and gas. The energy sector serves as a major nexus of Sino-American competition, most notably in Sudan, though this fierce rivalry has expanded to Nigeria, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Chad, and Congo—all nations of global petroleum significance for both China and the United States, most of all Nigeria and Angola.

Historically, the Western presence in the Gulf of Guinea was largely restricted to France due to its colonial history. However, this dynamic shifted at the turn of the 21st century as the region became central to the "New American Energy Policy". In 2002, the African Oil Policy Initiative Group (AOPIG)—comprising members of the U.S. administration, Congress, the State Department, and private oil executives—was formed. This group recommended that Washington designate the Gulf of Guinea as a "region of vital interest," establish a dedicated military command for the area, and explore the possibility of a permanent military base.

Following these recommendations, American firms significantly increased their regional investments, supported by a militarized approach. The U.S. entered into several agreements with Cameroon, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea to grant its forces access to local airport facilities. Simultaneously, France has reinforced its partnerships with these same nations, as well as Congo-Brazzaville, to secure oil installations. France has also expanded its investments in promising non-Francophone markets, specifically Nigeria and Angola, which are the leading oil producers in the region.

In reality, economic competition in Africa is no longer restricted to China, France, and the United States; the continent is no longer the exclusive domain of any single international actor. New global players, such as Japan, India, Russia, Turkey, and Israel, have begun to show significant interest in Africa, and it is no longer prudent for the active great powers to ignore them.

Furthermore, cultural asymmetry and Franco-American hegemony represent the most significant challenges China faces in Africa. Despite China's efforts to promote its culture, it has yet to find effective mechanisms to project its influence. Specifically, Chinese media remains relatively weak in marketing Confucian values compared to the United States, which has mastered the export of its values through diverse channels; for instance, Hollywood films appeal to Africans far more than Chinese cinema. Similarly, France remains a premier soft power in Africa due to its long colonial history, which allowed it to penetrate deep into the fabric of African societies. This has resulted in a lasting impact on France's relations with its former colonies from independence to the present day. France relies on several pillars for its cultural relations, most notably the formation of ruling elites, a shared language, French educational institutions, and cultural centers, in addition to the Francophonie organization, which Paris aims to transform from a cultural gathering into a political movement with a significant voice on the international stage.

Consequently, the greatest challenge for Chinese leaders is the ability to assert their presence—not just to the Africans themselves, but against the entrenched European and American presence that possesses a history and

culture deeply woven into diverse African societies. Despite criticisms of Western involvement, it still enjoys significant acceptance and interest among African populations. Therefore, the Chinese must adopt a strategy more effective than those of Western nations and present a model more influential than the deeply rooted American and French frameworks.

### **Second: The Challenge of Security Threats to Chinese Interests in Africa**

China is increasingly facing the strategic costs of its engagement in Africa as security threats escalate against its interests, particularly its corporate investments. Consequently, Beijing has shifted toward the Realist principle of 'self-help,' adopting an independent security posture that reduces reliance on host African states for protection. This transition is codified in China's evolving 'Security Policy in Africa,' which focuses on enhancing both offensive and defensive strategic planning capabilities.

Multiple security sources now impede China's ambitions in the continent. On one hand the persistent threats to Chinese personnel in the mining sector; targeted attacks, abductions, and killings by insurgents in conflict-prone border regions—notably in Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Chad—have forced several firms to divest or suspend operations.

On the other hand, maritime insecurity, specifically piracy, poses a systemic risk to China's supply chains. Frequent attacks on commercial vessels, particularly by Somali pirates, have prompted the Chinese government to demand rigorous countermeasures to secure vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs). Beijing views maritime security as a prerequisite for deepening Sino-African relations and safeguarding its domestic economy from external shocks. To this end, China has deployed advanced naval task forces to escort oil tankers and merchant ships. Currently, three sophisticated Chinese frigates operate along the Gulf of Aden, coordinating with regional navies—including Russia and Iran—and participating in international maritime coalitions such as “Combined Task Force 151” (CTF-151) and “Operation Atalanta.”

### **Third: Sinophobia and Anti- Chinese sentiment in Africa**

The increasing friction between local African communities and Chinese migrants has fueled a rise in xenophobic sentiment, often manifesting in physical violence. This phenomenon of Sinophobia first gained prominence in Lesotho in the 1990s following an influx of Chinese nationals. South Africa has similarly become a flashpoint; in 2002 alone, forty cases of armed robbery against Chinese expatriates were recorded. The escalation of hostility in Zimbabwe eventually compelled authorities to establish dedicated police bureaus to handle Chinese grievances and provide protection. Comparable tensions surfaced in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where local populations launched violent campaigns against Chinese commercial hubs, demanding their closure and obstructing business activities. Similar patterns of unrest have been documented in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Madagascar.

This systemic Sinophobia has catalyzed what may be described as “**resistance movements**” aimed at mitigating Chinese influence across the continent. These tensions are deeply rooted in socio-cultural and religious incompatibilities, where perceived deviations from local African traditions frequently spark confrontation. Furthermore, economic grievances remain a primary driver; local traders often resent Chinese competition, arguing that low-cost imports undercut domestic commerce.

Consequently, Beijing has recognized that without an immediate strategy to improve its public diplomacy and local image, escalating hostilities will continue to jeopardize Chinese investment and trade security throughout the continent.

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**Conclusion:**

In light of the preceding analysis, it is evident that Sino-African relations have undergone a profound and remarkable evolution over the past half-century, maturing into a comprehensive strategic partnership aimed at mutual national interests. However, several critical questions remain: To what extent does China truly exert influence across the continent? Has the Chinese strategy successfully achieved its intended cultural and economic impact—particularly in terms of eroding the historically entrenched influence of European powers rooted in the colonial era? Furthermore, has China employed this strategy effectively to fulfill its domestic objectives and assert itself as a pivotal global actor? To what extent can the Chinese presence on African soil remain sustainable? Ultimately, what form will this cooperation take as China's demand for African resources intensifies, and as Africa's reliance on Chinese engagement—at least in terms of economic development and infrastructure—continues to grow?

As previously demonstrated, China has emerged as Africa's preeminent trading partner and the primary importer of its mineral wealth. Consequently, Beijing's continental strategy is designed to consolidate its influence as a global power challenging Western hegemony over Africa's resources. China positions itself as a viable alternative to Western paradigms, offering an economic model predicated on investment, trade, and financial aid—specifically through concessional loans devoid of political conditionalities. Over the last decade, this strategy has yielded significant geo-economic gains, effectively transforming the continent into a strategic reservoir of raw materials essential for sustaining China's ascent toward global economic dominance.

However, when evaluating the geopolitical dividends of this presence, China's foreign policy has yet to establish it as the definitive arbiter of African political affairs. While Beijing has achieved notable successes regarding the 'Taiwan issue' and garnered relative support within international organizations, its political leverage does not yet rival that of former colonial powers—particularly France and the United Kingdom—or the United States. Western powers continue to employ traditional interventionist mechanisms, including

military involvement, to safeguard their strategic interests, often resulting in domestic fragmentation within African societies. This underscores the current limitations of Chinese influence over Africa's complex political and security landscapes.

Conversely, it can be argued that the underperformance of the U.S. economy may diminish the global standing of the United States and necessitate a temporary contraction of its expansionist policies. This shift provides an opening for China—buoyed by a robust and resilient economy—to gain ground on the United States and broaden its footprint in Africa by accelerating investment and consolidating its economic and political leverage across the continent.

There is little doubt that China's presence in Africa is intended to serve multiple objectives. Despite its discourse of “mutual benefit”, “shared exchange”, and “enhanced cooperation”, China's deeper strategic aims remain centered on energy security, market access, and the consolidation of both objectives. China also views Africa as a critical strategic arena through which it seeks to advance its broader global ambitions. The key question, therefore, is whether China, through all that it offers and undertakes in Africa, can ultimately become the number one actor on the continent and the most widely accepted external partner among its peoples. In our view, China is well positioned to become the leading economic actor, yet this prospect remains considerably more difficult when assessed at the political, military, and cultural levels.



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*Table of contents*

**Introduction..... 01**

**Lecture 01: The Strategy: definitions, characteristics, functions, and foundational principles .....03**

**First: The Historical Use of the Term ‘Strategy’.....03**

**Second: Definition of Strategy.....04**

**Third: The Difference Between Strategy and Related Terms.....09**

**Fifth: Means of Building Strategy.....11**

**Lecture 02: Chinese Strategy Before and During the Cold War.....15**

**First: Mao Zedong’s Rule: 1949–1978.....14**

**Second: Phase Two: “Deng Xiaoping Era”.....15**

**Lecture 03: Chinese Strategy and Its New Implications after the Cold War.....18**

**First: The Nature of China’s Perception of International Changes.....18**

**Second: Stages of the Development of Chinese Strategy from One Leader to Another .....20**

**Third: Factors for the Success of China's Influence and Impact Strategy.....23**

**Lecture 04: China’s Strategic-Building Capabilities.....26**

**First: Economic Power.....26**

**Second: Advanced Military Power.....27**

**Third: Advanced Technological Power.....31**

**Fourth: China’s Geographical Position.....33**

**Fifth: The Human Element.....34**

**Sixth: China and International Organizations.....34**

**Seventh: Ancient History and Political Acumen.....37**

  

**Lecture 05: The Role of Strategic Culture in Shaping Chinese Strategy.....40**

**First: Defining the Strategic Culture Approach..... 40**

**Second: Defining Chinese Strategic Culture.....41**

**Third: Characteristics of Chinese Strategic Culture..... 41**

**Fourth: Sources of Chinese Strategic Culture.....43**

**Fifth: Chinese Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy.....45**

  

**Lecture 06: A Theoretical and Analytical Approach to Chinese Strategy..... 48**

**First: Smart Power the Primary Manifestation of the Transformation in the Concept of Power.....49**

**Second: The Smart Power Strategy.....55**

**Third: Motivations and Mechanisms of China’s Smart Power Strategy.....57**

  

**Lecture 7: The Evolution of China’s Strategy toward Africa.....62**

**First: Sino-African Relations from Antiquity to the Mid-1970s.....63**

**Second: From the Mid-1970s to the Mid-1990s.....66**

**Third: From the Late 1990s to the Present.....67**

**Lecture 08: The Drivers of China’s Interest in Africa.....72**

**First: The Geographical Factor.....72**

**Second: The Economic Factor.....74**

**Third: The Political and Competitive Factor.....80**

**Lecture 09: The Objectives of Chinese Strategy toward Africa.....82**

**First: The Economic Objectives of China’s Orientation toward Africa.....82**

**Second: China’s Political Objectives in Africa.....84**

**Lecture 10: Mechanisms of Chinese Strategy in Africa.....90**

**First: The Economic Mechanism.....90**

**Second: The Socio-Cultural Mechanism.....96**

**Third: The Diplomatic Mechanism.....97**

**Fourth: The Military Mechanism.....98**

**Lecture 11: Challenges to Chinese Strategy in Africa.....102**

**First: The Challenge of International Competition in Africa.....102**

**Second: The Challenge of Security Threats to Chinese Interests in Africa.....106**

**Third: Sinophobia and Anti- Chinese sentiment in Africa.....107**

**Conclusion.....109**

**References.....111**