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THE AFRICAN UNION-CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF ALIGNING AFRICA'S AGENDA 2063 AND CHINA'S VISION 2049

By

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Since the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and African countries have risen at unprecedented levels. China and African countries declared a new type of strategic partnership in 2006, which was upgraded to a new type of comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership in 2015. As a result, China-Africa relations have become a topic of great interest for analysts and researchers worldwide. However, a missing aspect in the literature is the alignment of China and Africa's strategic development plans, namely, China's Vision 2049 and Africa's Agenda 2063. Since 2014, these strategic visions have been aligned because they supposedly share compatible strategies. Furthermore, the term strategic partnership has become widespread in policy and scholarly discussions on China and Africa. However, its meaning and applicability to Sino-Africa relations have not been adequately examined. Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by being the first to adopt the strategic partnership model (SPM) as an analytical tool to analyse AU/Africa and China's strategic partnership, focusing on the alignment of Africa's Agenda 2063 with China's Vision 2049.

Adopting an exploratory/explanatory research design and qualitative approach, the methodology entailed the collection of data through interviews, indirect observation and systematic analysis of academic literature and other documents. The findings of the study show that the AU and China succeeded in using their partnership to pursue their respective development, security and geopolitical goals. However, the study also found that the partnership perpetuates Africa's dependency on external actors, encourages divisions among AU Member States and compounds the challenge of addressing the governance, and peace and security issues in Africa. Therefore, the study recommends a clear alignment of the national interests of China and African countries with the AU's collective goals, and creation of an effective institutional framework for the AU and its Member States to follow-up on FOCAC agreements.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved mother, Maggie Hunadi Hlase, who passed away in my second year of this study. Her passing was a major blow to our family, and it took a huge toll on me and my ability to continue with this project. But her memory provided me with the strength to persevere. My mother was the one who convinced me to pursue a PhD when I thought I did not have the energy and will to do such a demanding project. She was the one I confided in when I was stuck and depressed in my research, not knowing how to proceed. Her words always inspired me to find strength and courage.

She may be gone, but we will always love and remember her

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AEC	African Economic Community
AGOA	Africa Growth and Opportunity Act
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ASEAN	Association of South Eastern Nations
ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AUPSC	African Union Peace and Security Council
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CADSP	Common African Defence and Security Policy
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

ICACPPS	Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	International Relations
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
OAU	Organisation for African Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMCD	Partnership Management and Coordination Division
PRC	People’s Republic of China
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programs
SPM	Strategic Partnership Model
STG2020	Silencing the guns by 2020
TAZARA	Tanzania-Zambia railway
TICAD	Tokyo International Conference of African Development
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UP	University of Pretoria
US	United States of America
WTO	World Trade Organization

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

Relations between China and the African continent are often traced to as far back as 200 BCE, wherein Chinese merchants travelled to Africa and exchanged goods with some East and North African nations (Alden and Alves 2008: 46; Snow 1988: 2; Kusimba 2018: 83). The trade relations between the two sides, though intermittent and minimal, continued for several centuries until cut short by China's inward-looking policy in the 15th century CE, just when European colonial conquests began to take shape around the world (Alden and Alves 2008: 46). China and Africa, however, revived their relations in the 20th century when the People's Republic of China (PRC), established in 1949 under the leadership of Mao Zedong, supported anti-colonial liberation movements in several African countries (Hanauer and Morris 2014: 19; Konings 2007: 343-344; Malisa and Nhengeze 2018: 2).

Following the Bandung conference in 1955 that sought to strengthen relations between previously colonised nations of Africa and Asia, Egypt became the first African country to establish official diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1956 (Alden and Alves 2008: 47; Shinn 2019: 63; Taylor 2006: 20). The anti-colonialism wave sweeping across the African continent also led to the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, which became the institutional expression of the Pan-African movement (Murithi 2012: 663; Packer and Rukare 2002: 366; Yusuf 2019: 37). African leaders accordingly mandated the OAU with the task of uniting African countries and safeguarding their interests, and eradicating colonialism in Africa. As a result, China forged a political and pragmatic relationship with the newly established regional organisation in Africa to support the continent's collective struggle against colonial rule (Ukeje and Tariku 2018: 293-294)

China-Africa relations steadily expanded between the 1960s and 1970s as more African countries gained independence and recognised the PRC over the Republic of China (ROC) or Taiwan. During this period, China earned or crafted, as some argued (Konings 2007: 343; Bano and Falki 2016: 74; Hanauer and Morris 2014: 19), an image for itself as a fellow member of the developing world, owing to its shared historical struggle with other developing countries against Western

imperialism and colonialism. Several African countries demonstrated their appreciation of China's support against colonialism by helping the PRC to replace Taiwan as the representative of the Chinese nation at the United Nations (UN) assembly in 1971 (Konings 2007: 346; Shinn 2019: 67; Van de Looy 2006: 2-3).

However, Sino-Africa relations started to decline in the late 1970s and 1980s for two main reasons. First, on the one hand, Africa's post-colonial state building was in a predicament as several African countries experienced domestic instability and economic stagnation. Many of these countries were hampered by such internal turmoil to maintain or establish meaningful cooperation with other states or actors around the world (Konings 2007: 348; Shinn 2019: 69). Second, on the other hand, Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, in China introduced economic reforms aimed at developing and modernising the country to undo the economic devastation caused by the Chinese Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. As a result, the PRC pursued closer ties with Western nations to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and solicit technological assistance from Western companies (Alden and Alves 2008: 46; Konings 2007: 347; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 111-112).

As the Cold War ended in 1989, Deng's economic reforms in China saw significant economic gains for the country (Hanauer and Morris 2014: 28). However, an event in China would drastically change the PRC's relations with both the West and Africa. In June 1989, student-led protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square calling for democratic reforms in the Chinese government were brutally suppressed by the military, leading to hundreds of civilian deaths. The incident dented Beijing's relations with Western nations as the crackdown was seen as a violation of fundamental human rights that have come to be sacrosanct in Western politics (Konings 2007: 349; Taylor 2004: 86; Van de Looy 2006: 5). In contrast, reactions from Africa were favourable to China, owing to the solidarity between developing countries and China, which is rooted in the struggle against colonialism (Taylor 1998: 447). As a result, China-Africa relations saw a significant increase in the 1990s as China sought to capitalise on the support from African countries and the broader South-South cooperation agenda to counter the attempts by Western powers to isolate Beijing in global affairs (Taylor 2004: 84-85; Tull 2006: 462). Sino-Africa relations were consolidated and institutionalised in 2000 with the creation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) (Naidu *et al* 2009: 93; Alden 2017: 15).

FOCAC became the mechanism for coordinating cooperation between African countries and China across a range of areas. Since 2000, China and African countries have held three FOCAC Summits and eight Ministerial Conferences, alternating between Beijing and an African country. Some scholars, such as Shelton and Paruk (2008: 151) and Taylor (2011: 63), noted that the first decade of FOCAC delivered some significant successes for both China and Africa. Trade between the two sides, for example, accelerated from US$1.4 billion in 1990 to almost US$10 billion in 2000 and to US$39.7 billion by 2005 (Jiang 2008: 53; Van de Looy 2006: 13), elevating China to Africa's third largest trading partner at that time (Islam 2021; Tull 2006: 464). China's investments in Africa also increased sharply from US$410 million in 1990 to US$3 billion in 2004 (Bano and Falki 2016: 79). These perceived successes, as Taylor (2011: 65) noted, led to the establishment of a "new type of strategic partnership" between China and African countries in 2006. China went on to displace the US as Africa's largest trading partner in 2009 (Taylor 2011: 81-82).

Until 2011, the African Union (AU), which replaced the OAU in 2002, only participated in the triennial FOCAC gatherings as an observer. However, the AU Commission (AUC) was eventually admitted as a full member of FOCAC in October 2011 to align China-Africa relations with the collective aspirations of African countries being spearheaded by the AU (Benabdallah 2015: 61; Van Hoeymissen 2011: 99). This move elevated China-Africa relations to a new level as the continental body provided African countries with an opportunity for developing an overarching African policy in engaging China. It transformed the relationship into a partnership between the AU, as a representative of African countries, and China. Furthermore, in this second decade of FOCAC, the trajectory of trade and investments between the two sides maintained the momentum of growth.

By 2017, the expanding China-Africa trade reached a new milestone of more than US$100 billion, while Chinese investments and financing in Africa exceeded US$300 billion (Ado and Osabutey 2018: 20). However, the launching of different initiatives signalled the recognition by Chinese and African leaders of the imperative of addressing issues of peace and security in Africa (Barton 2018a: 422; Chun 2018: 130; Duchâtel *et al* 2016: 2; Nantulya 2020: 501). This included the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security (ICACPPS) at the 2012 FOCAC Conference, the Peace and Security Fund in 2016, and the China-Africa Peace and

Security Forum in 2019 (Barton 2018a: 422; Chun 2018: 130-131; Duchâtel *et al* 2016: 2; Nantulya 2020: 501).

The second decade of FOCAC also saw African leaders in 2013 launching the AU's Agenda 2063– a masterplan for integration, development, peace and security for the African continent to be realised by 2063. In the same year, the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, started promoting the "Chinese Dream"– a vision for China to be a fully developed nation and restore itself as a world power by 2049 (Alden 2017: 24; Zhang and Niway 2018: 129). Chinese and AU leaders issued a joint statement in 2014 declaring commitments to reciprocal cooperation to realise Agenda 2063 and the "Chinese dream" (AU 2014 as cited by Benabdallah 2015: 53; PRC Embassy in South Africa 2014).

China subsequently established its permanent mission to the AU in 2015, the third after the USA and the EU (Carrozza 2018: 2). In May 2018, at the AU headquarters, the AU and Chinese leaders "renewed their commitments to consolidate and deepen the longstanding AU-China strategic partnership" (AU 2018). Chinese and African leaders went on to confirm and reaffirm their commitments to the China-Africa strategic partnership in the 2021 8th FOCAC conference held in Dakar, Senegal, though with lesser financial commitments from China compared to previous gatherings (Cichocka and Gavas 2021; Scarfe 2021).

1.2. Background to the study

The above chronology of relations between China and African countries depicts an increasingly intensifying relationship and an apparent shift towards multilateralism in the form of the AU as a representative of African countries vis-à-vis China in the FOCAC platform. However, China and Africa are very different entities. On the one hand, the former is a sovereign state in the Asian continent while the latter is a vast continent composed of 55 countries. But more importantly, China is the second largest economy in the world, a largely homogenous nation in terms of culture, and is governed by a single political party. On the other hand, 33 out of the 55 African countries are among the 46 least developed countries (LDCs) in the world (UNCTAD 2022: xi). African countries are also culturally and politically diverse. Therefore, while the AU has come to play a significant role in Africa's external affairs, including in Sino-Africa relations, relations between

the two sides have remained fundamentally at the bilateral level between Beijing and individual African countries, resulting in diverse and often conflicting interests.

Consequently, in the last two decades, some scholars and analysts started raising concerns about China's increasing engagement with the continent due to some apparent contradictions (Ado and Su 2016: 40; Asongu and Aminkeng 2013: 261; Obobisa *et al* 2021: 2). Critics have accused the Chinese government of pursuing "predatory" economic policies in African countries as a strategy to outdo the West in a "new scramble for Africa" (Alden 2007: 93; Carmody 2011). Beijing has also been criticised for its military power projections in Africa, fuelling a "new Cold War" between itself and the US (Attah-Asamoah 2019; Maru 2019). While others have pointed out that China's economic engagement in Africa enables human rights violations and environmental degradation (Akpan and Onya 2018; Van de Looy 2006: 17; Kwasi; Onjala 2018: 0710). Furthermore, as China became one of the top suppliers of weapons to sub-Saharan Africa (Wezeman *et al* 2018: 7; The Economist 2019), some African countries that have been adversely affected by violence as a result of China's sale of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) have also been documented by several studies (Campbell *et al* 2012; Mariani and Kirkham 2018; Muekalia 2004; Stevenson 2018; Taylor and Wu 2013). According to Kwasi (2019), China-Africa relations are "increasingly showing some characteristics evident during colonialism".

Chinese and African leaders have acknowledged the numerous challenges which they still have to tackle in order to mutually reap the full benefits of their partnership (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 43-45; Zeleza 2008: 180). However, they have commonly refuted criticisms and claims that China is following in the footsteps of European colonial powers in Africa (Carrozza 2021: 1191; Dahir 2018). For instance, after the 2006 FOCAC summit that formally established the strategic partnership, several African leaders immensely praised the relations between Africa and China. Former Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, proclaimed that "China is an inspiration for all of us, […] What China shows to Africa is that it is indeed possible to turn the corner on economic development" (Zenawi, as quoted by Bangura 2007). Likewise, Zambia's former President, Levy Mwanawasa, declared that the Beijing summit "demonstrated how important China was to the African continent" (Mwanawasa, as quoted by Milenga 2006). Following the FOCAC conference in 2009, Rwanda's President, Paul Kagame, went further by contrasting China-Africa relations to the continent's relations with Western powers. Kagame asserted that "Chinese investment in Africa

has fuelled the development of the private sector, whereas Western countries have mostly exploited African resources" (Eyewitness News 2009).

Similarly, Chinese leaders have always maintained that their relationship with African countries is based on mutual respect and common interests. This point was emphasised by China's former Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, in a speech during the inaugural FOCAC conference in Beijing. Tang insisted that "China and Africa enjoy a profound traditional friendship. We have no conflict of fundamental interests. Rather, we share extensive common interests in safeguarding peace and promoting development" (PRC Embassy in South Africa 2009b). In his keynote address at the same conference, China's former President, Jiang Zemin, echoed his compatriot. The Chinese leader emphasised that the "friendship between the Chinese and African peoples is based on a solid foundation", and that the two sides have "carried out fruitful cooperation in the political, economic, trade, scientific, technological, cultural, educational, public health, sports, social and other fields on the basis of equality and mutual benefit" (PRC Embassy in South Africa 2009a). Jiang's successor, Hu Jintao, later declared in his keynote address during the 2006 FOCAC summit that the "friendship" between China and Africa "has endured the test of time […] because we have never strayed from the principle of enhancing friendship, treating each other as equals, extending mutual support and promoting common development in building our ties" (Xinhua 2006b). African and Chinese leaders have since embedded such sentiments into the documents adopted at FOCAC conferences and summits. For instance, the 2018 FOCAC Action Plan (FOCAC 2018) declared that:

> as China […] works to realize the two centenary goals and the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation, and as Africa […] implements Agenda 2063, the two sides share similar philosophies, compatible strategies and complementary strengths in terms of development

1.3. Problem statement

The research problem of this study arises from careful consideration of arguments by some researchers and analysts that China and Africa's relationship is exploitative, while, on the other hand, Chinese and African leaders assert that their partnership is mutually beneficial. In documents adopted at recent FOCAC Declarations, as mentioned above, China and Africa have claimed that they "share similar philosophies, compatible strategies and complementary strengths" (FOCAC

2018). These assertions are based on perceptions of a historical solidarity and shared struggle against imperialism and, as noted by Benabdallah (2015: 53), that the "AU's Agenda 2063 and the concept of the Chinese Dream both seek the common goals of development and prosperity". However, these claims seem questionable, considering several issues highlighted by some studies. For example, Alden (2018), Alden and Large (2013), Benabdallah (2015: 51), Duchâtel *et al* (2016: 1), Lammich (2019: 105) and Ryder and Eguegu (2022), among others, indicated that security cooperation was not part of China's initial Africa policy in the FOCAC mechanism, even though violent conflicts was one of the major issues plaguing the African continent before and after the FOCAC was established.

In addition, Ryder and Eguegu (2022) noted that, in the discussions leading up to the establishment of FOCAC, African leaders wanted the mechanism to include security cooperation between China and Africa, but the Chinese leaders resisted the call. According to some experts, security cooperation in China-Africa relations was introduced in 2006 after international criticism of China's relations with 'repressive regimes' and the instability they caused in some African countries became a threat to Beijing's global image and investments on the continent (Alden 2018; Duchâtel *et al* 2016: 1; Lammich 2019: 105; Stevenson 2018: v). Furthermore, security cooperation was only actually prioritised after the 2011 Arab Spring that saw the death of Libya's leader, Muamar Gadhafi, and resulted in massive monetary losses for China's investments in the country's oil industry (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 45; Barton 2018a: 415; Shinn 2019: 74).

Second, several scholars contended that China's non-interference principle serves as a pragmatic foreign policy strategy aimed at permitting China to forge relations with any state, whether democratic or authoritarian, that can help advance its economic interests (Aidoo and Hess 2015: 109-110; Akpan and Onya 2018: 145; Hanauer and Morris 2014: 22; Konings 2007: 352-353; Large 2008; Tull 2006: 474). As these scholars argue, China has established relations and poured billions of US dollars' worth of investments even in countries that violate international law and human rights, thereby emboldening 'tyrants' that lead such regimes.

Hanauer and Morris (2014: 22) argued that China uses "non-interference" as a strategy to deflect international criticism of its internal policies and as a foreign policy to rationalise Beijing's non-involvement in the "messy" and complex domestic crises that continue to afflict numerous African countries. In return, "African leaders typically refrain from criticising China" (Hanauer and Morris

2014: 22). These issues indicate that Africa's Agenda 2063 faces potential major challenges due to China's activities in Africa, as, for example, Aspiration 4 of the Agenda stresses that, "good governance, democracy, social inclusion and respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law are the necessary pre-conditions for a peaceful and conflict-free continent" (AU 2015a: 6).

Lastly, China seems to overlook certain pressing issues that the AU is concerned about, which relate to activities of international or foreign actors on the African continent. For example, the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) raised "deep concern" on "the existence of foreign military bases and establishment of new ones in some African countries" (AU 2016). In particular, the AUPSC highlighted how such foreign military bases contribute to the flow of weapons on the continent and the inability of host nations to account for or monitor the movement of such weapons. Thus, the AU called on Member States to be "circumspect" when "entering into agreements" that would lead to the establishment of foreign military bases in their countries (AU 2016).

Despite knowing about the AU's concerns, China opened a military base in Djibouti in 2017 (its first on foreign soil) in close proximity to other military bases that the East African country hosts, such as the US, France, Germany and Japan. Though Beijing has described its base as a "logistics facility" aimed at enhancing China's ability to collaborate effectively with African countries on matters of peace and security, York (2019) pointed out that the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) has used the base to conduct military exercises. These include the PLA's largest-scale combat exercise on foreign soil, which involved live-fire drills using "machine guns, heavy artillery, sniper rifles and armoured vehicles" (York 2019). China's actions thus created tensions and raised security fears in what has been termed the "new Cold War" on the African continent due to the escalating rivalry between Beijing and Washington (Maru 2019; York 2019; Vertin 2020: 8-9). As a result, some analysts warn that Africa is set to become yet another battleground and will be on the receiving end of the ensuing destruction (Attah-Asamoah 2019; Maru 2019).

While studies on China-Africa relations have grown and covered numerous aspects of this relationship, the scholarship has ignored the concept of strategic partnership as an analytical framework to study China and Africa's partnership. Moreover, the alignment of the AU's Agenda 2063 and China's Vision 2049 is a subject that has never been probed. Therefore, the problem that this study seeks to understand is the alignment of the AU and China's strategic development and

security goals under reasons that the two sides share compatible philosophies and strategies, even though some apparent discrepancies present significant challenges for Africa to realise its Agenda 2063 aspirations.

1.4. Research aim and objectives

1.4.1. Research aim

The research aim of this study was to:

- Analyse and acquire in-depth insight into the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership in order to understand how it impacts the AU's Agenda 2063 peace and security trajectory.

1.4.2. Research objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Investigate the purpose of the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership and/or the basis upon which it was formed.
- Analyse the AU and China's respective perceptions of the consequences of their security cooperation and provisions for addressing emerging challenges.
- Investigate the convergences and divergences in the AU/Africa-China security cooperation, including in closely related areas, particularly political and economic realms.
- Analyse how AU's Agenda 2063 peace and security objectives link with China's vision of restoring itself as a great power by 2049.

1.5. Research questions

The main research question for this study was:

- How does the strategic partnership between AU/Africa and China affect the AU's Agenda 2063, especially the peace and security objectives of the Agenda?

This question was approached by tackling the following sub-questions:

- Why have Africa and China established a strategic partnership?

- How do the AU and China contemplate and plan to address emerging challenges in their strategic partnership?
- What are the convergences and/or divergences in AU-China cooperation, including in the fields of political and economic cooperation?
- How do AU's Agenda 2063 peace and security aspirations link with China's 2049 vision, and in what way is the former affected?

1.6. Motivation of the study

This research was motivated by the importance for the African continent to realise its longstanding aspirations of economic development and peace, which are among the key objectives of the AU's Agenda 2063. A very important strategy pronounced by the AU to enhance the efforts of achieving these aspirations was to leverage its strategic partnerships with its development partners, which include major world powers such as the EU, US and China. Africa's historical relations with European countries have been proven to be the main cause of underdevelopment and violent conflicts in African countries, with current relations continuing to fail to serve as catalysts for the continent's development (Anshan 2014: 265; Du Plessis 2014: 115; Murithi 2012: 664; Makinda and Okumu 2008: 81). On the other hand, China's relations with Africa have been presented as a 'win-win' partnership that promises to assist Africa in addressing its socio-economic ills and achieving its fundamental aspirations.

However, as explained in the 'problem statement' section, concerns about Africa and China's partnership have been raised by several studies, many of which have concluded that Beijing's engagements with Africa overall are detrimental to African countries (Akpan and Onya 2018: 145; Keet 2008: 81-82; Kwasi 2019; Taylor and Zajontz 2020: 282; Venkateswaran 2020: 4-5). Furthermore, there are some discussions in the literature about the compatibility of the Chinese Dream with the AU's Agenda 2063. However, there is insufficient research concerning the precise links between the two visions and how engagements between Chinese and African actors affect them. Therefore, the researcher deemed it crucial to explore this aspect of the topic in order to understand how Africa's partnership with China affects the continent's ability to achieve its key aspirations.

1.7. Demarcation/delimitation of the study

Like any other relationship between international political actors, China-Africa relations consist of numerous dimensions. Therefore, this study analysed China-Africa relations within the confines of their relationship as labelled a strategic partnership. As a result, the study sought to understand the phenomenon of strategic partnership in world politics, its meaning and its purpose for actors who embrace it as a foreign policy tool. The study then probed how the term strategic partnership is applied in China-Africa relations. It sought to understand why the two actors established a strategic partnership, its implementation, and its effectiveness. In so doing, the study focused on analysing how Africa and China's strategic partnership implemented security cooperation, particularly looking at the linkages between Agenda 2063's peace and security aspirations and China's security activities in Africa that are connected to its 2049 plans. Moreover, the study sought to assess the effectiveness of the partnership in this regard.

At first, the data collected and analysed was limited to strategic partnerships and security cooperation between China and Africa. However, it soon became clear that security cooperation between China and Africa is intertwined with their political and economic cooperation, thereby necessitating the expansion of data collection and analysis to cover their collaboration in these realms broadly. Therefore, while the study focused on the cooperation between China and Africa to achieve their peace and security goals outlined in their respective long-term strategies, the analyses also covered the related economic and political cooperation between the two sides. The analyses excludes other interactions such as people-to-people, cultural or educational exchanges, though they might be mentioned in passing.

1.8. Contribution to the field of International Relations

This study will contribute to and broaden the literature on Sino-Africa and strategic partnerships within the field of IR. It aims to fill in a gap in the literature by using the concept of strategic partnership as an analytical framework to analyse the AU-China strategic partnership to understand the alignment of China and Africa's strategic goals (Agenda 2063 and China's vision 2049) and how the partnership impacts Africa's development and security aspirations. Debates on China-Africa relations have produced massive literature, with various studies examining different aspects of the relationship. However, the alignment of Africa's Agenda 2063 with China's 2049

Vision has never been studied. Furthermore, the term 'strategic partnership' is widely used in China-Africa academic and policy discussions. However, such discussions, as well as academic studies on the subject, have failed to probe its meaning and applicability to China-Africa relations. This study is the first and, consequently, provides corresponding groundbreaking information on China and Africa's relationship based on the concept of strategic partnership. The study also touches on and adds to the debates about China's "debt trap" diplomacy and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Africa.

1.9. Definition of key terms

To avoid confusion, this section clarifies the following key terms used throughout the thesis:

A *strategic partnership* in this study is defined as a flexible, non-binding formal structured framework designed for intensified, long-term cooperation between two or more international political actors to pursue mutually beneficial shared or unshared core interests or goals more effectively than could be achieved in isolation, and jointly manage risks and seize opportunities in other areas of strategic interest. These partnerships have been established between states and between states and regional organisations such as the EU. This thesis will often use the term 'partnership' in the place of 'strategic partnership'.

Strategic partnership model (SPM) is an analytical framework that Thomas Wilkins (2008) developed to study strategic partnerships in world politics. This model is used in chapters six and seven to analyse the China-Africa strategic partnership.

The *AU's Agenda 2063* is a framework that was launched by the AU in 2013 as a roadmap to guide Africa's development that is intended to be realised by 2063, the AU's centenary. The framework comprises seven key aspirations or goals: sustainable economic development; political integration of the continent; good governance, democracy and protection of human rights in African countries; peace and security; consolidation of cultural identity through pan-Africanism and renaissance; gender equality; and economic and political independence of Africa. This study will interchange the following terms: Africa's Agenda 2063, AU's Agenda 2063, and Africa's 2063 aspirations.

China's Vision 2049, usually known as the 'Chinese Dream' of 'national rejuvenation', is a development plan launched by the Chinese government in 2013 to achieve the greatest scientific

and technological advances and full economic development for China by 2049. The plan includes military modernisation and establishing a global presence consistent with Beijing's global interests. Officially, the Chinese government calls it China's Second Centenary Goal[1] (Munene 2022; Xinhua 2021a), while some Chinese scholars have called it China 2049 (Dollar, Huang and Yao 2020) or Goal 2049 (Yifu Lin 2021). For the purpose of this study, the thesis uses the terms Chinese Dream and China's Vision 2049 interchangeably to refer to this development plan.

The African Union (AU) in the hyphenated *African Union-China* in the title and chapters of the thesis is used interchangeably with the term Africa when referring to the strategic partnership between China and the collective African countries. In other words, the thesis will often use AU/Africa-China's strategic partnership in the place of AU-China strategic partnership. This is mainly because, on the one hand, using the AU only can often cause confusion as the official relations in FOCAC documents describe the relationship as China-Africa. However, using the term Africa only can also lead to confusion because Africa is not an actual international actor. Moreover, the thesis uses AU/Africa mainly because it focuses on the alignment of the AU's Agenda 2063 with China's Vision 2049 within the FOCAC. Thus, it cannot use Africa only because Agenda 2063 is officially a programme of the AU. In addition, the thesis may use 'China-Africa' and 'Sino-Africa' when referring to the broader relations between the two sides.

Furthermore, it must be highlighted that this thesis is cognisant of that bilateral relations between actors in world affairs are usually phrased in a way that the most powerful partner is represented by the first name, for example, US-Japan, US-Canada, EU-AU, EU-South Africa, Russia-South Africa, and China-Brazil. The literature also expresses Africa and China's relationship similarly; for example, as China-Africa or Sino-Africa. This indicates that China is the leading or most powerful actor in the relationship. However, this thesis does not subscribe to this manner of phrasing international relationships. While power dynamics between China and Africa are discussed at some point in the thesis, the wording of the relationship is not meant to entertain this aspect. To this end, the thesis uses the phrases Africa and China and AU-China without implying power dynamics between the two actors.

[1] China's First Centenary Goal was to become a "moderately prosperous society in all respects" by 2021 (the centenary of the Chinese Communist Party or CCP) (discussed further in section 5.3.2: chapter 5).

Security cooperation is a collaboration between two or more international political actors to jointly pursue mutually beneficial goals in peace and security. These collaborations aim to address traditional security threats such as violent conflicts or terrorism. Notwithstanding, security cooperation can include efforts to tackle non-traditional security threats, for example, climate change, food insecurity and transnational organised crime. However, where non-traditional security threats are included in security cooperation, they are explicitly explained.

1.10. Organisation of the study

This section outlines the research structure, that is, what each chapter in this thesis concerns. The thesis comprises seven chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the research theme, the aims and objectives of the study, and discusses the research problem that will be investigated. The first section explains the research theme by providing an overview of China-Africa relations, outlining how the relationship developed from the Cold War era to contemporary times, wherein questions and concerns about the relationship started emerging. Secondly, the chapter formulates and demarcates the research problem to explain the problem statements, the research questions and the aims and objectives of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter provides a literature review to examine how the IR scholarship has understood the concept of strategic partnership, particularly how researchers in China-Africa studies have applied the term. The first section focuses on studies that have endeavoured to understand the concept of strategic partnership. In the second section, the chapter surveys the literature on the China-Africa topic to understand how the strategic partnership between the sides has been explained.

Chapter 3: Conceptual and analytical framework

This chapter discusses and develops the conceptual framework employed in this study. First, the chapter explores the theoretical background of the concept of strategic partnerships to understand

how IR theories have attempted to explain the concept. Second, the chapter delves into the meaning of the concept of a strategic partnership to develop a working definition for this study. Lastly, the chapter proceeds to explain Wilkins's (2008) strategic partnership model (SPM) and how it will be employed in the study in analysing the strategic partnership between Africa/AU and China.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter discusses the research methodology. First, the chapter will explain the research paradigm adopted, which clarifies the study's ontology and epistemology. Second, the chapter explains the research design, explicating the overall logical plan of the study. Third, the chapter will outline the research methodology to clarify aspects such as the research approach, methods of data collection, population, sampling and data analysis. The chapter will also address issues of validity and reliability, ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter 5: Contextualising China-Africa relations

This chapter contextualises the topic through an analysis of the rise of contemporary China-Africa relations. It begins by chronicling the historical development of China-Africa relations, starting by tracing the earliest contacts and then showing how the relationship developed during the Cold War era and in the 21st century. The chapter will also discuss the development of security cooperation in China-Africa relations, which has become a key area of collaboration to address issues of peace and security on the African continent.

Chapter 6: An SPM analysis of the formation and implementation of the China-Africa/AU strategic partnership

This chapter applies the strategic partnership model (SPM) to analyse the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership, tracking it through the two phases of the collaboration continuum: formation and implementation. This chapter analyses the formation stage of the China-Africa strategic partnership to answer the first research sub-question. It also tackles the second research sub-question by analysing how the implementation of the AU-China strategic partnership has unfolded.

Chapter 7: Evaluating the China-Africa/AU strategic partnership

This chapter completes the presentation and analyses of the study's main findings. Accordingly, it applies the third phase of the SPM, evaluation, to assess the effectiveness of AU/Africa and China's strategic partnership to answer the third and fourth research sub-questions.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This chapter will conclude the study with a summary of the key findings based on the four objectives of the study. This chapter will further recommend policies for China, AU and African countries to consolidate and sustain their strategic partnership. The chapter will also discuss the new research insights from this study and how they contribute to the current literature on both strategic partnerships and the China-Africa debate.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

A literature review, as Hart (1998: 13) explains, can be defined as:

> the selection of available documents on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.

As the author explains, the purpose is to create familiarity with available knowledge and identify gaps for potential further research on a particular topic (Hart 1998: 26-27). Ridley (2012: 3) explains the literature review as a part of the research wherein a researcher identifies the theories and existing studies that influenced their research topic choice and the methodology they have opted to use. In broad terms, according to Aveyard (2010: 14-16), there are two types of literature reviews, namely, traditional (narrative) and systematic. A systematic review, as the author explains, "strives to identify comprehensively and track down all the available literature on a topic, while describing a clear, comprehensive methodology". This type of review goes into detail and specifies the relevance of each study reviewed (Aveyard 2010: 14). Narrative reviews, on the other hand, are reviews in which there is no defined method of searching for or appraising literature. Narrative literature reviews aim to synthesise and critique key arguments of sources without going into the details of each study (Aveyard 2010: 16).

For the purposes of this study, the narrative review is more suitable as the literature review in this research does not seek to provide a detailed analysis of each study that is reviewed, but only to synthesise and narrate the debates and arguments from different studies. Furthermore, a preliminary assessment of available literature indicates that the literature relating to the topic of this study is massive and, thus, it will be an extremely time-consuming task to "track down" and provide a detailed analysis of all available studies.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the concept of a strategic partnership to understand how the scholarship of IR has explained it. This section analyses the rise of strategic partnerships as alternative cooperation mechanisms between actors in post-Cold War

international affairs. It also examines how the literature interprets the concept's meaning and purposes in world politics.

The second section proceeds to examine Sino-Africa relations in the literature to understand how these studies have explained the strategic partnership between China and Africa. As the China-Africa literature has become too extensive, this section will focus on studies that have inserted the term "strategic partnership" in the title of their papers. The section examines how the literature explains the development of China-Africa relations and the factors that drove the establishment of a strategic partnership between the two sides. Furthermore, the section analyses the areas of convergences and challenges that different scholars have identified in China-Africa relations. In the third section, this chapter discusses the gaps uncovered in the literature review. Lastly, the conclusion will summarise the chapter and emphasise the gaps in the literature that this study seeks to address.

2.2. The concept of strategic partnership

2.2.1. Strategic partnerships in global politics

The concept of strategic partnership is viewed as a fairly recent phenomenon, with many scholars noting its emergence in world politics in the early 1990s (Envall and Hall 2016: 89; Gomes-Casseres 2005: 39; Czechowska 2013: 38; Kay 2000: 15; Mehrotra 2001: 80; Michalski and Pan 2017b: 13; Nadkarni 2010: 45-46; Pan and Michalski 2019: 266; Parameswaran 2014: 263; Shenkar and Reuer 2005: 5; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 8, 16; Wilkins 2008: 362, 2012: 67). Studies such as Envall and Hall (2016: 89), Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 8) and Wilkins (2008: 362, 2012: 67) trace the origins of the term in the field of business and organisational studies. Gajauskaitė (2013:190), Kay (2000: 15), Nadkarni (2010: 46) and Wilkins (2008: 367) indicate that Soviet policymakers proposed the concept in the last days of the Soviet Union as an alternative to military alliances that dominated the Cold War politics.

According to Gajauskaitė (2013:190), the term strategic partnership then appeared at the 1992 US-Russia Camp David summit following the dissolution of the Soviet Union as the two former archrivals sought to explore friendly relations between them. Several studies indicate that the China-Brazil strategic partnership established in 1993 was the first strategic partnership in world

politics, followed by the US and Russia in 1994, though the latter was not openly pronounced by the partners (Michalski and Pan 2017b: 13; Nadkarni 2010: 48; Pan and Michalski 2019: 266). Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 8), however, point out that the US-Turkey strategic partnership that was revived in 2018 was actually established in 1992 but was abandoned for a long time. The authors thus indicated that it is difficult to locate the first strategic partnership in world affairs for empirical and analytical reasons.

Analytically, not all states keep a clear record of their partnerships, and for some, like China, it is a "politically sensitive" matter to disclose such information. Empirically, the definitional challenge of strategic partnerships is compounded by the existence of formal and informal partnerships and that labelling collaborations as 'strategic' differs from actor to actor (Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 8-10). Wilkins (2008: 359), however, argued that the China-Russia strategic partnership officially declared in 1996 represents the term's first explicit and deliberate invocation. India and Japan respectively followed the trend by establishing bilateral strategic partnerships with Russia in 1997 (Michalski and Pan 2017b: 13).

Envall and Hall (2016: 89) indicated that the concept of strategic partnership did not "catch on" in the West in the 1990s, featuring only intermittently in US policy discussions. In the same vein, the EU first used the term after the European Council in 1998, expressing "Russia's importance as a strategic partner to the Union" and that the Union sought to build a "comprehensive EU-China partnership" (Grevi 2008: 9-10). Wilkins (2012: 54) argued that the emergence of strategic partnerships highlighted the paradigmatic shifts in alignment politics. They reflected the desire for many states and organisations to disengage from the divisive alliance politics that had been at the centre of international politics during the Cold War era. Therefore, states sought to forge new bilateral and multi-lateral co-operation frameworks that do not alienate or antagonise non-participants (Czechowska 2013: 38; Nadkarni 2010: 24; Wilkins 2012: 54).

The year 2000 onwards, as noted by Envall and Hall (2016: 90), saw an upsurge in the number of strategic partnerships as the phenomenon spread to other regions such as Latin America, South East Asia and Africa. According to a survey cited by Pan and Michalski (2019: 266), the number of strategic partnerships proliferated to more than 150 by 2017, with six states and one international organisation standing out as the leading initiators of partnerships. These are Brazil, China, the EU, India, Russia, South Africa, and the US. The authors highlighted that these six actors have

embraced the strategic partnership framework as a key aspect of their respective foreign policies (Pan and Michalski 2019: 266).

Laipson (2015, as cited by Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 12) emphasised that the reason for the popularity of the concept is that "for 21st-century problems, states seek partnerships, not alliances". Nadkarni (2010) elaborated on this point by highlighting some factors that led to the proliferation of strategic partnerships in the 21st century. First, the US dominance in global economic and security structures weakened the feasibility of military alliances, particularly anti-US collaborations. Second, increasing interdependency at the regional level worked against forming alliances targeting third parties. Third, increasing globalisation accelerated global economic interdependency and integration, rendering the formation of "new defensive military alliances an economically self-defeating proposition for most countries, particularly those that place a premium on economic growth" (Nadkarni 2010: 47-48).

2.2.2. The meaning of strategic partnerships

As the strategic partnerships phenomenon managed to endure and shape the international system for the past three decades, a key question that many scholars have been grappling with is the actual meaning of the term 'strategic partnership'. Though the concept has become popular in international relations, the discipline of IR has fallen short of developing a common definition of the concept, and others have even contended that attempts to develop an all-encompassing definition are needless and near impossible (Blanco 2015: 65; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 25). Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 8) point out that, in many cases, the concept of strategic partnership "appears as a UPO – a sort of 'unidentified political object'". An issue cited by the authors is the two seemingly self-explicative terms 'strategic' and 'partnership' (Tyushka and Czechowska, 2019: 8).

Others (Michalski and Pan 2017b: 18) that attempted to deconstruct the term indicated that the term partnership refers to "a common purpose, even common interests, within a friendly arrangement". However, Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 19) asserted that in the field of IR, the term partnership continues to elude scholars and policymakers in terms of its realisation and analysis. The authors further elaborate that the term strategic, which is a derivative of 'strategy', is even more confusing. Strategy in IR is associated with a comprehensive plan of a political actor to

pursue political ends, including the threat or use of military force (Baylis and Wirtz 2019: 5; Duyvesteyn and Worrall 2017: 347). However, Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 19) asserted that "not all partnerships that are labelled as 'strategic' are part of an explicitly formulated strategy". Furthermore, there are bilateral and multilateral relationships that are 'strategic' in the sense that they are crucial for the interests of the parties and have significant global relevance, but are not explicitly labelled as a strategic partnership. For example, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) is seen as collaboration that has the potential to challenge or change the global power structure due to the massive size of their combined economies and populations (Thompson and de Wet 2016: 102). As a result, others have viewed this grouping as a strategic partnership (Grevi 2008: 148), while others see it as an 'alliance' (Thompson and de Wet 2016: 102). The parties themselves though, have not officially defined their collaboration in this manner.

Michalski and Pan (2017b: 17) expounded that the difficulty in defining strategic partnerships is further complicated by the fact that they have assumed very different shapes, "which compounds the problem of delineating the descriptive dimension connected to the concept". This is attributable to the point that bilateral and multilateral collaborations labelled as strategic partnerships have been established between friendly and unfriendly states and those with conflicting socio-political and economic values and interests (Nadkarni 2010: 48-49; Pan and Michalski 2019: 266; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 14).

Since such actors may hold incompatible worldviews and goals (as in the case of the EU-China and China-Australia partnerships for example), strategic partnerships across the world have been formed for various purposes and, therefore "tend to be endowed with very different structures, resources, and contractual bases" (Pan and Michalski 2019: 266). The authors share Holslag's (2011: 295) view that, as a result, the definitions of strategic partnership could be as numerous as the number of such collaborations. As a result, Renard (2013: 306) questioned whether many of these arrangements are really 'partnerships', let alone 'strategic'.

Finding a common meaning of strategic partnership has also been complicated by the recognition of the term by other scholars as a "new form of alignment" (Chidley 2014: 146; Strüver 2017: 34-35; Tyushka *et al* 2019: 56-57; Wilkins 2008: 359) or "strategic alignment" (Guoyou, Borquez and Muñoz 2020: 1). Strategic partnerships and other non-traditional forms of collaborations such as coalitions and security communities emerged in the early 1990s when the relevance and efficacy

of military alliances as the archetypal form of international alignment were being questioned, prompting the scholarship to revisit and clarify the meaning of the term 'alignment' (Snyder 1991: 123; Wilkins 2012: 54, 55-56). Subsequently, the terms alignment and alliance were shown to be fundamentally distinct and thus should not be used interchangeably (Chidley 2014: 143; Strüver 2017: 33; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 18; Wilkins 2012: 55-56). A key aspect highlighted was that the term alliance is merely a subset of the broader concept of alignment (Snyder 1991: 123; Wilkins 2008: 359; 2012: 58).

Wilkins (2012: 59) further expounded in his "taxonomy of alignment archetypes" how strategic partnership is only one of the forms of alignment, along with others such as alliance, the security community and coalition. In his "The End of Alliances", Menon (2007) pertinently captured the distinction between alliances and alignment. The author elucidated that "The absence of quasi-permanent military alliances [in the post-Cold War era] will, therefore, not mean the absence of alignments; there will be a great many of the latter" (Menon 2007: 16).

However, the question remained as to what constitutes the type of alignment in strategic partnerships, considering that, in world politics, the term alignment is broadly understood as the adoption of a common posture by two or more actors in pursuit of formal cooperation towards common interests (Chidley 2014: 154). Yet, in the case of strategic partnerships, even antagonistic parties with clashing interests forge such partnerships (Pan and Michalski 2019: 266; Tyushka *et al* 2019: 55), while other partnerships, as Envall and Hall (2016: 92) argued, indicate non-alignment between the parties.

Notwithstanding, scholars agree that states or other actors establish strategic partnerships with an understanding that the partnership will enable them to pursue their core or strategic goals more effectively than in isolation (Blanco 2016: 37; Pan and Michalski 2019: 270; Parameswaran 2014: 265; Tyushka *et al* 2019: 55). However, the difficulty in developing universally applicable meanings and frameworks has led to many scholars in the field of IR developing different working definitions and analytical frameworks (Blanco 2016; Czechowska 2013; Czechowska *et al* 2019; Envall and Hall 2016; Gajauskaitė 2013; Holslag 2011; Michalski and Pan 2017b; Nadkarni 2010; Pan and Michalski 2019; Parameswaran 2014; Renard 2012, 2013, 2016; Strüver 2017; Wilkins 2008, 2012, 2018). Tyushka *et al* (2019: 55) and Wilkins (2012) are among a few authors that have endeavoured to develop holistic definitions of the term strategic partnership. According to Wilkins,

whose definition has been employed by others such as Parameswaran (2014: 264) and Strüver (2017: 36), a strategic partnership is a:

> structured collaboration between states (or other actors) to take joint advantage of economic opportunities, or to respond to security challenges more effectively than could be achieved in isolation. Strategic partnering occurs both in and between the international and domestic sectors (levels). Besides allowing information, skills, and resources to be shared, a strategic partnership also permits the partners to share risk. A strategic partnership (between a state and an international organisation) presents

For Tyushka *et al* (2019: 46), a strategic partnership is:

> a special kind of manifested and sustainable strategic co-operation between international strategic actors (a state and an international organisation), which is (a) founded on their converging strategic goals; (b) driven by partners' mutual perception as relevant in implementing these goals; (c) featuring relatively more intensive contacts (than with other actors) as well as, occasionally, (d) unique bonds; and which is (e) induced by the evolving strategic environment, that is, emerging multipolarity, including pressures for common action in the face of growing interdependence and the emerging transnational challenges.

While Tyushka *et al*'s (2019: 55) study focused on partnerships between states and international organisations, their definition applies to partnerships between states and other actors in the same manner as Wilkins' definition. However, Tyushka *et al* (2019: 46) acknowledged that their definition is not universally applicable and that "In fact, it appears close to impossible to develop an all-encompassing definition of strategic partnership". Tyushka and Czechowska (2019) also point out that some of the exceptional analytical frameworks that have been developed to study strategic partnerships include Wilkins' (2008) strategic partnership model (SPM), the three-level analytical approach by Michalski and Pan (2017b), Czechowska's (2013) "ideal model", and Holslag's (2011) twofold approach (Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 37-38). In Tyushka *et al* (2019: 47), the authors built on Czechowska's (2013) ideal model to develop what they call the SPaSIO model, which focuses on strategic partnerships between states and international organisations.

2.2.3. The purposes of strategic partnerships

Another question that the scholarship of IR has sought to address is understanding the purposes or functions of strategic partnerships. Blanco (2016) criticised the intellectual attempts in IR to

develop an all-encompassing definition of the concept of strategic partnership and to outline a set of standard properties for the phenomenon. Instead, the researcher focused on understanding strategic partnership as a concept with particular functions in the discourse of international politics. For example, actors use 'strategic partnership' as a language or expression to position and reposition themselves on the international stage to pursue particular interests. In this way, the term strategic partnership serves multiple rhetorical functions (Blanco 2016: 37). The author analysed the EU's foreign policy discourse to show that, first, strategic partnership is employed by the 'Union' as "a label and mechanism of differentiation and hierarchization"; secondly, as a language strategy to promote a rules-based international order as part of its normative foreign policy; and, third, "as a speech and positioning act that establishes or modifies the rules that constitute bilateral relationships" (Blanco 2016: 37).

Envall and Hall (2016: 88), on the other hand, argued that strategic partnerships in Asia are new forms of "security governance" being used to enhance national and regional security, as well as advance economic and other objectives. Using the China-Australia, India-Japan, China-India, and Japan-Australia partnerships as comparative case studies, the authors argued that these partnerships do not conform to the alignment paradigm as they are not consistently intended for producing policy coordination or centred on shared principles. Rather, strategic partnerships in Asia serve as mechanisms to institutionalise, regularise, or simply facilitate multi-level processes for dialogue on issues such as trade and investments, security co-operation, and people-to-people exchanges. In particular, cases such as the Australia-China and China-India partnerships wherein values and interests between the partners clash frequently, partnerships serve to "quarantine" areas of disagreement. The authors, therefore, contended that these partnerships represent moves by states in the region to create alternative approaches to managing their security in accordance with their objectives and understanding of their regional security environment (Envall and Hall 2016: 92).

Michalski and Pan (2017b) advanced a systematic approach, adopted by Tyushka *et al* (2019: 56-58), that illustrates the functions of strategic partnerships on three levels. First, at the individual or (intra-relational) level, strategic partnerships perform reflexive (self-assertive) or status-enhancing functions in which actors aim to affirm themselves as significant international players in the evolving and multipolar world system, thus, enabling them to project and reinforce their respective

self-conceptions as world actors (Michalski and Pan 2017b: 30-31). This aspect fits Blanco's (2016: 37) and Renard's (2013: 304) observations that strategic partnership in the EU's political discourse functions "as a language to advance a normative foreign policy" that seeks to “assert the EU as a global strategic player vis-à-vis the emerging powers".

Second, at the bilateral or (inter-relational) level, strategic partnerships serve as a form of foreign policy alignment for managing bilateral relations "in direct pursuit of the respective interests of the parties". Tyushka *et al* (2019: 56) elaborate that partnerships provide actors with strategically relevant opportunities for the joint pursuit of their shared goals, which usually result in increasingly similar foreign policy styles. Lastly, at the systemic (international) level, strategic partnerships function as "vehicles of social interaction", as structured relationships are more likely to influence inter-state relations (Michalski and Pan 2017b: 27-31; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 30-32). According to Pan and Michalski (2019: 266-268), for example, China uses strategic partnerships to interact with the global community with the primary aim of "shaping an international environment that is propitious to its rise as a global power".

On the other hand, the EU uses the strategic partnership mechanism as a tool "to shape the international system toward principles of international engagement of its liking" (Pan and Michalski 2019: 266-268). Tyushka *et al,* (2019: 58) thus agreed with Renard (2013: 304) that the "true *raison d'être*" of strategic partnerships lies in their purpose and ability to resonate well beyond bilateral issues, that is, to meet regional and global interests of the collaborating actors. As Renard (2013: 304) further elaborated, strategic partnerships do not limit themselves to bilateral engagement per se as their core purpose but are designed to be instrumentalised by the constitutive actors "for broader ends" (regional or global goals) and in broader contexts (including within multiple multi-lateral platforms and avenues of global governance).

The literature, therefore, indicates that strategic partnerships remain, as Holslag (2011:295) observed, "limited to the features that its members, rightfully or not, ascribe to it". In the next section, this chapter surveys China-Africa studies to understand how scholars have explained the strategic partnership between China and Africa.

2.3. The Africa-China strategic partnership

China's increasing engagement with Africa since the 1990s has attracted great interest from policymakers, media pundits and academics around the world, "frequently seeking to explain why, and on what basis, the country is investing in Africa" (Ado and Su 2016: 40). The debates have produced vast amounts of research papers focusing on different aspects, themes and areas of co-operation between China and Africa. For example, Ado and Su's (2016) *China in Africa: a critical literature review*, and multi-authored edited books such as Alden *et al* (2018), Berhe and Hongwu (2013), Rotberg (2008), and Oqubay and Yifu Lin (2019), provide a glimpse of the immensity of the literature on this topic.

Asongu and Aminkeng (2013) observed that, the debate on China-Africa relations has mainly been dominated by three schools of thought: the pessimists, optimists and the paradigm-change view. The first is the pessimists or neo-colonialists strand, which led the arguments in the late 1990s and most of the 2000s after the FOCAC was established. This intellectual tradition has essentially viewed China-Africa relations as asymmetrical and unstable. Within this pattern, China has mostly been depicted as a new imperial power seeking to plunder Africa's resources. The second are the optimists, whose standpoint is that the relationship between China and Africa is an exciting opportunity for both actors. The third strand views China-Africa relations as a paradigmatic change, emphasising that China's model for development and economic growth "contradicts the orthodoxy of strong institutions as prime instruments of growth" (Asongu and Aminkeng 2013: 261-262).

However, studies that analyse the China-Africa relationship focusing on their 'strategic partnership' are very few, given the voluminous literature on China and Africa. A search of Sino-Africa studies conducted in English with the term 'strategic partnership' in their titles produced only ten papers (see table 1 below). Furthermore, as the table shows, studies investigating the increased security cooperation in China-Africa relations conducted in English are rare, although this part of the debate has also produced numerous research publications. Only Arbab (2007) briefly discussed China's supply of arms to African countries, tracing it to the Cold War era when Beijing supplied weaponry to liberation movements in Africa. However, the broader literature focusing on security cooperation between China and Africa has addressed several issues, including, first, China's role in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and 'norm-making' on the African continent (Alden *et al* 2018;

Alden and Large 2013). Secondly, debates on China's non-interference principle and its security interests on the African continent (Aidoo and Hess, 2015; Barton 2018a; Large 2008; Wu and Taylor 2011). Thirdly, the links between China's arms transfer to Africa and political violence (Hanauer and Morris 2014; Campbell *et al* 2012; Mariani and Kirkham 2018; Taylor and Wu 2013). Fourthly, the role of the AU and regional organisations in China-Africa security co-operation is also found in Academic debates (Benabdallah 2015; Van Hoeymissen 2011).

Table 1. China-Africa studies that included 'strategic partnership' in title

Author/s	Title of study	Year of publication	Definition of strategic partnership	Focus of study
Ado, A. and Osabutey, E. L. C.	Africa–China Cooperation: Potential Shared Interests and Strategic Partnerships	2018	None	Economic/trade
Akpan, N. E. and Onya, R	China and Africa: Strategic Partnership or Crypto-Imperialism?	2018	Yes	Economic/trade
Arbab, F.	China-Africa Interaction: Prospects for a Strategic Partnership	2007	None	Economic/trade/ political
Bano, D. S. and Falki, S. M.	Sino-African Strategic Partnership and Stratagem of Foreign Aid: Implications for the West	2016	None	Economic/ Aid
Du Plessis, A.	The Forum on China– Africa Cooperation, Ideas and Aid: National Interest(s) or Strategic Partnership?	2014	None	Economic/trade
Jiang, W.	China's Emerging Strategic Partnerships in Africa	2008	None	Economic/trade/ political
Konings, P.	China and Africa: Building a Strategic Partnership	2007	None	Economic/trade/ political
Muekalia, D. J.	Africa and China's Strategic Partnership	2004	None	Economic/trade
Shelton, G.	The FOCAC Process and Sino-African Strategic Partnership	2016	None	Economic/trade/ political

Van de Looy, J.	Africa and China: A Strategic Partnership?	2006	None	Economic/trade/ political

Moreover, the majority of studies that included 'strategic partnership' in their titles (Ado and Osabutey 2018; Arbab 2007; Bano and Falki 2016; Du Plessis 2014; Jiang 2008; Konings 2007; Muekalia 2004; Shelton 2016; and Van de Looy 2006) appeared to have approached the concept as a self-explanatory term. These studies, therefore, only investigated how China and Africa's strengthened cooperation in different areas, particularly in the field of economics, supposedly confirm whether the two actors have or are still building a strategic partnership. The column titled 'Focus of study' in Table 1 above shows that majority of these studies concentrated on analysing economic cooperation, while a few also included political relations between China and Africa. Also, the column titled 'Definition of strategic partnership' shows that, all these studies, except Akpan and Onya (2018), made no attempts to define the concept of strategic partnership. According to Akpan and Onya (2018: 143), a strategic partnership "can rightly be said to be a partnership built on a shared level of planning by parties in a relationship in order for both to have mutual benefit".

Akpan and Onya (2018: 143) further elucidated that such a partnership "suggest some level of alliance" between the partners that would benefit both parties. The authors, as a result, make the conceptual error, as Chidley (2014) and Wilkins (2012) pointed out, of using the term alliance while actually referring to a case of alignment. Akpan and Onya also approached the strategic partnership concept from a business perspective, arguing that China and Africa are strategic partners "in the sense that each possesses one or more assets that can help the other". Understandably, as the authors explain, Africa possesses the energy and mineral resources that China needs, while China possesses the investments and aid that the continent requires (Akpan and Onya 2018: 143). The authors' definition, however, is very broad as "shared level of planning […] for both to have mutual benefit" cannot be used to specify any constitutive features of strategic partnerships. Furthermore, this understanding can be applied to other forms of collaboration, such as military alliances, security communities, or business partnerships.

While the majority of China-Africa scholars pay little to no scholarly attention to the concept of strategic partnership, the term appears to be understood in a particular way. Shelton (2016: 260),

for example, indicated that since the 1990s, "China has increasingly prioritised Africa as a strategic partner at both the political and economic levels". This line of thought can also be noted in Bano and Falki's (2016: 77) observation that the phase in "China-Africa relations which truly translated their relations into a strategic partnership began in the Post-Tiananmen Square events, which strained Chinese relations with the West".

The authors, assuming a similar viewpoint as Du Plessis (2014: 117), further pronounced that the Africa-China strategic partnership was strengthened by the establishment of the FOCAC in 2000 (Bano and Falki 2016: 79). According to Du Plessis (2014: 117), the creation of the FOCAC in 2000 was the commencement of China and Africa's "contemporary strategic partnership". It should be noted that the document adopted at the first FOCAC gathering in 2000 indicated that China and African countries "agree to adopt a workable programme towards the creation of a new strategic partnership" (FOCAC 2000b). Thus, the interpretations by Bano and Falki (2016) and Du Plessis (2014) can be linked to the inclusion of the term 'new' strategic partnership in the document as implying a revamped or revived partnership. Muekalia (2004: 10), on the other hand, acknowledged that the "practical implementation" of strategic partnership as a "programme" is an open question. However, the author maintained that "China is engaging Africa in a long-term strategic partnership for international leadership, markets, energy and space" (Muekalia 2004: 10).

In this way, scholars on the China-Africa topic hold a somewhat divergent understanding of the concept of strategic partnership from most studies that endeavoured to understand the term. For example, Envall and Hall (2016: 88) excluded the idea that strategic partnerships can exist without a formal agreement creating one. On the other hand, Sino-Africa studies imply that the PRC and the African continent were already in a strategic partnership well before the FOCAC was established, even though a clear meaning of the term is lacking. These scholars' understanding of strategic partnership can be linked to some assessments by Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 10). The authors noted that the "empirical" dilemma of studying strategic partnerships is complicated by the "existence of both formal and informal strategic partnerships and the ways of labelling them (which does not necessarily include markers of being either 'strategic' or a 'partnership')" (Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 10). Thus, the interpretations above by Bano and Falki (2016: 79) and Du Plessis (2014: 117), for example, that the FOCAC era represents, respectively, a "strengthening"

and "contemporary" China-Africa strategic partnership suggest that China and Africa have been in an informal strategic partnership prior to establishing a formal one in 2000 through the FOCAC.

However, though China-Africa studies focus on the contemporary relationship launched in the 1950s, there is a lack of clarity about when the informal strategic partnership might have commenced. Moreover, there are no records of Chinese or African leaders claiming the other side as a strategic partner prior to the establishment of FOCAC, and the first usage of the term strategic partnership in world affairs is traced to the late 1980s (Kay 2000: 15; Nadkarni 2010: 46; Wilkins 2008: 367). Therefore, it becomes only the perspectives of scholars that China and Africa were in an informal strategic partnership before creating a formal one.

While it is unclear what exactly constitutes an informal strategic partnership, the assertions that a formal one is established through an official agreement that declares it so (Envall and Hall 2016: 88; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 10) mean that an informal partnership can be distinguished by the absence of a formal pact. China-Africa studies, however, do not deliberate on the formal or informal aspects of the strategic partnership between China and Africa and do not attempt to define the concept or develop an analytical framework to study the phenomenon.

Akpan and Onya's (2018: 143) description, notwithstanding, implies that a partnership is made strategic by how important the two or more collaborating actors are to each other's key goals. This literature review, therefore, will focus on studies on China-Africa relations that enclosed the term strategic partnership in their titles to understand how they have explained or attempted to explain the relationship, which they assume to be a strategic partnership. The review will probe how scholars explain the motivations behind increased ties between China and Africa, what purposes the partnership serves for them, how they address challenges, areas of divergences and convergences, and the prospects of the relationship. However, other studies within the broader China-Africa literature will be used to corroborate the points made by the studies which are the focus of this literature review.

2.3.1. Formation of the Africa-China partnership

Like the broader China-Africa studies, most scholars in this debate who included the strategic partnership concept in their titles identify four phases in contemporary China-Africa relations. The

first phase commenced in the 1950s "when most of today's developing world was still under the yoke of colonialism" (Muekalia 2004: 6). In this phase, the PRC had just been founded in 1949 under the leadership of Mao Zedong (Akpan and Onya 2018: 142; Bano and Falki 2016: 73-74; Konings 2007: 343; Van de Looy 2006: 1). Leaders from Africa and Asia, as Konings (2007: 43) noted, gathered at the 1955 Bandung Conference of Non-Aligned Nations. The goal was to strengthen ties between African and Asian nations, oppose colonialism and resist the Cold War pressures of aligning with the US or Soviet Union.

China and Africa rekindled their relationship at the conference after early engagements between them were interrupted by Western colonial conquests. During the conference, China found a global audience to promote its Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, namely, "mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence" (Van de Looy 2006: 2). As anti-colonial movements intensified on the African continent in the 1950s and 60s, relations between China and Africa were centred on ideological interests as China provided political and material support to Africa (Konings 2007: 343; Bano and Falki 2016: 74).

Towards the end of Mao's leadership in the 1970s, the US$400 million Tanzania-Zambia railway (TAZARA) was China's most prestigious aid project in Africa. Almost all African states had gained independence at this time, and the number of those with diplomatic relations with Beijing had increased and helped the PRC to replace the Republic of China (ROC), or Taiwan, at the UN in 1971 (Konings 2007: 343; Van de Looy 2006: 2-3). Thus, Beijing also offered infrastructure, factories, federal buildings, student exchange programmes, stadiums and medical teams to several other African states that were loyal to the PRC (Bano and Falki 2016: 74; Van de Looy 2006: 4). Schiere (2011: 6) highlighted that the amount spent for the TAZARA project was very large for the Chinese, considering that China's socio-economic conditions were more dire than in several African countries in the 1970s. Adisu, Sharkey and Okoroafo (2010: 3) highlighted that, during the Cold War, China used aid to developing countries in Africa and elsewhere to strengthen 'South-South' relations and challenge the superpowers.

The second phase was from the late 1970s when relations between Africa and China declined (Akpan and Onya 2018; Konings 2007; Van de Looy 2006). In this phase, Mao's successor, Den Xiaoping, focused on reforming the Chinese economy for domestic modernisation (Akpan and

Onya 2018: 142; Konings 2007: 344; Van de Looy 2006: 4). African countries at this time were still experiencing great socio-economic difficulties owing to colonial legacies that were proving difficult to reverse (Muekalia 2004: 7). Deng's leadership in China elevated the objectives of attracting foreign direct investments (FDI) and domestic economic modernisation above ideological interests. For this purpose, Beijing pursued closer co-operation with Western developed nations due to China's dependence on the West for investments and technical support, and the African continent became less important for Beijing (Bano and Falki 2016: 74; Jiang 2008: 51; Konings 2007: 344).

The third phase of China-Africa relations followed in 1989 when the Cold War ended with the collapse of the communist Soviet Union in 1989. This world-changing event coincided with the infamous military crackdown on student-led pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, China. Beijing's handling of the protests tarnished its relations with the West as several Western nations condemned the Chinese government for alleged human rights violations (Bano and Falki 2016: 77; Konings 2007: 349; Van de Looy 2006: 5). The incident, as Van de Looy (2006: 5) noted, caused the Western world to question the operations of the Chinese government, which was at the time the last major communist power still standing. However, China was relieved by a muted and somewhat supportive reaction from the developing world, especially from Africa (Konings 2007: 349).

Thus, China once again turned towards "South- South cooperation" to pronounce its traditional stance of non-interference in order to counter what Beijing regarded as "imperialist and hegemonic interference in its affairs" (Bano and Falki 2016: 77). Konings (2007: 349) indicated that China's non-interference principle resonated well with several African leaders who felt threatened by demands for political liberalisation and democratisation in their countries. As the 1990s decade progressed, these political interests were supplemented by the two sides' mutual economic needs (Akpan and Onya 2018: 143). China needed a steady supply of natural resources in Africa to support its growing economy (Akpan and Onya 2018: 143). At the same time, Africa needed investments that China provided (Akpan and Onya 2018: 143).

The fourth phase was the establishment of the FOCAC mechanism in 2000, marking a new era of institutionalised and multi-lateral China-Africa relations (Bano and Falki 2016: 79; Du Plessis 2014: 117; Konings 2007: 349; Shelton 2016: 265). Du Plessis (2014) indicated that the FOCAC

played a major role in consolidating relations between China and Africa. However, "2006 is marked as the year in which these relations were firmly cemented", as the conclusion of the summit that year announced "a new type of strategic partnership" between the two sides (Du Plessis 2014: 117). Shelton (2016: 265) described the FOCAC as a form of "international diplomatic collaboration" through which Chinese and African leaders investigate, aggregate, and strengthen compatible interests and objectives. The author observed that the mechanism had encouraged a rising number of economic projects, political agreements and various collaborative ventures between China and African countries that have resulted particularly in increased trade volumes.

Shelton (2016: 267) further pointed out that these engagements have promoted "a process of mutually beneficial complex interdependence between the two sides". In the FOCAC era, China-Africa trade consequently grew from US$1.4 billion in 1990 to almost US$10 billion in 2000 and to US$39.7 billion by 2005 (Jiang 2008: 53; Van de Looy 2006: 13). The increasing trade between the two sides passed the US$100 billion mark in 2017, setting a new high (Ado and Osabutey 2018: 20). Investments from China into Africa also increased sharply, from US$410 million in 1990 to US$3 billion in 2004, and surged to US$9 billion by 2007, dwarfing the World Bank's money flow into Africa (Akpan and Onya 2018: 145; Bano and Falki 2016: 79). By 2017, China's investments and project funding in Africa have surpassed US$300 billion, with China holding US$110 billion of FDI stock in Africa (Ado and Osabutey 2018: 20). Bano and Falki (2016: 83) indicated that Chinese concessional loans to African countries worth more than US$10 billion also surpassed the World Bank’s US$4.5 billion in 2004. However, African countries' dependence on commodities for exports remained a barrier to their effective participation in trade with China (Konings 2007: 351, 356)

Shelton (2016: 264) emphasised that increased ties with China under the broader South-South co-operation agenda provided a shield for Africa against exploitation by Western powers and a viable alternative to the typical trading patterns of North-South relations that have dominated the global economy since the end of World War II. South-South relations further present the opportunity to mitigate against the increasingly adverse effects of globalisation upon developing countries. Furthermore, China and Africa view each other as dependable allies against Western hegemony in global governance structures and the ideological shape of the international political landscape (Du Plessis 2014: 119; Konings 2007: 361-362). Konings (2007: 351, 355) and Akpan and Onya (2018:

145), however, argue that a close inspection of contemporary China-Africa relations reveals that their strategic partnership was primarily based on economic interests, particularly China's need for resource security and new markets and investment opportunities that will sustain its economic growth.

2.3.2. Areas of convergences

Other studies on the China-Africa topic postulate that cooperation between Beijing and African states is based on equality and convergent interests, particularly economic development and fair participation in global affairs (Ado and Osabutey 2018: 20; Du Plessis 2014: 122; Shelton 2016: 265). Shelton (2016: 265), for example, declared that relations between China and Africa had developed an interdependence and have formed a special bond "grounded on a common destiny", which can serve as a model for South-South co-operation. The relationship, as the author asserted, is founded on their common understanding of their struggle against the vices of imperialism and colonialism. Thus, both sides are "working more closely together to push forward the agenda for the global transition from a unipolar to a more just and equitable multipolar world" (Shelton 2016: 265). Their aim is for developing countries to be justly represented and 'heard' on the international stage and in global institutions such as the UN, the World Bank, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Shelton 2016: 265, 268).

While others see the slogan of creating "a just and equitable world order" largely as China's strategic campaign to craft an image of itself as a benign and responsible power in contradiction to the imperialist West (Konings 2007: 359; Muekalia 2004: 10), there are those who contend that Africa's interests in global politics have been bolstered through Sino-Africa relations. McDonald (as cited by Du Plessis 2014: 122) argued that not only has China presented Africa with opportunities for access to funding for crucial development ventures but has also sought to support the continent's "often marginalised institutions, such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the AU, in international affairs".

Africa's voice started receiving attention in world politics through its partnership with China and the globally broadcasted FOCAC conferences (Du Plessis 2014: 122). Ado and Osabutey (2018: 20) also emphasised that FOCAC provides a multilateral engagement framework and "can provide a platform for a bargaining power for both Africa and China vis-à-vis the West and other nations".

The authors further point out that FOCAC has also been instrumental in highlighting some issues that are of fundamental interest to African countries in world affairs, "including the elimination of trade barriers and farm subsidies, increased aid and debt relief, and African representation on the UN Security Council (UNSC)". Ado and Osabutey (2018: 22-23) also highlighted that Chinese investments in Africa have also been "timely" and significantly supportive towards many struggling sectors. These investments have also provided opportunities for some newly established African companies to access technology and knowledge. The authors use the example of the Lekki Free Zone Development Company in Nigeria, demonstrating how it benefitted from Chinese investors in Lagos (Ado and Osabutey 2018: 22-23).

China and African countries also converge around the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states. This particularly concerns the demands often made by Western powers that developing nations should improve their human rights records and governance standards (Bano and Falki 2016: 82; Du Plessis 2014: 125). The subjects of democracy and human rights is emphasised by other critics as critical factors that have drawn China and Africa to closer cooperation (Alden and Alves 2008: 53; Tull 2006: 461). For China, the principle of non-interference play a key role in its defence against Western criticisms on its policies in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang, which African and Chinese leaders have a common understanding that these are issues of the PRC's sovereignty (Konings 2007: 360-361).

On Africa, Western countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) commonly attach demands such as protection of human rights, improvement of democratic processes and market liberalisation as conditions to development assistance or aid. Chinese and African leaders have often complained about such conditions, citing their incompatibility to the realities of recipient countries. In addition, they have contended that the West uses conditional aid as an imperialist strategy to dominate and interfere in the domestic affairs of developing countries (Bano and Falki 2016: 77). Bano and Falki indicated that the West's aid system restrict recipient countries from devising economic resolutions that are tailored to their specific ground realities.

In response, China, having experienced remarkable economic growth and development since the 1990s, has developed an aid programme for developing and least developed countries that does not come with conditions, the only exception being the 'One China' policy (Bano and Falki 2016:

87; Du Plessis 2014: 125; Shelton 2016: 264). Du Plessis (2014: 125) noted that China's aid policy departs from the traditional aid system of conditionalities and provides other types of assistance. This includes capacity building, skills transfers, infrastructure development, education, science and technology, and cultural co-operation. While the West has charged China of being a "rogue creditor", "underwriting a world that is more corrupt, chaotic and authoritarian" (Naim 2010, as cited by Gilpin 2021: 2), African countries have welcomed China's aid as a suitable alternative to the Western aid regime (Bano and Falki 2016: 89). As a result, development assistance has been an issue on which China and Africa find common ground regarding the principle of non-interference and the argument that nations should respect each other's choice of development path (Gilpin 2021: 7).

Africa and China are also regarded as sharing a common development strategy in the form of the AU's Agenda 2063 and the PRC's "Chinese Dream", respectively (Ado and Osabutey 2018: 20; Shelton 2016: 264). The "Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation" (Shelton, 2016: 263) was conceived by China's President, Xi Jinping, in 2013 as a strategic vision for China to achieve its objectives of full domestic development and be restored to its "rightful" position as a central power in international affairs by 2049 (Alden 2017: 24; Shinn 2019: 77; Zhang and Niway 2018: 129). Accordingly, Shelton highlighted that the African continent can benefit from the Chinese Dream by developing and advancing a corresponding "African Dream". This process, as he argued, is now manifested in the AU's Agenda 2063, “which outlines an African Dream for continental economic development and integration” (Shelton 2016: 267).

Through China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—an infrastructure development project that seeks to connect China's international partners through land and maritime trade routes— Shelton maintains that both China's and Africa's visions converge for mutual gains. For example, Africa can access China's expertise in building an African rail network and high-speed trains as part of Agenda 2063 infrastructure and integration objectives, while China gets part of its intended global network of trade routes and partners (Shelton 2016: 268-269). Ado and Osabutey (2018: 20) echoed Shelton's view, noting that Beijing's vision for an increased Chinese role in the global political economy through the BRI can increase China's interconnectedness with Africa through the continent's Agenda 2063 aspirations to develop and industrialise African countries in the next five decades or earlier.

Looking to the future, Shelton (2016: 75) declared that the success of the China-Africa strategic partnership, especially since Beijing appears willing to set a common agenda for interaction, lies in Africa's ability to construct an appropriate and effective policy response to ensure a mutually beneficial partnership. However, the literature has not probed the links between Africa and China's strategic goals, namely the AU's Agenda 2063 and China's 2049 'Dream', to understand how they impact each other. Therefore, this study also seeks to fill in this gap in the literature by examining how China's 2049 vision links with and affects the AU's Agenda 2063.

2.3.3. Divergences and challenges

According to Ado and Su (2016: 40-41), the majority of conclusions drawn by research exploring China's presence in Africa are negative, highlighting mostly the adverse economic and security consequences that China's intensified engagement with Africa has generated for the continent. As Jiang (2008: 55) explains, critics accuse China of pursuing mercantilist policies in Africa for pure economic interests without concern for human or environmental impacts. A major contradiction highlighted by critics was that China's increased engagement with African countries since the 1990s has been reversing Africa's progress in promoting good governance and protection of human rights, which Western nations consider as preconditions for development and peace (Akpan and Onya 2018: 148).

Two cases that were predominantly mentioned in the early years of FOCAC were the 2003 Darfur genocide at the hands of the Sudanese government and the endurance of Robert Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe and its ability to continue human rights violations (Akpan and Onya 2018: 146; Jiang 2008: 55; Van de Looy 2006: 17). In the Darfur case, some studies (Kaplinsky et al 2006: 40; Manyok 2016: 2-3) cited China's massive investments in Sudan's oil industry as a direct source of revenue for President Omar Al Bashir's regime to finance the systematic killing of ethnic Darfuri people in the region. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, China became the largest investor in the country's mines after Western powers slapped Mugabe's government with crippling economic sanctions for its controversial land reform policy in 2000. Mhandara and Chipaike (2013: 218) recorded that the Chinese investments thereafter became a vital source of funds for Zimbabwe's security forces. In 2004, for instance, "China supplied military hardware worth US$1 million in exchange for mineral concessions and ivory". Thus, through its non-interference foreign policy and extensive economic

investments in these countries, China was seen as a sponsor of 'rogue states' and enabler of violent conflicts (Konings 2007: 352-353).

Additionally, Muekalia (2004: 8) cited a study by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which reported that during the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict between 1998 and 2000, China sold US$1 billion worth of arms to both warring sides. China also supplied Laurent Kabila's government in the conflict-ridden Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with heavy military equipment between 1997 and 1998 and transferred significant amounts of heavy weapons to the similarly war-ravaged Sierra Leone (Muekalia 2004: 8). However, Berhe's (2013: 3) assessment of the first decade of FOCAC concluded that the charge that China is supplying arms to rogue states was unfounded. The author argued that Beijing's approach to peace and security in Africa does not depart from the standard practices established by Western powers, such as the US, UK and France, which have been active on the continent for most of modern history. Berhe further assert that the history of Western governments in Africa is one of "propping up dictatorships, clandestine arms transfers and the promotion of trade interests through financial aid", which Western scholars and media often ignore when criticising China. Notwithstanding, recent studies such as Bayes (2020), Mariani and Kirkham (2018), Whitaker and Clark (2018), among others, point that China's share of arms trade in Africa had significantly grown.

Another challenge that other studies indicated was the economic impact of China-Africa relations on African countries. As indicated by Konings (2007: 355-356) and Van de Looy (2006: 14), since the post-colonial era, most African countries have incurred enormous trade deficits and foreign debts as they mainly export commodities while largely importing manufactured goods from developed countries. However, Africa finds itself in a similar situation in its trade with China. While some sectors in Africa benefitted from Chinese presence, the impact of these investments varied across countries and regions (Ado and Osabutey 2018: 22). In particular, China's low production costs of textiles and clothing merchandise afforded its companies to flood African markets with cheap Chinese-made goods, overwhelming the ability of local industries to compete in their own markets in countries such as Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda (Akpan and Onya 2018: 148-149; Konings 2007: 356).

Schiere (2011: 8) also highlighted that Chinese investments in Africa are concentrated to resource-rich countries, while the others have only a limited trade relationship with China. Moreover,

Kolstad and Wiig (2011: 33) stated that results from their study indicated that Chinese FDI were more focused on resource rich countries that suffered institutional inefficiencies, which in light of the 'resource curse' literature, as they elaborated, suggested that the effects of these investments on development in Africa may be problematic. However, the authors stressed the point that traditional investors on the continent are equally attracted to countries with natural resources and lack of adequate institutions to support markets, suggesting that, like its security approach pointed out by Berhe (2013: 3), China's investments in Africa "may be less distinctive than commonly assumed" (Kolstad and Wiig 2011: 33).

Konings (2007: 356) further wrote that some Chinese businesses were able to circumvent special arrangements such as the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA). These structures were developed by the US to afford eligible African manufacturers duty-free access to US markets while placing quotas on Chinese-made products. However, other Chinese businesses managed to set up branch factories in several African countries before the MFA expired in 2005, which saw their exports to the US soaring thereafter. Consequently, African producers could not compete with their Chinese counterparts in the US, leading to shut down of factories and job losses in several African countries (Konings 2007: 356).

Taking a more critical view, Akpan and Onya (2018: 145) argued that China has adopted an '"aid-for-oil strategy' that has resulted in increasing oil supplies from African countries in return for comprehensive and exploitative trade deals". The authors observed that Beijing has aggressively courted resource-rich countries, irrespective of their human rights record, with trade deals, aid packages (including debt forgiveness) and concessional loans. However, most of the loans offered to African countries by China come with agreements largely favourable to the latter than to the former. The authors cited, among other issues, a "no-political-strings-attached" US$2 billion loan granted to Angola by China in 2004, which had to be repaid within 17 years at an interest rate of 15%. However, the terms of the loan stipulated that 70% of the construction projects covered by the loan must be allocated to Chinese companies, while local companies can be granted 30%. The loan consequently created very few, if any, meaningful economic opportunities for the locals in Angola, while China reaped most of the benefits. Akpan and Onya further highlighted that in much poorer countries such as the DRC, the often "corrupt and underfunded" governments have very

little capacity or incentives to engage China for the benefit of citizens (Akpan and Onya 2018: 145).

Gazibo and Mbabia (as cited by Du Plessis 2014: 123) indicated that Africa plays the role of a passive partner in its strategic partnership with China as "the rules of the game" are determined and set by Beijing to the disadvantage of the continent. The authors expounded that "Africa not only lacks a strategy of engagement, it is also incapable of finding the political will that will lead to greater co-operation in their approach towards China" (Gazibo and Mbabia, as cited by Du Plessis 2014: 123). This viewpoint is stressed by other scholars in the broader China-Africa topic, such as Anshan et al (2012: 14), Shinn (2019: 79), Mthembu and Mabera (2021), Monyae (2018), Nantulya (2021b) and (Taylor 2019: 119), among others, who assert that the AU's lack of a coherent African China policy weakens the continent's bargaining position against China. One of the main reasons Africa fails to develop a common policy, according to Taylor (2007: 32), is that some African states, tempted by the economic benefits from their bilateral relations with China, resist multi-lateral agreements and the AU's involvement in their affairs with Beijing. Likewise, Du Plessis (2014) mentioned that some African countries, intentionally or due to lack of capacity, do not disclose information about the aid they receive from China to their counterparts on the continent. The author emphasised that this indicates "a major grey area in China–Africa relations", as aid flows into Africa from China and other aid-providing powers (Du Plessis 2014: 122). However, the lack of an effective and efficient mechanism to manage it means its impact on the continent cannot be adequately assessed (Du Plessis 2014: 122). Additionally, Shelton (2016: 273) cited research by the African Development Bank that suggested that Africa's own institutional and administrative weaknesses hinder the positive impact of Chinese investments on the continent.

The literature review, therefore, shows that China-Africa studies have identified and discussed the perceived convergences and the major challenges in China-Africa relations. However, there is a lack of discussion or analysis of Chinese and African perceptions of the partnership's challenges and ways of addressing them. This study, thus, also seeks to probe how China and Africa perceive and intend to tackle challenges in their partnership. This is important as most of the challenges within the Sino-Africa partnership affect the African continent rather than China. Thus, it is pertinent that this study dedicates special attention to how Chinese and African leaders view

existing and emerging challenges in their strategic partnerships. Furthermore, attention will be given to how Africa's partnership with China affects key aspirations of Africa's Agenda 2063.

2.4. Gaps in the literature

This literature review highlights four issues that stand out. First, scholars in the China-Africa debate understand the concept of strategic partnership differently from researchers that endeavoured to understand the phenomenon and develop its meaning. China-Africa studies pay very little attention to the concept of strategic partnership and view it as self-explanatory. Therefore, these scholars do not attempt to analyse the relationship through this concept. Second, while studies identify and discuss divergences and challenges in China and Africa's strategic partnership, scholars have not investigated Chinese and African perceptions of the challenges of the China-Africa partnership and measures for addressing them.

Third, studies on the China-Africa topic that included the term strategic partnership in their title also neglect the aspect of security cooperation between the two sides. The subject of security co-operation between China and Africa is discussed comprehensively in studies such as Alden *et al* (2018), Barton (2018a) and Benabdallah (2016), among several others. However, the significance of it in this regard is that the concept of 'security' is often associated with the term 'strategic', implying that strategic partnerships have an inherent connection with security cooperation (see, for example, Envall and Hall 2016: 88; Gajauskaitė 2013: 192-193; Renard 2016: 33; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 12; Wilkins 2008; 2012: 68). Therefore, it is relevant to discuss the dynamics of security cooperation in Sino-Africa relations within the context of their strategic partnership.

Fourth, some of these scholars advance the point made by other studies in the broader Sino-Africa topic that China and Africa have compatible development strategies, which are China's 2049 vision and Africa's Agenda 2063 (for example, Alden 2017:24; Benabdallah 2015: 53; Ndzendze and Monyae 2019; Shelton 2016; Zhang and Niway 2018: 129). However, like the other researchers on this aspect, they have not analysed the specific links between these development strategies to explain how they influence each other towards the achievement of the intended development.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter adopted a narrative literature review to analyse how scholars in the field of IR have understood the concept of strategic partnership and how studies in China-Africa relations have applied the concept. Although the term strategic partnership has proliferated in both world affairs and the discipline of IR itself, scholars remain divided on the definition of the term. Some scholars, such as Blanco (2015: 65) and Tyushka *et al* (2019: 46), contend that attempts to develop a universally agreed-upon definition of the term are both needless and near impossible. A major reason for this difficulty that scholars highlight is that strategic partnerships have been established between traditionally friendly states that usually hold common interests and rival states characterised by clashing values and interests, making it difficult to determine the constitutive and descriptive features of such collaborations.

However, scholars do agree that strategic partnerships serve particular purposes for political actors. First, at the international or systemic level, strategic partnerships serve as platforms of interaction between international actors, which affect and shape global relations for the interests of the partnering actors. At the bilateral or inter-relational level, strategic partnerships function as mechanisms for actors to align their policies and manage their cooperation as they strive to achieve their goals. Lastly, at the individual or intra-relational level, strategic partnerships are used by actors to assert their relevance or significance in international affairs. Some scholars, however, maintain that the concept of strategic partnership remains dependent on how states define and use them.

The literature also shows that studies analysing relations between China and Africa have become too vast, particularly as most scholars continue to probe the intentions of China's increased engagement with the continent. However, research on the strategic partnership between China and Africa is limited, and scholars on the topic have a very different understanding of the concept from those who focused on the term. In fact, some studies (Bano and Falki 2016: 77; Du Plessis 2014: 117; Muekalia 2004: 10) suggest that China and Africa have been in a strategic partnership long before the early 1990s when the phenomenon officially emerged in world politics, even though there is no clear meaning of the term. The literature review, therefore, analysed China-Africa studies that attached the term strategic partnership in their title to understand how they explain this assumed strategic partnership.

Contemporary China-Africa relations are understood to have gone through four phases. The first phase started in the 1950s when Africa was engulfed in a wave of liberation movements to free the continent from the shackles of colonialism. The PRC, which was just established in 1949 under Mao, and Africa rekindled their relationship during the 1955 Bandung Conference that brought together previously colonised nations to strengthen their partnership. The second phase followed at the end of Mao's leadership in the late 1970s, as his successor introduced economic reforms aimed at modernising and developing the Chinese economy.

As Africa remained stuck in post-colonial state and nation-building processes, China pursued closer ties with Western powers to attract FDI and technological assistance. The infamous Tiananmen Square incident at the end of the Cold War in 1989 ushered in the third phase of China-Africa relations after that. As China faced a Western-initiated international backlash for alleged human rights violations, Africa responded to the incident with tacit support for Beijing, resulting in increased political and economic engagement between China and Africa. The fourth phase that scholars identify is the establishment of the FOCAC mechanism in 2000, which heralded a new era of institutionalised and multi-lateral China-Africa relations.

Scholars cite varying reasons for intensified relations between China and Africa. Others posit that China and Africa have been drawn to each other by a shared history and common interests. First, scholars on this side of the debate argue that China and Africa's common historical struggle and their converging interest in creating a just and equitable world order form the basis of a "true partnership". As scholars elaborate, the agenda of reshaping the international order has benefited both China and Africa as their political alliance has counterbalanced against the Western hegemony in global institutions such as the UN and WTO.

Thus, China and Africa's bargaining power has increased, and the voices and interests of developing countries in world affairs have also been enhanced. Secondly, China and Africa find common ground on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. The two sides are of the view that Western powers have found a way of interfering in the domestic affairs of developing countries through conditional aid or development assistance. In response, China devised a development assistance programme that does not attach conditions (except for the One-China policy) for recipient countries, thereby bolstering the sovereignty and choice of the development path of aid-receiving countries. Thirdly, studies point out that China and Africa have

complementary strategic development goals in the form of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation and Africa's Agenda 2063.

However, others adopt a more critical perspective, seeing economic interests as the basis for increased China-Africa relations. The argument advanced here is that since the 1990s, as China experienced an economic boom, its need for a stable supply of natural resources, especially oil, was the chief driving force behind its increased engagement with the African continent. Scholars in this camp argue that, under the guise of the non-interference principle, China has invested in diverse sectors and sold weaponry to all types of regimes in Africa, irrespective of their political conditions or human rights record. Consequently, this approach has bolstered rogue regimes and reversed Africa's progress in resolving violent conflicts, protecting human rights and promoting good governance. Additionally, scholars argue that China-Africa trade has carried on the North-South economic patterns as African countries largely export commodities while chiefly importing manufactured goods from China. African companies have also struggled to compete with cheap Chinese-made imports in most African countries, leading to the closure of many local factories and job losses.

This review, therefore, identified four gaps in the literature. The first identified gap was the divergent understandings of the concept of strategic partnership between authors in the China-Africa debate and those that focused on understanding the term. The second identified gap was the lack of discussions on how Chinese and African leaders perceive challenges in their partnership and the approaches to addressing them. The third gap was that studies in China-Africa relations that included the term strategic partnership in their title neglected the subject of security cooperation between China and Africa. The fourth identified gap was that some of these studies advanced the view that China and Africa have converging development strategies but have not examined how precisely these strategies converge to explain how they affect each other's trajectory towards achieving the ultimate goal of development. This study, therefore, seeks to fill in these gaps by analysing the Africa-China strategic partnership using the concept of strategic partnership as an analytical framework and dedicating a special focus on security cooperation between the two sides to understand how challenges in China-Africa relations are understood and addressed, and, particularly, how the partnership affects the AU's Agenda of 2063.

The next chapter outlines the conceptual and analytical framework used for this study.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction

A conceptual framework, according to Miles and Huberman (1994: 18), is a visual or written product, one that "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them". Akintoye (2015, as cited by Adom *et al* 2018: 439) explained that researchers mostly employ conceptual frameworks when current theories are not suitable or adequate for developing a solid structure for a particular study. Essentially, the conceptual framework is the researcher's description of how the research problem will be addressed.

This chapter discusses the conceptual and analytical framework employed in this study to analyse the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership. First, the chapter explores the theoretical background of the concept of strategic partnerships to understand how IR theories have been applied to the concept. This review demonstrates that the concept of strategic partnership has its roots in organisational studies and emerged in the field of IR in the post-Cold War era as policymakers saw it as an alternative to military alliances. Also, it shows that attempts to locate the concept within some of the existing IR theories have produced incomplete explanations, with many scholars rather adopting theoretical syntheses and other analytical frameworks to explain strategic partnerships (Blanco 2016; Czechowska *et al* 2019; Holslag 2011; Michalski and Pan 2017; Pan and Michalski 2019; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019; Wilkins 2008).

Second, the chapter delves into the meaning of the concept of strategic partnership. Similar to many other concepts in the social sciences, the term strategic partnership has posed a challenge for IR scholars to develop an all-encompassing definition. Thus, this section probes the different understandings as well as the key features of strategic partnerships to develop a working definition for this study. Thirdly, the chapter discusses the relationship between the concept of strategic partnership and security to clarify the meaning of security co-operation, as the study focuses on security co-operation within the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership.

Fourthly, the chapter explains the Strategic Partnership Model (SPM) developed by Thomas Wilkins (2008) to elucidate how it will be employed in the study to analyse the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership. The model examines strategic partnerships focusing on three organisational

dimensions: formation, implementation and evaluation. Although Wilkins' model is not overarching, it is a practical and tested analytical tool that is suited to offer credible answers to key questions such as why strategic partnerships emerge, how they perform and impact bilateral and global relations, and why they succeed or fail. Moreover, the model can be used to study all types of strategic partnerships in world politics.

3.2. Conceptual and theoretical foundations of strategic partnerships

The conceptual and theoretical debates on strategic partnerships have been ongoing since the late 1990s. However, the concept remains underdeveloped and under-theorised three decades later. Within the field of business and organisational studies, wherein the term strategic partnership originates (Envall and Hall 2016: 89; Gomes-Casseres 2005: 39; Shenkar and Reuer 2005: 5; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 16; Wilkins 2008: 362), it has been used interchangeably with 'strategic alliances', though the latter is the most used. According to Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 32-33), a strategic partnership in the field of organisational studies is defined as "a formal strategic alliance between mainly two commercial enterprises, formalised by one or more business contracts setting out the goals and procedures of joint pursuit of business activities". While a strategic alliance is generally understood as (Gomes-Casseres 1996, as cited by De Man 2013: 3):

> a collaboration between at least two independent organisations aiming to achieve a competitive advantage that each cannot achieve on its own, […] and is characterised by joint goals, involves some form of sharing of revenue, costs and risk between the partners, provides for joint decision making and is based on open-ended or incomplete agreements

Thus, as Wilkins (2008: 362) noted, the terms strategic partnership and strategic alliance in the business field are, for all intents and purposes, synonymous; distinctions between them are purely semantic. Furthermore, the term 'alliance' is also used interchangeably with strategic partnership and strategic alliance. The meaning of strategic alliances in the discipline of business and organisational studies, however, remains without a universally agreed-upon definition, and there is no standard classification of different types for them (Casson and Mol 2005: 17). The literature similarly does not form an all-encompassing theory of strategic alliances. Wilkins (2008: 362), as a result, elucidated that despite the term's origins and wide usage in the field of business and

organisational studies, it is difficult to obtain a clear definition of strategic partnership from that field, mirroring the dilemma in IR.

Organisational studies nonetheless seek to describe "the delicate conversion of conflict into cooperation, the mobilisation of resources, the coordination of effort that facilitate the joint survival of an organisation and its members" (March and Simon 1994, as cited by Wilkins 2008: 363). Consequently, alliances tend to be an organisational phenomenon in that they shape relations among firms as well as influence the entire international economic system. In this way, strategic alliances are mechanisms between business organisations. The primary aim of alliances is to structure relationships and thereby increase each partner's capabilities and prospects for long-term survival. As a result, Wilkins (2008: 362) argued that the literature on strategic alliances in the business field is relevant to strategic partnerships in international politics.

Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 35) noted that the study of strategic partnerships in the field of IR first appeared in the interdisciplinary approach of international organisation studies. The term was adopted in comparative government, politics, and international political economy (Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 35). However, Wilkins (2008) was the first to develop the organisational approach to study strategic partnerships in world politics. The author argued that strategic partnerships are similar to other alignment structures in that they are "collaborative social enterprises and thus will exhibit both the distinct properties and predictable behavioural patterns common to organisational groupings" (Wilkins 2008: 363). Michalski and Pan (2017: 22-23) further expanded this view, indicating that strategic partnerships exhibit the organisational traits of other alignment systems in world politics—"a dimension that is expressed through their propensity to structure bilateral relations among states and influence the configuration of the international system".

The SPM by Wilkins (2008), however, presented strategic partnerships as "a new form of alignment", though conceptually and theoretically distinguished from the traditional alignment paradigm of military alliances (Wilkins 2008: 363; 2012:54-55; 2018: 501). Alignment, thereby, situated the strategic partnership phenomenon within the realist theoretical tradition. This is because the notion of alignment in world politics generally refers to the adoption of a common posture by two or more actors, which leads them to engage in some form of formal coordinated cooperation towards common, particularly security-related, interests. According to Tyushka and

Czechowska (2019: 35), this alignment perspective has its roots in the realist tradition of bandwagoning and balancing.

Holslag's (2011: 295) position echoed this point, arguing that strategic partnerships have been "propelled by the prospect for absolute gains, relative gains, threats and altering balances of power", while others have taken the "form of balancing, bandwagoning and hedging". Michalski and Pan (2017: 22-23) as well noted that many of the states that have embraced the partnership framework adhere to the realist power paradigm and that several characteristics of strategic partnerships resemble this tradition. According to Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 35), the realist view is the most prevalent perspective in the study of strategic partnerships. From this view, strategic partnerships are a form of alignment in the sense that actors that establish partnerships use them as a means of increasing their chances of survival against the unpredictability of the anarchic international system. Realist perspectives on their own, however, are ill-equipped to explain the multifaceted and diverse forms of strategic partnerships in world politics.

Strategic partnerships have also come to be understood as social constructions, invoking the constructivist perspective (Michalski and Pan 2017: 25-26; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 35). Constructivism emphasises the importance of ideas and language, the means by which ideas are communicated within an intersubjective environment, leading to the social construction of reality (Gros and Fung 2019: 42). In this way, "any fixed meaning of strategic partnerships", as Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 35) pointed, seems improbable. Rather, similar to the famous maxim by Wendt (1992: 391) that "anarchy is what states make of it", strategic partnerships are what states make of them (Holslag 2011: 295; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 35). Blanco (2016: 37) adopted this perspective by shifting from common approaches that sought to explain what 'real' strategic partnerships are, to assessing the functions of the concept. Essentially, he argued that realities could be 'constructed' by actors through strategic partnership as a perlocutionary term; that is, "as a concept that not only describes the reality but is also able to influence the rules of the game" (Blanco 2016: 37).

Likewise, Pan and Michalski (2019: 265) noted how divergent rationales of action are closely related to the objectives of strategic partnerships for the collaborating actors. The authors thus analysed how strategic partnerships are established across the world. Their study focused on how the US, China and the EU's "contending logics" are constructed in order to understand the link

between logics, on the one hand, and interests and values, on the other. Accordingly, the authors found that the interests that shape the imperative of setting up strategic partnerships and the values that inform their viability create four different patterns of collaborating— "the homogenous, marriage-of-convenience, come-in-handy, and heterogeneous"— with contrasting implications for the structure of the international system (Pan and Michalski 2019: 265).

Other scholars (Gilson 2016; Wang 2017) have approached strategic partnerships from the historical institutionalism tradition. From this view, strategic partnerships are a continuation of patterns of behaviour characteristic of the international system. As Michalski and Pan (2017: 12) noted, strategic partnerships are a novelty in world politics, but they are not unprecedented at all. Thus, they are "treading a familiar path" (Gilson 2016: 793) of long-established international structures and the norms underpinning them– path dependency– as illustrated by the widespread bilateral/multilateral treaties, international organisations, alliances, coalitions, security communities, and other international institutions in contemporary world politics. These behaviour patterns stem from entrenched "conceptions of the normal imprinted at a foundational stage, leading to persistence and the reproduction of forms of behaviour, and the shaping of strategies and goals" (Gilson 2016: 794).

Wang (2017: 270) employed historical institutionalism to show that the strategic partnership between China and Switzerland enjoys success even in the face of China's rise and consequent Western anxieties because of the friendly Sino-Swiss relations established since the 1700s. Gilson (2016), on the other hand, shows that the EU and Japan's strategic partnership is 'trapped' in a structural and normative path dependency set in place by the parties' agreement in 1991 (known as the 1991 Hague Declaration). The author argued that the EU and Japan have struggled to "break away from earlier functional and normative assumptions about their relative significance and about each other". As a result, the EU-Japan strategic partnership has been restricted to leaving up to its full potential as a major world economic and political force (Gilson 2016: 795-796).

One of the emerging scholarly endeavours in theorising strategic partnerships is by Czechowska *et al* (2019). The authors designed an 'ideal-typical model' within a realist-constructivist theoretical synthesis to analyse strategic partnerships. Building on the work of Barkin (2010), the synthesis, as the authors elaborated, "brings from classical realism a focus on power politics and on foreign policy, and from constructivism a focus on, and a methodology for studying, the co-constitution

of structures and agents" (Tyushka *et al* 2019: 54). Accordingly, the realist-constructivist synthesis presents strategic partnerships as typically high-level forms of collaboration that permit actors to pursue their interests and enhance their position in global politics. Due to the lack of a fixed meaning, partnerships simultaneously are constantly being (re)constituted as the phenomenon continues to evolve (Tyushka *et al* 2019: 55). The authors, nevertheless, acknowledge that the synthesis falls short of providing "all the ingredients needed for 'meta-theoretical theorizing'" (Tyushka *et al* 2019: 48).

Strategic partnerships remain without an all-encompassing theory. Different studies, thus, have adopted various theoretical syntheses, analytical models and frameworks to study the likewise diverse strategic partnerships existing in the international arena. In the same way, rather than theory, this study adopts an analytical model by Wilkins (2008) (discussed in section 4.5) to analyse the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership. This study adopts this model for two main reasons: first, the phenomenon of strategic partnership lacks a fixed meaning and does not fit within any theory in the discipline of IR. Thus, formulating another theoretical synthesis or using some elements of a single theoretical perspective for the purpose of this study would serve neither any unique purpose in theorising nor in understanding the concept of strategic partnership. Second, theoretical syntheses are unlikely to be replicated in all studies on strategic partnerships. In contrast, Wilkins' model is a pragmatic and tested analytical framework that can be used to study all types of strategic partnerships in world politics to understand why they emerge, how they perform, and why they succeed or fail.

3.3. Defining strategic partnerships

While there are disagreements about the meaning of strategic partnerships, other scholars agree about some of the key constitutive features or standard properties of such partnerships that distinguish them from other forms of alignment, such as alliances and coalitions. First, strategic partnerships transcend standard diplomatic interaction in that they are structured frameworks planned for closer, long-term co-operation (Geldenhuys 2015: 122; Holslag 2011: 295; Michalski and Pan 2017b: 20-21; Parameswaran 2014: 264-265; Strüver 2017: 36-38; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 19; Wilkins 2008: 361; 2012: 68-69). Furthermore, they have the potential to reduce uncertainty between the partnering actors through regularised interactions at various

governmental (official), including high-level and non-governmental levels (people-to-people) (Nadkarni 2010: 48). The institutional makeup of these links, as Parameswaran (2014: 264) noted, may be different, "but outlines of it are usually embedded in the joint statements that identify areas of co-operation, the main agencies involved, and the mechanisms created to advance collaboration".

Second, strategic partnerships are forged between "long-time allies", "longstanding foes" and those that are neither allies nor adversaries (Michalski and Pan 2017b: 19; Nadkarni 2010: 48-49; Tyushka *et al* 2019: 56). They provide a "flexible design formula" (Nadkarni 2010: 48) which to circumvent the friendship/enmity dichotomy of alliance politics (Blanco 2015: 75-8). Strüver (2017: 37) noted that strategic partnerships could be seen as pledges between two or more parties to mute differences on issues of domestic affairs and focus on matters of common interest and concern in the global sphere.

Third, strategic partnerships are primarily 'goal-driven' rather than 'threat-driven' alignments (Parameswaran 2014: 265). No 'enemy' state or other actor is identified as a threat to the partnering actors (Wilkins 2008: 360). Although the partnership may pronounce co-operation to jointly tackle issues such as extremism, terrorism, or serious organised crime (Wilkins 2008: 360). Rather than a particular mission, such as deterring or confronting an adversarial state, the main purpose of strategic partnership is to address common challenges, jointly seize opportunities and address risks. Parameswaran (2014: 265) additionally explains that these collaborations are mechanisms for actors "to pursue opportunities for selective engagement with as many partners as possible without alienating others". Wilkins (2008: 360) further emphasise that strategic partnerships are centred chiefly on mutual interests and, unlike entrenched alignments such as alliances, it is not uncommon to find strategic partners that do not share values.

Fourth, unlike formal treaty-based military alliances that bind participants to rigid courses of action, strategic partnerships are characterised by high levels of flexibility and low commitment costs (Chidley 2014: 154; Czechowska 2013: 47; Parameswaran 2014: 264; Renard 2012; Strüver 2017: 36-38; Wilkins 2012: 68). Strüver (2017: 36) pointed out that, due to this flexibility, the implications of exiting partnerships can be minimal if not entirely insignificant. Parameswaran (2014) argued that "this flexible, non-binding nature of strategic partnerships is perhaps their main attraction". As the author explained, developing and emerging powers in the post-Cold War era

have preferred "limited alignment" in which they are able to forge partnerships with as many states as possible without alienating or provoking any of them (Parameswaran 2014: 264).

Lastly, strategic partnerships are characterised by multidimensional collaboration, entailing several areas of co-operation between the partners (Geldenhuys 2015: 121; Holslag 2011: 295; Michalski and Pan 2017b: 20; Parameswaran 2014: 26). While strategic partnerships are inherently related to security (Envall and Hall 2016: 88; Renard 2016: 33; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 12; Wilkins 2008; 2012: 68), most of them are not security-driven in the same manner as military alliances, security communities or coalitions (Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 12). They generally encompass various sectors for cooperation, particularly economic, political and security cooperation, but also science, technology, and other people-to-people exchanges. In fact, as Wilkins (2008: 361) asserted, a central feature of strategic partnerships is economic cooperation. This is in stark contrast to conventional forms of alignment, such as military alliances and coalitions, which are commonly created exclusively for military or security cooperation against a perceived threat (Walt 1997: 157).

It must be clarified, however, that the use of the term alliance in IR is not restricted to military alliances (Konings 2007: 349). Rather it is often used to refer to non-military special collaborations as well; for instance, political and economic alliances (Konings 2007: 349). To avoid confusion, this thesis will specifically use the term 'military alliance' where it is referring to a collaboration that is defined in this manner.

In line with the above characteristics of strategic partnerships discussed above, a working definition adopted in this study is that:

> strategic partnerships are flexible, non-binding formal structured frameworks designed for intensified, long-term co-operation between two or more actors to pursue mutually beneficial shared or unshared core interests or goals more effectively than could be achieved in isolation, and jointly manage risks and seize opportunities in other areas of strategic interest.

This definition thus departs from the views of authors discussed in chapter 2, whose studies on China-Africa relations included the term strategic partnership in the title of their papers. The working definition developed here specifies one of the features of strategic partnerships as a formal structure, which is therefore based on an agreement between the parties involved. It also highlights that collaborations that have not been officially labelled as strategic partnerships but are based on

formally structured frameworks and exhibit most of the constitutive features discussed above can be classified as strategic partnerships. Such partnerships have been established by political actors such as states (countries) and international organisations or regional intergovernmental organisations (RIOs) such as AU, EU and ASEAN. This study thus focuses on strategic partnerships established among such actors. It is also important to highlight that the term 'partnership' is used interchangeably with 'strategic partnership' in this study.

3.4. Strategic partnerships and security

In the context of this study, it is important to clarify the relationship between strategic partnership and security. There are scholars that have argued that security should not be a requisite area of co-operation in strategic partnerships (Chidley 2014: 143; Strüver 2017: 35). However, other scholars have maintained that these partnerships are inherently related to security issues (Envall and Hall 2016: 88; Gajauskaitė 2013: 192-193; Renard 2016: 33; Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 12; Wilkins 2008; 2012: 68). Renard (2016: 33) noted that "there is, after all, a very large overlap between strategic and security issues". These conceptual divergences stem from the meaning of the interrelated terms 'strategy/strategic' and 'security'.

The word strategy originated in ancient Greece, referring to "the art of troop leader, generalship" in the military (Heuser 2019: 19). The term has since come to refer broadly to a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim, and has been used in various settings, but most prominently in the field of commerce. However, in IR and its subfield of *Strategic Studies*, the term strategy refers to the application of military power to attain political goals, or as Baylis and Wirtz (2019: 5) put it, "the theory and practice of the use, and threat of use, of organised force to achieve political goals". At the core of these political objectives is the security or preservation of the state, which all other goals must serve (Buzan *et al* 1998: 22; Krause and Williams 1996: 230; Morgenthau 1952: 973; Waltz 1979: 126).

Traditionally, therefore, strategy was concerned with security, which in its conventional meaning referred to protecting the state or its core interests against any foreign or domestic threat. As a result, strategy was studied within military academies and institutions (Baylis and Wirtz 2019: 5). Therefore, it was gradually introduced in academic institutions with the emergence of nuclear weapons and the threat they posed to the international community during the Cold War (Baylis

and Wirtz 2019: 5; Duyvesteyn and Worrall 2017: 351). However, the end of the Cold War saw growing criticisms against strategic studies for being too narrow and irrelevant, as major wars were declining while threats to political, economic, social, and environmental security interests were increasing. This led to increasing attention away from the study of strategy to the study of security itself and ultimately to the "broadening and deepening" of the concept of security (Baylis and Wirtz 2019: 2-3).

Consequently, the term has come to encompass traditional security threats and other wide-ranging issues (Buzan et al 1998: 21-23; Krause and Williams 1996: 230). This includes economic crises, political instability, climate change, famine, organised crime, terrorism, and mass migration, as threats to societies, individuals and states (Buzan *et al* 1998: 21-23; Krause and Williams 1996: 230). Likewise, the meaning of the term strategy in post-Cold War IR shifted from 'the use of military power to attain political ends to "a comprehensive way to try to pursue political ends, including the threat or actual use of force, in the course of a dynamic interaction of (at least) two competing wills" (Duyvesteyn and Worrall 2017: 347; Gajauskaitė 2013:190-191). Accordingly, issues or entities deemed strategic to a state or international organisation can be as varied as possessions, capabilities, territory, activities, events, agreements or relations. These are interlinked to the overall mandate or plan to preserve or pursue vital interests. In this way, strategy broadly refers to the use of state means or power, which include military force, economic means, and political or soft power, to pursue core interests.

Thus, as strategic partnerships emerged in the post-Cold War era, they are neither associated with traditional alignment thinking nor the traditional concept of security but rather with the new security perspective. Wilkins (2018) pertinently explains the relationship between strategic partnerships and security. As the author elucidates (Wilkins 2018: 501):

> strategic partnerships are 'security' alignments in the broad sense. That is, they mirror the shift from 'narrow' definitions of the concept of security to 'broad' (or 'extended') versions that include economic, political, environmental, and societal aspects

Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 12) further explicated that not all strategic partnerships are security-driven and security based, but "the security component, be it explicit or implicit, narrow or broadly conceived"– can be identified in all strategic partnerships.

Therefore, strategic partnerships in this study are seen as bilateral or multilateral cooperative frameworks that actors establish as part of their comprehensive plan to pursue their core interests. Kay (2000: 16) observed that they are "a means of shaping the international environment to suit a state's vital interests". However, the concept of 'security cooperation' in the language of IR and among policy-makers remains limited to the traditional meaning of security. The meaning of the term focuses on cooperation between international political actors aimed at addressing traditional security threats to societies and states, such as wars and crime. Where the term is used differently, it is usually labelled explicitly as non-traditional security (NTS) cooperation.

Thus, security cooperation, even in strategic partnerships, is understood in the context of the traditional meaning of security. Though it is not a mandatory area of cooperation in their formation stage, security cooperation remains a key feature in most strategic partnerships. Contemporary threats, such as international terrorism and transnational organised crime, have impelled world actors to engage in different collaborations, including military, intelligence and cooperation between various law enforcement agencies. Actors that establish strategic partnerships and exclude collaborations to address traditional security threats realise at some point that some form of security cooperation is necessary for the sustainability and effectiveness of their partnership.

This study, therefore, accepts the broader meaning of security as associated with strategic partnerships, but the notion of security co-operation is understood within the traditional meaning of security. Most strategic partnerships have positioned themselves within the global human security agenda. Accordingly, they have committed to cooperating on interrelated issues such as economic, environmental and food security. Examples include strategic partnerships between AU and China (Benabdallah 2015: 17), China and EU (Dorussen *et al* 2018: 289), Japan and Australia (Wilkins 2015: 96), EU and Canada (Bendiek and Schenuit 2019: 30), EU and Japan (Gilson 2016: 795), EU and AU (Rein 2015: 553), and the ASEAN-EU strategic partnership (Allison-Reumann and Murray 2021). However, where they mention security cooperation, it usually entails traditional security aspects, for example, joint military operations, peacekeeping, weapons development exchanges and trade, intelligence sharing, and nuclear non-proliferation engagements. Notwithstanding, security cooperation can include collaborations to address non-traditional security threats. However, this is usually stated explicitly (for example, in FOCAC Declarations and Action Plans).

3.5. Wilkins' strategic partnership model (SPM)

This section discusses the model developed as an analytical framework by Wilkins (2008: 363-367) to study strategic partnerships and how it will be applied in this study. The author developed the strategic partnership model (SPM) using insights from business and organisational studies, which, he argued, can equally be applied to study strategic partnerships in international politics methodically (Wilkins 2008: 363). The SPM analyses strategic partnerships in three phases: their *formation*, *implementation* and *evaluation*. Wilkins employed the model in studying the strategic partnership between Russia and China, focusing on "a policy and conceptual analysis of the Russo-Chinese accord". The model has been adopted by other scholars, such as Adelle and Kotsopoulos (2017), Geldenhuys (2015) and Priyandita (2019). Geldenhuys (2015) used the analytical framework to analyse the formal structures and processes constituting the South Africa-Russia strategic partnership. The researcher concluded that the strategic partnership on paper qualifies for a "tight" rating. However, it is weak in practice as the respective republics involved "are still largely unaware of and unaffected by the partnership arrangement, which remains mainly an official relationship" (Geldenhuys 2015: 140-141).

Adelle and Kotsopoulos (2017) used the SPM to investigate and evaluate the EU-South Africa strategic partnership's collaboration on climate change. The authors established that despite the converging climate goals between South Africa and the EU, several important structures created within their partnership to address environmental and climate change issues had been neglected and weakened (Adelle and Kotsopoulos 2017: 229). Priyandita (2019) also used the framework to examine the China-Indonesia strategic partnership, focusing on Indonesia's strategy to utilise the strategic partnership platform to engage China. The author found that, through its strategic partnership with China, Indonesia has created "multiple channels of communication for the purposes of economic pragmatism and the overarching goal of socialising the target state into accepting Indonesia's vision of the international order" (Priyandita 2019: 1). This study, therefore, uses Wilkins' (2008) model to analyse Africa-China alignment of strategic security goals in Africa Agenda 2063 and China’s 2049 vision.

Wilkins (2008: 363) argued that any conceptual model devised to investigate strategic partnerships must be capable of accommodating three fundamental features: "their evolution, scope, and the challenges they face". Thus, the below framework by Wilkins sought to cover these aspects by

analysing several organisational dimensions of strategic partnerships through sequential stages of development during the course of co-operation, which, as indicated earlier, are formation, implementation, and evaluation. The applicability of this model in this study will be demonstrated through the EU-China strategic partnership as a case example because it shares some important similarities with the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership, such as the number of actors involved and different political values between the partnering actors.

3.5.1. Formation

All social and organisational groupings have a formation stage. According to Wilkins, this stage of strategic partnerships is determined by three key factors: environmental uncertainty, strategic fit, and a system principle. First, actors on the international stage operate in a competitive and often hostile environment, which presents uncertainty. Thus, they recognise the benefit of joining forces with other actors to increase their capabilities to mitigate this challenge. While the partnering actors may hold some common threat perceptions, the aspect of countering threats, particularly from third actors, does not dominate inclinations for co-operation in the same manner as military alliances (Wilkins 2008: 363-364).

Environmental uncertainty is often caused by a particular phenomenon that has a knock-on effect on the world order, for example, the 2016 'Brexit' (Great Britain's withdrawal from the EU), the end of the Cold War or the 2008 global financial crisis. Brexit, for instance, triggered a political and economic crisis in Europe that threatened the very survival of the EU and the feasibility of the concept of regional integration (Malik 2018: 91). Facing uncertainty and growing scepticism over integration even among its own member states, the EU sought to strengthen its key partnerships, which saw EU-ASEAN relations being upgraded to a strategic partnership in December 2020 (Allison-Reumann and Murray 2021).

Great Britain swiftly entered into a free trade partnership with Australia and launched bids to become an ASEAN Dialogue Partner and a member of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) (Bonura 2021). Individual partnering actors, however, may have their own strategies to adjust their interests to changing environments. For example, the EU-China strategic partnership, which was established in 2003, was impelled by the perceived uncertainty of the international order engendered by China's rise (Cameron 2020: 1-2).

For the EU, the notion of strategic partnership presented an ideal forum to engage and coordinate goals and strategies with a rising, likely destined for superpower status, China. In contrast, China sought to assuage Western anxieties concerning its rise by demonstrating a willingness to cooperate and establish a common understanding (Maher 2016: 960-961).

Second, as Wilkins elaborated, the uncertainty induces actors to seek compatible and interested partners based on shared interests and, if possible, common political values or ideologies "for an overall strategic fit". This involves a process of assessing what partners will likely bring to the relationship, such as resources or capabilities, for the effective pursuit of goals. This is primarily about forging a partnership with noticeable short-term and long-term benefits, for example, political, economic or security-related gains (Wilkins 2008: 364). According to Michalski and Pan (2017b: 19), the crucial component is the perception among the partnering actors that they both "bring a 'strategic' dimension to the partnership in terms of global impact, regional significance, or economic and security interests". The EU-China strategic partnership, in this regard, was partly prompted by noticeable mutual economic gains and capabilities to address global security threats. China was urged by its need to maintain its rise by forging an economically beneficial relationship with one of the West's most powerful actors (Cameron 2020: 1; Kefferpütz 2019: 3-4; Michalski and Pan 2017a: 618-619). In comparison, the EU sought to benefit from China's rise and its large market for European-made goods (Cameron 2020: 1; Kefferpütz 2019: 3-4; Michalski and Pan 2017a: 618-619).

Third, following the identification of a compatible partner, actors will initiate dialogue with their counterparts to explore the prospects and opportunities for cooperation. Driven by a common purpose, this is where the likely partners establish a system principle or "reason for being". Wilkins explains that the system principle is "the overarching framework of mutual agreement and understanding" between the partners concerning how the international order should work and is typically based on a common worldview shaped by shared values and interests. Consequently, the system principle (such as promoting a multipolar world or a rules-based international system) serves as the source or basis of specific goals and objectives of the strategic partnership.

However, the partnering actors may often interpret common goals differently and hold unofficial goals or 'hidden agendas' (Wilkins 2008: 364). The EU-China strategic partnership's system principle, for example, was "the pledge for a multipolar world order" (Holslag 2011: 299) to

contain "the worst excesses of American imperial hubris" following the US's unilateral decision to invade Iraq in 2003 (Maher 2016: 961). However, the EU, on the one hand, sought to both demonstrate its relevance as an independent international actor and to rope in China into the EU's vision of a multilateral, liberal international order (Pan and Michalski 2019: 269). While China, on the other hand, aspired to contain the US's influence by promoting multipolarity and collaborating with as many actors as possible (Maher 2016: 961).

Lastly, the formation of strategic partnerships is "a top-down or elite-driven process". It usually involves high-level political leaders such as heads of state or leaders of international organisations. Most, if not all, strategic partnerships in world politics have been jointly announced by leaders such as presidents, prime ministers, and heads of international organisations. In the same way, the declaration of the strategic partnership between the EU and China in 2003 was made by Romano Prodi, the then President of the European Commission, and the former Premier of the PRC, Wen Jiabao (Christiansen *et al* 2019: 19; Maher 2016: 961; Wen 2004).

Therefore, the SPM in this study will reveal the underlying factors at the formation stage of the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership. It will bring to light what uncertainties Africa and China faced at the time, the key motivations for the creation of the partnership, the partnership's strategic dimension, and the system principle that guides the development and pursuit of goals.

3.5.2. Implementation

After formally establishing the strategic partnership, the next phase is implementation, which primarily concerns building and maintaining relationships. The implementation stage of the partnership involves the construction of an organisational or institutional structure for coordinating co-operation. As Wilkins (2008: 364) explains, this institutional framework can acquire different levels of complexity depending on the envisioned scope or degree of collaboration and the bureaucratic levels involved. The institutional structure of the EU-China strategic partnership, for example, was initiated with the Joint Statement of the 7th China-EU Summit, which declared the Non-proliferation and Arms Control agreement, Customs Co-operation Agreement, Science and Technological Co-operation Agreement, among other agreements, to facilitate co-operation in these areas (Mission of the PRC to the EU 2004).

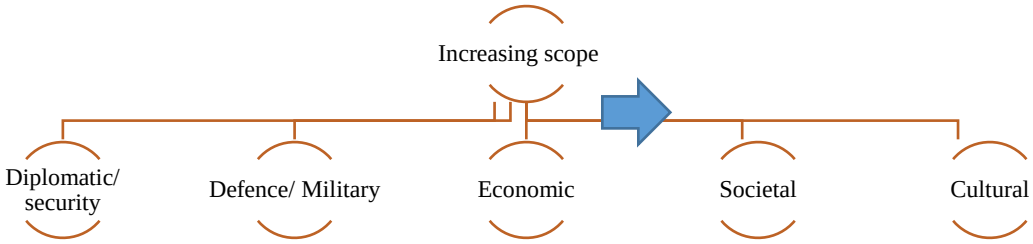
Non-proliferation, for instance, played an important role as China and the EU had a mutual interest in preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. However, the framework of co-operation faced complications and hurdles as China, due to its vested interest in maintaining good relations with Iran, thwarted some Western-initiated UN resolutions against Iran, and the EU often lacked a cohesive approach in engaging China on the matter (Christiansen *et al* 2019: 135; Holslag 2011: 302). Wilkins highlights three key points in the construction of an institutional structure. First, the number of partners involved shapes the complexity of the organisational structure. Secondly, the partnering actors usually do not merge their respective organisational mechanisms or individual identities. Lastly, every partnership will be uniquely designed as they involve different actors (Wilkins 2008: 365).

The EU-China strategic partnership is more complex than, for example, the South Africa-Russia strategic partnership, for the reason that the former involves many actors while the latter is only two actors. Compromises and agreements in the South Africa-Russia partnership have relatively been easier to reach, as there are only two cohesive actors and thus two competing interests. On the other hand, the EU has often had to compete with some of its individual member states' economic interests in their bilateral relations with China (Cameron 2020: 1-2). This is an important aspect that is pertinent to the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership that this study seeks to investigate; that is, whether the multiplicity of actors in this partnership complicates the implementation of agreements.

According to Wilkins, the complex system comprises "a non-hierarchical structure, a collaboration-based culture, and a relatively equitable distribution of power and authority among the partners". In figures 1 and 2 below, the author depicted the organisational structure, which organises relations among the partnering actors on two axes, namely, functional areas and hierarchical connection. Figure 1 illustrates the five functional areas organised according to expanding cooperation scope, with diplomatic security at the starting point and cultural at the highest end of the range. Wilkins (2008 365) points out that while diplomatic security and military relations are usually important areas of collaboration, "economic co-operation is often found at the forefront of collaborative activities". The hierarchical connections represented in figure 2 show that the domestic public is the area with the least hierarchical connection but the deepest with regard to "coupling". By analysing the multiple engagements between strategic partners on both

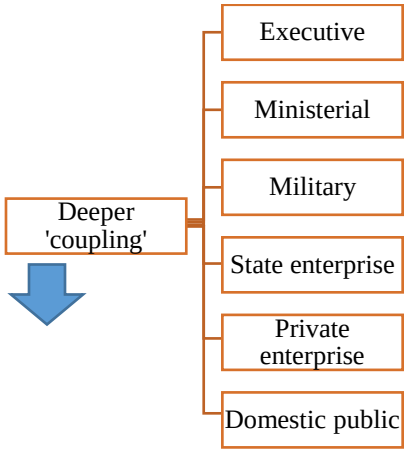
the X and Y axes, Wilkins (2008: 365) argues that "the degree to which the partners are coupled (loosely, moderately, or tightly)" can be ascertained.

Figure 1: X-AXIS: functional areas



Source: Wilkins (2008:365)

Figure 2: Y-AXIS: hierarchical connections



Source: Wilkins (2008:365)

Wilkins further explains that the creation of an institutional structure shapes the partnership in three ways. First, it generates a sense of shared understanding of expectations (norms) and highlights the sensitive issues among the partners, which, in the long term, constructs a new common 'identity' or organisational culture. Secondly, it affects the configuration of the international system in that it influences the behaviour of other actors in relation to the partnership.

Lastly, the quality of the organisational structure, well or poorly-defined objectives, power balances or disputes between partners affect the implementation of agreements and prospects of the partnership's survival as a cohesive and effective collaboration (Wilkins 2008: 366). The emergence of the EU-China strategic partnership, for example, was accompanied by Western expectations that deepening ties with Beijing would socialise the communist, "authoritarian regime" into Western liberal norms and values and thereby develop a common identity with China (Maher 2016: 961; Michalski and Pan 2017a: 618).

However, the seemingly deepening ties between Western Europe and China since 2003, especially in the areas of trade and security, raised concerns among politicians and analysts in the US. Gill and Murphy (2008, as cited by Holslag 2011: 4), for example, stated that the EU's partnership with China posed a threat to the traditionally strong transatlantic relations while simultaneously worsening China-US ties. Notwithstanding, the EU-China strategic partnership constructed a strong institutional structure for coordinating cooperation in various sectors, including trade, security, science and technology, and education. However, the partnership has been plagued by disputes concerning China's alleged broken promises to tackle massive subsidies to its state-owned enterprises, enforced technology transfer, and intellectual property theft, among other clashes (Cameron 2020: 2).

This model, therefore, will examine how the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership has been implemented. It will unpack the institutional structure that has been constructed to facilitate co-operation, with a particular focus on security, to analyse how co-operation has been implemented, how it has affected Africa’s security landscape and how challenges have been perceived and addressed.

3.5.3. Evaluation

The final phase, evaluation, concerns assessing the effectiveness of the strategic partnership. According to Wilkins, this involves revisiting some of the first principles of the formation and implementation phases. The evaluation of strategic partnerships can be conducted by assessing four areas. The first is the alignment of interests and values. As Wilkins indicated, the closer interests and values of the partnering actors converge, the easier they can be aligned within the

partnership, creating a more cohesive collaboration with stronger incentives for mutually beneficial co-operation.

According to Bergquist (1995, as cited by Wilkins 2008: 366), "common interests and values, goals, and perspectives are ultimately what makes or breaks most partnerships". The EU-China strategic partnership, for instance, has particularly been put to the test by conflicting political values and norms, which led to a near collapse of the partnership in 2008 concerning China's handling of protests in Tibet (Christiansen *et al* 2019: 20; Michalski and Pan 2017b: 49). Furthermore, China's policy in its Xinjiang province in 2021 triggered tit-for-tat sanctions between EU and Chinese leaders and led to the suspension of the China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), putting the partnership in limbo (Ni 2021).

Second, the strategic partnership must be assessed by its progress toward achieving key goals. The partnership's ability to accomplish its objectives is extremely crucial to its sustainability and survival (Wilkins 2008: 366). While permanence cannot be guaranteed for any organisation, discernible progress or success in achieving most of the key aims and objectives is central to keeping the organisation going. As Grevi (2010: 3) argued, "strategic partnerships not only are sustained but they deliver". What has perhaps managed to sustain the EU-Strategic partnership, for instance, despite some fundamental differences, is the achievement of economic objectives that have produced significant mutual economic gains, with both sides becoming each other's largest trading partner after China overtook the US in 2021 as the EU's top trading partner (Cameron 2020: 1; Cooban 2022; Lo 2021).

Third is validation and reconfirmation by all parties to the partnership. This is essentially about "mutual loyalty and commitment" (Tyushka and Czechowska 2019: 24), which all parties need to demonstrate through both words and action from the formation stage of the partnership and from time to time. Without observable commitment, a partnership may likely lose credibility and, therefore, become a 'false partnership' (Wilkins 2008: 366). In false partnerships, the term strategic partnership may simply serve as a rhetorical strategy employed by actors "to help them around the rough edges of shifting global politics" (Kay 2000: 16).

As Tyushka and Czechowska (2019: 25) explain, actors may openly label their collaboration as a strategic partnership, while "in reality such a relationship might not manifest much partnership, strategic relevance, or either". The EU-China strategic partnership in this regard has been marred

by broken promises and conflicting political values, with the EU eventually labelling China a "systemic rival" in 2019 (Cameron 2020: 1). However, the partnership remains of important strategic relevance not only for the two actors but also in world politics in general, owing to the massive size of their economies and trade relations and the impact they have on the world economy and politics (Christiansen *et al* 2019: 88; Lo 2021).

The last aspect involves mutual perceptions, which highlight factors that may strengthen or weaken the integrity of the strategic partnership, such as historical factors and ideological or cultural differences. Such issues may contribute to creating a climate of mutual trust, which is crucial for achieving sustainable co-operation (Wilkins 2008: 366). For instance, though the EU-China strategic partnership has endured, mutual trust has been conspicuously lacking within the partnership, mainly as a result of incompatible ideologies and interests. The complete lack of mutual trust in EU-China relations has recently placed the prospects of the partnership in question as some EU leaders in 2019 announced the "end of naivety towards China" and signalled that the Union was willing to walk away from the partnership if China continues to violate agreements (Kefferpütz 2019: 3-4). Wilkins further indicates that public opinion, particularly in liberal democratic societies, can serve as a supplementary barometer of a partnership's performance. In this regard, public opinion may influence how states select strategic partners and continue with existing ones (Wilkins 2008: 366).

The strategic partnership's future prospects, according to Wilkins (2008: 366), can also be affected by other factors such as international pressures, unexpected major events, shifting goals, changes in the status of a partner, hidden agendas or cultural tensions. For instance, Russia's war with Ukraine that started in February 2022 has further put a strain on EU-China relations as they find themselves on opposite sides of the conflict. The EU and its allies were quick to condemn Russia's actions as "unprovoked aggression" and a violation of international law. Western countries further responded with severe economic sanctions that led to an exodus of Western multinational corporations from Russia. However, Chinese leaders and others in countries such as India, Iran, Brazil and most African countries have resisted condemning Russia. Beijing continued to align itself with Moscow and even increased its oil and gas imports from Russia, with Chinese firms also rushing to fill the vacuum in the Russian market left by Western firms (Cooban 2022).

At worst, such factors mentioned above as external pressures and hidden agendas may lead to the "exit stage" or collapse of a partnership (Wilkins 2008: 366). A pertinent example is the EU-Russia strategic partnership that finally collapsed in 2014 following years of conflicts and disagreements (Kapoor 2021: 4). The issues included the NATO expansion, EU enlargement, the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, alleged Russian cyber-attacks in EU states, alleged Kremlin-ordered assassinations of Russian critics, and the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Kapoor 2021: 4). However, some ineffective partnerships may be maintained more in form than substance, becoming "hollow or false partnerships" (Wilkins 2008: 367). In contrast, if the partnership proves to be effective, it may expand by taking in new partners or evolve into a closer relationship such as an alliance or other form of security organisation. Nevertheless, the future of any organisation depends on how it addresses the challenges it encounters.

Similarly, the SPM will evaluate the effectiveness of the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership by assessing the alignment and compatibility of the partners' interests and values. This will include the progress towards the achievement of the partnership's goals, the commitment of the partnering actors and trust between them, and other factors that may affect the future prospects of the partnership.

As Wilkins (2008: 367) acknowledged, though, the SPM is certainly not all-encompassing and has met some criticism. Blanco (2016) criticised the model for treating strategic partnership as a fixed category of relations between actors on the global stage. The author argued that this view of strategic partnership as a concept with a distinct universal meaning and a set of standard properties ignores the other functions or 'meanings' of the concept, particularly the function of the term as a language strategy in world politics (Blanco 2016: 40). The term strategic partnership may have a "perlocutionary" function for actors, for example, as a language tactic for exaggerating the significance of collaborations to influence world politics. Envall and Hall (2016: 91) argued that the interpretation of strategic partnership as a form of alignment among international actors is inaccurate. The authors used China and the US, Australia and China, and China and India, to point out that other partnerships such as these do not fit Wilkins' model. Rather, the authors argued that the concept of strategic partnership is best explained as a "new security practice" that marks the emergence of new forms of "security governance" (Envall and Hall 2016: 88).

However, these criticisms or perceived weaknesses of Wilkins' model do not diminish its analytical utility. Strategic partnerships, in their varying types, whether in form or substance, are social collaborations in world politics created with particular aims and agreements that are to be implemented within a formalised framework of co-operation. They have particular characteristics that distinguish them from other forms of collaboration, such as alliances, security communities, or coalitions. Therefore, Wilkins' SPM is well suited to analyse all types of strategic partnerships to answer important questions, such as why they are formed, how they perform towards achieving their aims, how they affect national, regional and world politics, and whether they succeed or fail.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the conceptual and analytical framework adopted in the study. First, it surveyed the theoretical foundations of the concept of strategic partnerships. It showed that the concept of strategic partnerships originated in business and organisational studies and emerged in the field of IR in the early 1990s as states sought to disengage from the alliance politics of the Cold War. In addition, it showed that IR scholars have been struggling to fully comprehend and integrate the phenomenon of strategic partnership in the discipline's mainstream theories and approaches, such as realism, constructivism and historical institutionalism, or develop a stand-alone theory to explain it. Many scholars, rather, have employed theoretical fusions and different analytical tools to study strategic partnerships. As a result, rather than a theoretical synthesis or some elements of a single theory, this study adopts Wilkins (2008) strategic partnership model (SPM) as an analytical framework because it is suitable and replicable in studies of strategic partnerships.

The chapter also clarified how the term strategic partnership is understood in this study. The concept of strategic partnership has been understood differently by different scholars and policymakers, thus, presenting a challenge in the scholarship in efforts to offer a comprehensive definition similar to the field in which the concept originates. Thus, the study adopts the definition that strategic partnerships are: flexible, non-binding structured frameworks designed for intensified, long-term cooperation between two or more actors to pursue mutually beneficial shared or unshared core interests or strategic goals more effectively than could be achieved in isolation and jointly manage risks and seize opportunities in other areas of interest. The chapter further clarified the meaning of the term security cooperation. While strategic partnerships are

associated with the broader meaning of security, the concept of security cooperation remains limited to the traditional meaning of security. In other words, the view is that security issues are those threats that can be addressed through legitimate organised force. This study thus adopts this understanding of security co-operation.

Lastly, the chapter discussed Wilkins' (2008) SPM as the analytical framework employed in this study. The model assesses strategic partnerships through three phases: formation, implementation and evaluation. Like all other models and theories, Wilkins' model has some limitations. However, it is a well-formulated, pragmatic analytical framework that can provide compelling answers to key questions concerning the reasons international actors form strategic partnerships, how these partnerships influence inter-state relations, and, most importantly, how effective are they in achieving goals. Moreover, while theoretical syntheses are still applicable to investigate the phenomenon of strategic partnership, they are unlikely to be replicated in all studies. The SPM model, on the other hand, can be used to study not only all types of strategic partnerships in their entirety but also through focusing on different areas of cooperation, as in Adelle and Kotsopoulos' (2017) analysis of South Africa and EU's cooperation on climate change.

In the next chapter (4), the research methodology used to carry out this study is unpacked and clarified.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001: 14), research methodology is "the general approach and strategy the researcher takes in carrying out the research project". Kothari (2004: 8) defined it as "a way to systematically solve the research problem". The methodology section of a research paper, in essence, explains what the researcher did and how they did it, allowing readers to evaluate the reliability and validity of the research results. The methodology thus sheds light on the rationale and path of the methodical processes adopted in carrying out a research study to gain more knowledge about a phenomenon being studied. It clarifies how the researcher views and approaches reality and the phenomenon they seek to study, how they plan to undertake the research, and the program of action, stating the specific steps that will be followed to achieve the aims and objectives. The methodology also concerns the methods and tools used to gather and analyse the information, assess the authenticity of the findings, and clarify the limitations that may challenge the findings.

This chapter discusses the research methodology used for carrying out this study. First, the chapter explains the research paradigm adopted, which clarifies the study's ontology and epistemology. Second, the chapter explains the research design, explicating the overall logical plan of the study. This section details the steps followed in conducting the research, from developing the research problem to achieving the aim. Third, the chapter outlines the research methodology. This section explains the research approach, methods of data collection, population and sampling techniques, and data analysis methods.

The fourth section address issues of validity and reliability. It demonstrates the rigour in carrying out the study and, therefore, the genuineness of the findings. Fifth, the chapter proceeds to discuss the ethical considerations related to the study's research approach and methodology. The last section clarifies and addresses the limitations of carrying out the research and their potential implications on the findings.

4.2. Research paradigm

According to leaders in the field of qualitative research (Creswell 2014: 6; Guba and Lincoln 1994: 105), a paradigm is "the basic belief system or 'worldview' that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically, and epistemologically fundament always". Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 191) point out that the paradigm or "interpretive framework" is "the net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises". On the one hand, ontology can be explained as the researcher's fundamental belief system about what constitutes life and existence. In other words, it is how the researcher perceives the world or what the researcher assumes to be reality. Epistemology, on the other hand, concerns the question of how a researcher came to know what they know; that is, the process of acquiring that information and the source of it (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017: 27).

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017: 27) further elaborated that epistemology is about the very basis of knowledge, that is, its nature, kinds, how it is gained, and how it is conveyed from a researcher to an audience or other researchers. As for methodology, this refers to the overarching plan detailing the approach, methods and techniques employed in carrying out a systematic study about a specific phenomenon. In this way, a research paradigm constitutes the beliefs and principles that shape how a researcher views reality, how they know what they know, and how they intend to study a phenomenon. A paradigm, therefore, is the researcher's conceptual lens through which they examine the procedural aspects of their study to determine the methods of data collection and analysis that they will use.

4.2.1. The constructivist/interpretivist paradigm

This study uses a *constructivist/interpretivist* research paradigm to analyse the China-Africa strategic partnership. The interpretivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology; that is, it views reality as a socially constructed phenomenon that is dependent on the subjective interpretation of those who partake and those who seek to understand it. From this perspective, there are multiple interpretations of reality rather than a single, observable state of existence (Creswell 2014: 6). This is in contrast to researchers conducting quantitative studies grounded on the positivist paradigm, as they view reality as an observable, stable, and measurable objective truth that exists 'out there' (Merriam and Tisdel 2016: 9). The epistemological aspect of this study is based on authoritative

knowledge, that is knowledge from scholarly or research works (for example, books and journals), experts, and leaders in government and organisations. The interpretivist paradigm adopted here further assumes a naturalist methodology, which Kivunja and Kuyini (2017: 33) explain as an approach in which "the researcher utilises data gathered through interviews, discourses, texts and reflective sessions".

4.3. Research design

Research design is defined as "a framework specifying the methods, techniques and procedure for collecting and analysing the needed information in a research project/study" (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007: 58). According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016: 163), it is the "general plan about what you will do to answer the research question". Robson (2002, as cited by Boru 2017: 98) explained that there are three main forms of research design classified according to their purposes: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016: 175) clarified that exploratory studies seek to investigate a phenomenon that has not been studied well or had not been clearly understood. Their aim is to tackle emerging problems on which the existing literature has neglected or has not addressed sufficiently. Explanatory studies, on the other hand, aim to identify the basis or reasons behind a particular phenomenon or problem and provide evidence to support or refute a certain explanation, narrative or prediction, or to establish causal relationships between variables (Boru 2017: 98). In descriptive studies, researchers aim is "to gain an accurate profile of events, persons or situations" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016: 175). The authors added that the design of a research can also have a combination of purposes. The section below outlines the research design adopted in this study.

4.3.1. Exploratory/explanatory design

This study's point of departure was its research problem, namely, the alignment of the AU and China's strategic goals under reasons that the two sides share compatible philosophies and strategies, even though some apparent fundamental discrepancies present significant challenges for Africa to realise its Agenda 2063 aspirations. Thus, the research aimed to acquire in-depth insight into the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership in order to answer the research question; that is, how the partnership impacts the AU's Agenda 2063 peace and security trajectory. In line

with the research aim and question, the study adopted an exploratory and explanatory research design grounded on a qualitative approach (see subsection 4.4.1 below).

A qualitative exploratory and explanatory design fits the purpose of this study because it is the first to explore and analyse the alignment of the AU's Agenda 2063 with China's Vision 2049 (the Chinese Dream). It seeks to understand the partnership and how the strategic goals of each of these parties are aligned and how each of them benefits or accomplishes their goals. Additionally, in accordance with the analytical model (SPM), as discussed in chapter three, the study is explanatory as it aims to assess the effectiveness of the AU-China partnership in terms of progress in the achievement of goals and the manner in which engagements between the partners affect each other's goals. In so doing, the explanatory dimension attempts to explain the practicality and predict the possible outcome(s) of the partnership for each partner, but more specifically for the African side.

Furthermore, a qualitative design is suitable for this study because the research process in qualitative studies "is emergent" (Creswell 2013: 47); meaning that, is flexible and adaptable to change. As Maxwell (2013: 19) elaborated, unlike quantitative research, quantitative studies do not commence from a fixed point of departure or follow a predetermined order or specific steps. Qualitative designs "involve interconnection and interaction among the different design components" (Maxwell 2013: 19), which are appropriate to study phenomena entailing social interactions and processes such as the AU-China strategic partnership. Accordingly, the study also employed qualitative methods in sampling, instruments, and data collection and analysis (see section 4.4).

The design of this study also builds on previous studies discussed in the literature review (chapter 2), which had studied some aspects of the Africa-China strategic partnership but had not provided sufficient understanding of this partnership. Most of these scholars, Ado and Osabutey (2018); Akpan and Onya (2018), Arbab (2007), Huang (2008), Konings (2007), Muekalia (2004), Shelton (2016), and Van de Looy (2006), as mentioned in chapter two, ignored the concept of strategic partnership, although they included the term in their titles and, therefore, purporting to investigate this 'partnership'. These studies thus only examined the growing and increasingly institutionalised cooperation between China and Africa, focusing mostly on economic cooperation. In particular,

these studies sought essentially to confirm or prove whether China and Africa have established or are still building a strategic partnership and whether the partnership is mutually beneficial.

This study, on the other hand, goes further to probe the meaning and applicability of the concept of 'strategic partnership' in Sino-Africa relations, as well as aspects such as the context, basis, and purpose of the concept in China-Africa ties, to understand the partnership's impact on the AU's Agenda 2063 peace and security goals. The design adopted here speaks to the interpretivist paradigm in that the reality of the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership is constructed through the qualitative extraction of meanings from texts and interviews. Furthermore, the design considers the meanings the actors involved (AU/African countries and China) attach to their social interactions within the context of the phenomenon being studied.

Data collection of this study commenced with a literature review to survey existing research on strategic partnerships and China-Africa relations. This was followed by the meticulous study of texts, for example, books, journal articles, policy documents, speeches, statements, declarations, and interviews of experts on the topic of China-Africa relations. As in typical qualitative designs, the endeavours of data collection and analysis, concept development and modification, developing the research questions, and recognising and addressing issues of validity were undertaken more or less simultaneously. Therefore, it stands to reason that each aspect influences all of the others. For example, during interviews, some of the experts provided or referred to additional sources for more information, which assisted in refining the literature study and approaching the research problem. As Leedy and Ormrod (2021), noted that, of all the designs at the disposal of researchers, a qualitative research design is "the least prescriptive". The authors elaborated that "There are no magic formulas, no cookbook recipes for conducting a qualitative study" (Leedy and Ormrod 2021: 260). Maxwell (2013: 19) also elucidated that "qualitative research design is a 'do-it-yourself' rather than an 'off-the-shelf' process", which usually "involves 'tacking' back and forth between the different components of the design, assessing their implications for one another".

The study commenced by investigating the purpose of the AU-China strategic partnership and/or the basis upon which it was formed. This part aimed to examine the historical background and the factors surrounding the formation of the Sino-Africa strategic partnership, and then analyse the aims and objectives pronounced in the partnership since the founding of FOCAC and how they have evolved over time. Second, the study sought to analyse how African countries and China

perceive the effects of their intensified cooperation, particularly on security. This was undertaken by examining the effects of Sino-Africa security cooperation, any provisions in FOCAC agreements for addressing any potential challenges that may emerge, and how African and Chinese leaders have reacted to and addressed the challenges. Third, the study focused on security cooperation between China and Africa to understand the areas of convergences and divergences in the partnership. It examined the origins of security cooperation in the partnership, the underlying motivations and interests, and how it affects Africa's security trajectory. Lastly, the study probed the Sino-Afro security cooperation within the context of the alignment of Africa's and the PRC's key development strategies, which are the AU's Agenda 2063 and China's 2049 vision (the Chinese Dream), respectively.

4.4. Research methodology

Research methodology has been defined differently by various scholars. However, the convergent view is that it is a general "roadmap", "plan", "blueprint", or approach and strategy (Leedy and Ormrod 2001: 14). Research methodologies consist of the assumptions, postulates, rules, and methods "that researchers employ to render their work open to analysis, critique, replication, repetition, and/or adaptation and to choose research methods" (Leedy and Ormrod 2001: 14; Schensul 2008: 516). Methodology elucidates research components such as approaches and methods of data collection and analysis, which have been systematically applied to conduct a trustworthy research project. This section outlines the methodology adopted in undertaking this research.

4.4.1. Qualitative research approach

Research approaches, according to one of the pioneers in the field of social research, Creswell (2014:3), "are plans and the procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation". In accordance with the research design, this study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is a systematic investigation of a social phenomenon in its usual or normal environment (Creswell 2014: 4). The subject of qualitative inquiry, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 3) explain, can include issues such as how organisations function, how groups or individuals behave in particular contexts, the manner

in which people experience aspects of their lives, and how social interactions construct relationships.

The qualitative researcher thus seeks to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to "social or human problems" (Creswell 2014: 4; Denzin and Lincoln 2017: 43). Creswell further elaborated that the process of qualitative research entails "emerging questions and procedures" and "data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data" (Creswell 2014: 4). Therefore, qualitative research, as Denzin and Lincoln (2017: 43) put it, assumes a naturalistic and interpretive approach to studying reality. Staller (2012: 1161) expounded that the work of qualitative studies is often characterised as "messy". This is not because researchers in this field are careless and unsystematic "but because the process is not strictly controlled and must be adapted to the realities of the environment" (Staller 2012: 1161).

This study, therefore, followed a similar qualitative approach of studying the phenomenon —the AU-China strategic partnership— in its natural environment, that is, without attempting to influence or interfere with actors or the social interactions being studied. A qualitative research approach is suitable for this study because the phenomenon being studied involves social interactions, structures and processes that can mostly likely be understood through careful analyses and interpretation, rather than applying a standard formula.

4.4.2. Qualitative methods

Following the qualitative approach and design, the study sought qualitative data to address the research problem and pursue the aim. Data collection was carried out in two ways. The first involved secondary data collection or secondary research in which the methods employed were the thorough study of documents/texts (for example, academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, news articles, conference papers, research publications and policy briefs) and audio-visual material such as internet videos and recordings of relevant events. Secondary data collection, in simple terms, entailed studying and collating existing data on the topic at hand. The second way was to collect primary or raw data, which was gathered from online/virtual interviews, and from documents/texts such as speeches, statements, conference declarations, and policy documents. Additionally, the indirect observation method was used to observe or follow current affairs

concerning China-Africa relations, and publicly accessible and relevant proceedings and recordings of conferences or summits of the AU, FOCAC and the African Peace and Security Annual Conference (APSACO). However, it should be clarified that indirect observation was not used to collect data per se. The method served only as way of keeping the researcher up to date with current developments on the topic. After noting information that could be used for this study during indirect observation, the researcher then sought more information that could be referenced from publications or articles by reputed news agencies.

4.4.3. Population

A population is a set of people with a certain set of characteristics relevant to a research project (Banerjee and Chaudhury 2010). Thus, the target population in this study consisted of two categories to ensure that the sample would be representative. The first was relevant experts (researchers/scholars) specialising in China-Africa studies. The second category was government officials. This included African government officials in South Africa, embassies or Missions of the 46 other African states and the PRC in South Africa, as well as officials from the regional or intergovernmental organisation involved in this case, the AU.

4.4.4. Sampling

A sample in research is a subset of the target population of a particular study. Discussions of sampling, as Leavy (2017: 75-76) noted, usually focus on "who is in your study—the subjects, respondents, participants, or collaborators". Sampling essentially concerns selecting a number of participants for purposes of the research from a larger population specifically related to the study.

4.4.4.1. Purposive sampling

The study used the purposive or judgement sampling technique, as the research aim required the use of experts and experienced persons in the relevant area of the research. Unlike probability sampling, purposive sampling, as Leavy (2017: 79) pointed out, is "a strategic approach to sampling in which 'information-rich cases' are sought out in order to best address the research purpose and questions". This method involves the deliberate selection of particular cases, individuals, events or contexts in order to obtain important information that cannot be acquired

from alternative sources (Leavy 2017: 79-80). Therefore, participants in the sample of this study were included by virtue of qualities such as their profession, position or experience. The criteria did not include the institution they work for or any particular affiliation. The experts interviewed in this research thus were chosen because they have extensive work experience or have carried out comprehensive studies on the subject of China-Africa relations, not merely because they work for a particular institution. To ensure that the sample was representative, the researcher sought to include Chinese scholars along with other non-Chinese experts in the first category of the population; and government officials from east, north, west and southern African countries.

The purposive sampling method suited this study because in-depth information about the topic could most likely be obtained from respondents that are significantly knowledgeable about China-Africa relations than participants that are not. As a result, the researcher had to purposely identify participants that would fit this criteria for the interviews.

4.4.4.2. Sample size

The researcher planned to have a sample of a minimum of 20 respondents consisting of 10 from each category of the population—10 China-Africa experts from the first category; and in the second category, seven officials from African governments, two from the Chinese government and one AU leader. At the maximum and due to time constraints, the envisaged sample was 35 respondents consisting of 15 experts; and 16 government officials out the 46 African countries with representation in South Africa, two AU leaders and two Chinese officials. However, at the time of writing the research proposal for this study, the COVID-19 global pandemic had particularly affected bureaucratic systems in governments around the world, making it difficult to obtain approval from governments to interview their officials. As a result, the study encountered great difficulty in accessing crucial participants from the second category of the population. Therefore, the final sample that this study worked with was sourced only in the first category. Even efforts to reach the minimum number of participants targeted in this category faced great obstacles.

Thus, the total number of experts interviewed was six. They hailed from various think tank institutions and universities. These institutions include, first, the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), a peace and conflict studies research institution based in Oslo, Norway. Secondly, the Institute of Global Dialogue (IGD) – a foreign policy think tank based in Pretoria, SA, focuses on

South Africa's foreign policy, African Studies, and multilateral governance. Thirdly, the Centre for China-Africa Studies (CACS) – a research institute within the University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, which specialises in wide-ranging studies of Africa-China relations. Finally, the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) is a research institute based at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, focusing on African and international political affairs. The expert from the latter institution is based at the London School of Economics in the United Kingdom.

4.5. Instruments

Instruments are the tools that researchers use in the research process to actually collect the data. The collection of data began with gathering already existing data through documented information or texts (for example, books, journal articles, research reports and conference working papers) and audio-video material. The data was then written in the first drafts of the literature review chapter. This was followed by the fieldwork data collection, which primarily relied on semi-structured interviews. Additionally, news television channels, websites and videos of current affairs available on the internet relating to China-Africa relations were used. As mentioned above, these current affairs sources assisted the researcher in observing current affairs and developments in the topic.

4.5.1. Personally/self-administered questionnaires

Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 142) defined a questionnaire as "a preformulated written set of questions to which respondents record their answers, usually within rather closely defined alternatives". In accordance with the design and methodology, the study used personal or self-administered qualitative questionnaires. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit more in-depth responses from the interviewees regarding how they understand the AU-China strategic partnership. Furthermore, the questionnaires probed the interviewees' thoughts on the partnership's impact on Africa's Agenda 2063 peace and security trajectory. The questionnaire contained a list of 22 open-ended questions divided into four themes according to the four research objectives.

4.5.2. Interviews

Merriam and Tisdel (2016: 107) explain that an interview is a structured conversation through which "knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee". According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 142), an interview is "a guided, purposeful conversation between two or more people". Interviews are conducted by researchers as part of the data collection process. The purpose is to obtain information from human respondents about the phenomenon or topic being studied. The interviews can be structured; if this is the case, planned predetermined questions are laid out beforehand. Interviews can also be semi-structured; if this is the case, planned predetermined questions are used. However, flexibility within the conversation is allowed. Lastly, interviews can be unstructured; in this case, the interview is conducted through in-depth conversations with no predetermined questions. Regardless of the interview type, however, it can be conducted individually or in a group setting. Furthermore, face-to-face, telephonic or online (virtual) interviews may be held.

4.5.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

The interviews employed in this study were semi-structured as the type of information needed and respondents to provide it were known from the outset. Thus, the interviews followed a list of pre-formulated qualitative questions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because the interviews in this study intended to look for themes and patterns within the information obtained from respondents that may create, corroborate or refute certain narratives concerning the phenomenon being studied. Due to distance and safety concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were held on the online meeting platform, Zoom and were video recorded. Each interview lasted an average duration of an hour.

4.6. Data analysis

According to LeCompte and Schensul (1999: 143), data analysis is "a process used by researchers to reduce and make sense of vast amounts of data so that impressions that shed light on a research question can emerge". Reduction is part of the analysis in which the researcher "sorts, selects, focuses, simplify, abstracts, and transform the raw data that appear in written-up field notes" (Miles and Huberman 1994: 11). Marshall and Rossman (1999:150) elaborate that the analysis process

aims to "bring order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data". This study used Wilkins' (2008) strategic partnership model (SPM), discussed in chapter 3, in conjunction with an inductive data analysis approach. Thus, the study adopted analytic induction as a method of data analysis.

Analytic induction, as Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 350) explained, is a general strategy for qualitative data analysis. Through analytic induction, the researcher seeks generalisable interpretations of phenomena through qualitative data collection until cases that support an alternative interpretation are established or negated (Sekaran and Bougie 2016: 350). As the authors elaborated, analytic induction commences from "a (rough) definition of a problem" and then carries on with a putative or hypothetical interpretation of the problem. The researcher then proceeds with a thorough and systematic inspection of data and evidence. In the instance that some evidence contradict the researcher's hypothetical explanation, Sekaran and Bougie point out that "the researcher either redefines the hypothesis or excludes the 'deviant' case that does not confirm the hypothesis." Analytic induction, as its name indicates, assumes inductive logic, which allows the researcher to modify their hypothetical interpretation of the phenomenon throughout the research process (Sekaran and Bougie 2016: 350).

For this study, the analytic induction method commenced from the research problem, which is that claims by Chinese and African leaders that the Sino-Africa partnership is mutually beneficial appear to be refuted by some academic studies that insist the relationship is exploitative in favour of China. The data analysis method was framed according to the research's aim and four objectives. Each research objective was allocated five questions, which were used for the interviews. The method was then used to analyse unstructured texts (for example, interview responses, speeches, statements, declarations, and policy documents) to examine themes and patterns for how narratives, positions or perspectives are communicated by experts and actors involved in the subject of the study. Meanings from unstructured texts were then compared with events, interpretations and perspectives contained in structured texts (books, journal and news articles, policy briefs, and other scholarly publications) to determine whether they corroborate or refute any side of the China-Africa debate as discussed in the *background to the study* and *problem statement* sections in chapter one. This method suited this study as the research problem required analysis of qualitative data in the form of structured and unstructured text and audio-visual material.

4.7. Reliability and validity

As Neuman (2014: 211-212) noted, "it is not possible to have perfect reliability and validity". Nevertheless, the concepts of reliability and validity are generally concerned with demonstrating the rigour in carrying out the research so that readers can determine the authenticity and trustworthiness of the results. On the one hand, reliability represents the replicability of processes and methods to achieve consistent results. However, rather than aiming for the same results, Merriam and Tisdel (2016: 252) clarified that qualitative reliability concerns the question of "whether the results are consistent with the data collected". In other words, in view of the data collected, do the study results make sense, and, therefore, are they consistent and dependable? On the other hand, validity refers to the 'appropriateness' of the processes and methods and the 'truthfulness' of the results (Whittemore *et al* 2001: 523). Unlike in quantitative studies, wherein validity can be reduced to the accurate application of methods and techniques (Maxwell 2013: 122), qualitative validity "is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (Creswell and Miller 2000, as cited by Creswell and Creswell 2018: 274)

4.7.1. Validity

Qualitative researchers strive for validity through several strategies. This includes *adequate or prolonged engagement* in data collection; *negative case analysis*– discussing contrary information; *truthful interpretations* of participants' experiences; *respondent validation* (member checks)– checking with participants to ensure accurate representations of participants' views; *peer debriefing*– involving another person to review the study; *triangulation* of sources and methods; *self-evaluation* for researcher bias; and *thick description*– providing sufficient descriptive information of the context and methods.

This study strived for validity through prolonged engagement and persistent observation of the phenomenon. The researcher spent the first year of this research studying the literature extensively and following current affairs (indirect observation) to understand the debates and developments in China-Africa relations. This was coupled with negative case analysis, which entailed the purposeful search for data that supported alternative explanations or challenged the researchers' expectations or emerging findings. To ensure truthful interpretations of participants, the researcher

conducted interviews openly and transparently and made the video recordings of the sessions available to participants. For respondent validation, a preliminary analysis was sent back to interview respondents for confirmation to avoid misinterpretation of their views.

Peer debriefing at this level (post-graduate) is a built-in component of the research process. This was carried out through constant meetings with the study's academic supervisor. Drafts were sent to him for review, allowing for questions and critique from the development of the research proposal to writing the entire thesis. The Department of Politics Research Committee members also reviewed the research proposal. Due to the often-biased interpretations of the China-Africa relationship that have characterised the debate, for example, perceptions of China as a new imperial power in Africa versus China and Africa as natural partners, self-evaluation was important in the study. The researcher, as an African, hoped to see the African continent achieve its aspirations. Therefore, it was necessary for the researcher to be always on guard against personal biases to ensure that the researcher did not fall on either side of the debate without critically assessing data and facts. Thus, triangulation was achieved through multiple data collection methods (interviews, indirect observations, and documents study) and multiple data sources (comparing and crosschecking data collected from all methods).

For thick description: this study was mostly conducted remotely with minimal interaction between the researcher and human participants, largely due to the global coronavirus pandemic. Human interactions have been limited between the researcher, the research supervisor and the experts who participated in the interviews. However, these limitations did not impede the collection of reliable data for the study, as crucial information has been available on publicly accessible mediums and channels. These include text data in the form of books, journal articles, conference papers, research publications, and news articles.

Furthermore, other sources include official speeches and statements on official websites of governments, international organisations, think tanks and news agencies. The researcher was immersed in the topic through these sources, coupled with the religious following of current affairs, uncovering key historical background information on China-Africa relations that shed important light on the current state of affairs. Throughout the process, the researcher and research supervisor roughly met two times a month, with drafts and progress updates sent every two weeks.

This ensured scrutiny, critique and guidance from the research supervisor, which helped refine and refocus the research aims and objectives and how the topic was approached.

By the time fieldwork began in the second year of this project, the researcher was well versed in the topic. The researcher interviewed some of the best scholars working on the China-Africa topic since the early 2000s. The interviews did not produce unexpected information. Rather, they largely confirmed the researchers' expectations, as they reflected the interviewees' views in their previous and latest written works on the topic. In different ways, all of the interviewed scholars asserted that China and Africa's partnership is fundamentally skewed in favour of the former. They pointed out, as has been documented by many others throughout the literature, that while some material benefits have been documented across several African countries, China has disproportionately been reaping more benefits, often with some significant setbacks for Africa.

4.7.2. Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research can be achieved through triangulation and audibility (the audit trail). As mentioned, triangulation concerns the use of multiple methods of data collection. Auditability refers to the ability of the research process to be audited by other reviewers. This study thus achieved reliability through triangulation of tried and tested data collection and analysis methods, namely, a literature study, interviews and indirect observation. The literature covered in this study was extensive, encompassing the most pertinent China-Africa scholarly works and other pieces by reputed news agencies. In addition, while the interview sample was relatively small, the interviewees hold authoritative knowledge, as they are experts who have extensively worked on this topic for extended periods and have expressed some converging views on the China-Africa debate. The document study and interview methods were augmented by the researcher keeping up to date with current developments through daily news channels. This enabled indirect observation of current issues that shape relations between Africa and China. In this way, the methods of collecting data were reliable.

As for the audit trail, this strategy involves keeping a research journal or recording memos throughout the research process (Merriam and Tisdel 2016: 252). However, keeping a journal was unnecessary as this study was not data-heavy and did not entail numerous procedures and steps. The researcher primarily used a computer to write drafts, set reminders, send invitations, conduct

interviews and store files. Therefore, this study can rather be audited by tracing the development of the thesis from the research proposal stage and its approval, reviewing of chapter drafts by the research supervisor and scrutiny of the research findings in comparison with the research aims and objectives, sources used, literature review, research methodology and the conceptual framework.

4.8. Ethical considerations

Ethics in research refers to legal, moral and professional codes of conduct in scientific or academic research (Sieber 2004: 402; Žukauskas *et al* 2018: 143). Research ethics, thus, "provide a guideline or set of principles that support researchers in conducting research so that it is done truthfully, professionally and without harming anyone in the process" (Hickey 2018: 8).

In line with the 'key values' outlined in the University of Pretoria's (UP) code of ethics (UP, 2020)[2], the researcher in this study began the data collection process after receiving clearance from UP's Ethics Committee. Secondly, the researcher took into account the rights and responsibilities as a researcher under the UP by complying with sections C-1 and C-2 of the university's code of ethics (UP 2020: 9-14). Thirdly, the researcher upheld and respected the rights of human participants in the research by adhering to the Bill of Rights (Chapter 2) of the Constitution of South Africa (RSA 1996) and section D-6 of UP's code of ethics (UP, 2020: 23-29).

4.9. Limitations of the study

As indicated, this study was conducted when the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic wreaked havoc worldwide and killed millions of people. Many countries instituted restrictive measures to contain the spread of the virus, resulting in some nonessential businesses, work, learning activities and travelling coming to a halt or with limited operations. Institutions of learning, including universities, also experienced disruptions that posed significant challenges for post-graduate researchers. As a result, the study encountered great challenges that resulted in the following limitations.

[2] UP. 2020. University of Pretoria Code of Ethics. Available at: https://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/6/files/rt-429-99-university-of-pretoria-code-of-ethics-for-research.zp158366.pdf (Accessed: 2 July 2021).

4.9.1. Methods

The researcher originally planned to use a mixed-method approach to gather qualitative and quantitative data. For quantitative data, the researcher envisaged collecting it through a carefully designed online survey targeting key government officials from at least ten of the 54 AU member states and two Chinese government officials. If the researcher succeeded, such quantitative data could have enriched the qualitative information collected in understanding the meanings that African and Chinese leaders attach to the AU-China strategic partnership. However, between March and September 2020, when the researcher was developing the research proposal, restrictive measures instituted by the South African government and other countries made it impossible to obtain government approval to permit their staff to participate in the current research. Thus, due to time constraints, the researcher was compelled to adjust the research methods, as there were indications that normalcy may not return for at least the next two years.

4.9.2. Sample size

Similar to the methods, the situation adversely affected the sample the researcher intended to use in this study, as it was required to include the sampling techniques in the research proposal. The researcher eventually used a small sample, numbering only six participants, which may seem insufficient for making reliable conclusions. In addition, the sample is composed of outsiders (experts/scholars) only rather than those directly involved (government officials). First-hand information from AU officials, AU member states and Chinese government officials would have provided vital information in understanding how African leaders understand the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership.

It must be acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic began to subside in 2022 and most restrictions instituted by governments and organisations were lifted. However, this year was actually the final year of this study and the researcher was finalising the data analysis and writing of the thesis. Moreover, it was not possible to change a methodology aspect such as sampling. To change the sample, the researcher would have been required to, first, request approval from the relevant authorities in government to interview their officials. The second step would have involved using the permission from government to apply for approval from the relevant Faculty's

Ethics Committee to proceed with the interviews. This is a considerably time-consuming process that would have mostly likely exceeded the duration limits of this study.

4.9.3. Access to research-related events

Between January 2020, when the pandemic broke out, and mid-2022, research-related events such as seminars and conferences that are very useful to novice researchers disappeared. Those held online did not permit interaction with attendees and speakers as these events usually allow. These events are important for post-graduate researchers as they stimulate ideas and help in networking and access to potential participants. Thus, this study was also limited by insufficient interaction with other researchers.

4.9.4. Access to some literature

Due to the pandemic, accessing library resources was difficult and time-consuming. It was even more difficult to access scarce materials that could only be used for limited hours due to demand. Thus, during the first two years of the study (2020-2021), the researcher struggled to access or thoroughly read some important books on this topic due to limited access to them or only accessing a few chapters. It was only in 2022, in the final year of this study, when the COVID-19 pandemic abated that the researcher was able to access key literature.

4.9.5. Scope of discussion

As a novice researcher, the researcher does not have extensive experience in undertaking research and producing academic papers of this magnitude individually. Thus, the scale and depth of debates covered in this study could be impaired on some levels compared to the works of experienced scholars.

Therefore, it is acknowledged that this study's findings may have some shortcomings. However, these limitations do not undermine the validity of the findings as the data was collected genuinely and from credible sources and represent the reality of the phenomenon studied. Furthermore, a sufficient search for data that could support an alternative explanation or disconfirm the findings

was carried out. Therefore, while the absence of the above limitations would have led to richer data, the study would still come to the current findings.

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter discussed and elucidated the research methodology adopted in this study. First, the chapter explained the study's constructivist or interpretivist research paradigm or worldview. This worldview suited the purpose of the study, as the aim was to understand socially constructed meanings, understandings and perspectives of actors and observers. Second, the chapter outlined the research design and explicated the steps followed from the research problem to achieving the aim. This section also explained the type of research design, which is explanatory. An explanatory design was chosen because available research related to the topic and the study's aims and objectives are mostly exploratory and descriptive. Thus, this study sought to build on them and provide an explanatory interpretation, that is, answers to 'why' questions. Third, the chapter detailed the research methodology employed for this study. This section explained the research approach, data collection methods, population and sampling, and data analysis methods. A qualitative approach was suitable because the nature of the topic and context under which actors operate can best be studied through analysis of qualitative data collected through methods such as texts/documents examinations, interviews and observations.

Fourth, the chapter addressed the issues of reliability and validity of the study's findings. The concepts of reliability and validity aim to demonstrate the thoroughness or rigour in conducting the study and, thus, establish the credibility or authenticity of the findings. This study achieved validity through prolonged engagement in data collection, negative case analysis, truthful interpretations, respondent validation, peer debriefing, triangulation of sources and methods, self-evaluation, and thick description. For reliability, triangulation and audibility ensured that the methodology and research process was dependable.

Fifth, the chapter clarified the ethical issues considered in carrying out the study, showing that the researcher considered all the ethical issues related to this study and that the research was carried out ethically and legally. Lastly, the chapter discussed the limitations in carrying out the study that may also affect the findings. The study was largely conducted under global restrictive measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted data collection methods, sample

size, and access to research-related events and literature. However, these limitations do not invalidate the findings of the study in any way.

Having clarified the research methodology, chapter five analyses the rise of contemporary China-Africa relations that led to the establishment of a strategic partnership between the two sides.

CHAPTER 5. CONTEXTUALISING CHINA-AFRICA RELATIONS

5.1. Introduction

Relations between Africa and China have been traced as far back as around 200 BCE. However, official diplomatic relations between African countries and China emerged in the 1950s. The emergence of this diplomatic relationship started when the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) supported anti-colonial movements on the African continent. African countries formed the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, which was transformed later in 2002 into the African Union (AU). This organisation was created to enhance Africa's efforts to unite the different countries and merge resources to free the continent from colonialism and, most importantly, pursue security and prosperity for their people.

Relations between China and Africa during the Cold War were thus centred on the struggle against colonialism. China provided material and political support for liberation movements in many African countries. However, China-Africa relations waned in the 1970s and 1980s. A revival was seen in China-Africa relations in the 1990s. This was triggered when the Western nations condemned China for the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing. Africa's mute and favourable response to the incident encouraged China to strengthen its relations with Africa as the Western reactions were seen as 'interference' in the internal affairs of another state. Subsequently, China and African countries established the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, marking a new era of formalised and institutionalised relations between the two sides. Since then, relations between China and Africa have witnessed unprecedented growth, particularly in trade.

This chapter examined the development of contemporary China-Africa relations. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section analysed the historical development of China-Africa relations. It commenced by tracing the earliest contacts between African and Chinese people. The chapter aimed to understand how relations between China and Africa developed over time and how this history shaped their interactions during the Cold War era. The section also explored the events at the end of the Cold War that led to intensified relations between China and Africa in the 1990s. It also sought to understand the engagements between China and Africa in the 1990s to understand the context towards the establishment of the FOCAC at the end of the decade. The

chapter then deliberated on Africa-China relations after the formation of the FOCAC in 2000 and in the current state of affairs wherein the two sides have aligned their key strategic goals, namely, Africa 2063 and China 2049 vision, respectively.

The second section focused on Africa-China security cooperation on the African continent. Similar to the previous section, this section started by examining the origins of security relations between the two sides. The chapter highlighted that security relations between the two countries emerged during the Cold War and were influenced by the global politics of the era. It also explored how developments towards the end of the Cold War influenced security relations between Africa and China. Here the chapter showed that security relations continued to evolve into the early 2000s after the formation of FOCAC. The section, lastly focused on the FOCAC era as security cooperation rose to prominence, leading to the establishment of institutional platforms. This included the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security (ICACPPS) and the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, which are aimed at coordinating security cooperation between China and Africa more effectively.

5.2. Historical overview of China-Africa relations

5.2.1. Early contact

Most of the literature that detail the first interactions between China and Africa suggest that the Chinese were the ones that initiated contact with the African continent (Abegunrin and Manyeruke 2020; Alden and Alves 2008; Kusimba 2018; Snow 1988). Snow (1988) wrote a detailed account about the earliest China-Africa interactions. The author indicated that Chinese scholars and historians maintain that the first Chinese on their records to make contact with Africa were traders from the Han dynasty (202 BCE to 220 CE). According to these scholars, Chinese merchants during this era conducted long-distance trade, and "were already in touch with two of Africa's most imposing ancient states", the kingdom of Kush in the northern Sudan and the kingdom of Axum in north eastern Africa (Snow 1988: 2). Alden and Alves (2008: 46) also documented that archaeological discoveries of Chinese artefacts were found in North and East Africa. These discoveries, which stretch as far South and inland as Great Zimbabwe, are traced to sometime between 200 and 100 BCE. The artefacts have provided evidence of some of the earliest contacts

between the Chinese and Africans. Chinese traders reportedly obtained exotic artefacts from Africa and brought them home (Alden and Alves 2008: 46; Whitaker and Clark 2018: 25). Interactions between China and Africa at this time predominantly centred on trade, with Chinese merchants occasionally reaching the African continent through maritime explorations and trading expeditions (Abegunrin and Manyeruke 2020: 9-10; Alden and Alves 2008: 46; Kusimba 2018: 83; Snow 1988: 6; Whitaker and Clark 2018: 25).

Early contacts between Chinese and Africans peaked in the 14th and 15th centuries during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) when China's shipbuilding technology had significantly advanced, "prompting several sea ventures to the south under the command of Admiral Zheng He (1405-1433)" (Alden and Alves 2008: 46). Snow (1988: 24) recorded that Zheng He's fourth exploration and trade expedition in 1414 reached the then East African city-state of Mogadishu (now capital of Somalia), which had a thriving overseas trade, where he met some merchants and invited them to Peking in China. As the author narrated, the merchants accepted Zheng's invitation with enthusiasm and arrived at the Chinese court along with representatives of the Sultan of Mogadishu in 1416. By the end of the year, the Chinese emperor had received envoys from no less than three African territories, Malindi, Mogadishu and Brava, prompting the Chinese to return the favour. Subsequently, between 1417 and 1419, envoys from the Chinese emperor and traders visited Mogadishu, Brava, Malindi and southern areas around modern day Tanzania and Mozambique (Snow 1988: 24-25).

However, the bourgeoning relations between the Chinese and Africans were interrupted in mid-15th century, just when some European nations began their explorations and incursions in Africa, Asia and the Americas. In China, an internal power struggle in 1421 in the Ming Dynasty culminated with a foreign policy shift that saw the flourishing Chinese overseas travels coming to an end (Snow 1988: 31). During this era of China's 'closed-door' policy, interactions between the Chinese and Europeans were initially based on trade and missionary expeditions from Europe. However, disagreements and disputes over trading rights and diplomatic status led to the two Opium Wars in the mid-19th century. These wars were fought between China's last dynasty (Qing, 1644-1911) and European forces, primarily from Britain and France. China suffered defeats in both wars. From the first war in 1839 to 1949 (a period that came to be known as China's Century of Humiliation), the Chinese empire was forced to sign unfair treaties and give some major

concessions, including territorial concessions, to foreign powers (Alden and Alves 2008: 46; Whitaker and Clark 2018: 24)

In Africa, the Europeans started by establishing trading posts and resting stations in the early 1600s for their long journeys to the Asian continent where they conducted extensive trade. Then they started exploring and establishing some form of cooperation with the native people they encountered on the land. However, interactions soon led to imperialist aggression and military invasions of several African lands by the foreigners. By the mid-20th century, European powers such as Britain, France and Portugal had conquered and colonised the rest of the African continent, with the exception of Ethiopia. As a result of China's closed-door foreign policy and the upheavals on both sides, relations between China and Africa during this period came to a halt (Abegunrin and Manyeruke 2020: 10; Alden and Alves 2008: 46; Snow 1988: 31).

5.2.2. Africa-China relations in the 20th century

The dynastic rule in China that was shattered by the Opium Wars was officially replaced in 1912 by the establishment of the Republic of China (ROC). However, for several years, the ROC was engulfed in a civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Kuomintang (KMT)-led nationalist Government from 1927 to 1949, coupled with Japanese invasions. Subsequently, the CCP, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, deposed the ROC government, in what is known as the Chinese Communist Revolution, and established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 (Alden and Alves 2008: 49-47; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 26-27). The founding of the PRC marked the end of the Century of Humiliation for the Chinese nation. Simultaneously, the PRC launched the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' as the core doctrine of its foreign policy. The Principles entailed "mutual non-aggression, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit, mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and peaceful co-existence".

As Barton (2018a: 417) indicated, however, the PRC has since placed a distinct priority on the principles of non-interference and state sovereignty. These principles hold that any form of interference in the internal affairs of other countries is a violation of the right to self-determination. The Five Principles were subsequently established by the Panchsheel Treaty of 1954 between China and India (Alden and Alves 2008: 47-49). According to Barton (2018a: 417), China's first

application of the non-interference principle in the history of its foreign policy was in 1950. The PRC signed a bilateral treaty of alliance with the Soviet Union just before the principle was officially incorporated as part of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Barton 2018a: 417).

The founding of the PRC, as noted by scholars such as Alden and Alves (2008: 47), Konings (2007: 343), Shinn (2019: 63) and Taylor (2006: 20), coincided with the wave of decolonisation movements sweeping across the developing world in the 1950s and 1960s. This era saw many African countries attaining independence from colonial rule. As a result, new contacts between China and Africa emerged in the 1950s as the anti-colonialist movements stirred developing countries to cooperate and strengthen their efforts. Subsequently, leaders from newly independent African and Asian states met at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 for the first Asian-African Conference to promote cooperation between the two continents (Alden and Alves 2008: 47). Accordingly, the conference focused on opposing colonialism and neo-colonialism and promoting the idea of non-alignment against the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union.

During the conference, narratives of shared experiences under Western subjugation and exploitation inspired an international campaign for solidarity and comradeship among leaders of Asian and African states. For China, the conference was a victorious moment for two reasons: First, it managed to propagate the Five Principles as an appealing basis for south-south relations, which were then incorporated into the Ten Principles of Bandung. Secondly, Beijing gained official recognition on the African continent as Egypt became the first African country to establish formal diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1956 (Alden and Alves 2008: 47; Shinn 2019: 63; Taylor 2006: 20).

The perceived success of Bandung encouraged the formation of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) in 1957 as another initiative to promote solidarity among developing countries (Shinn 2019: 64). Chinese leaders, as Eisenman (2018: 433) pointed out, subsequently established the Chinese Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity to coordinate relations with African political organisations through the AAPSO. Furthermore, as Cairo was the first African city to host a Chinese embassy, Beijing used the embassy to spread its influence and assistance in Africa (Eisenman 2018: 437).

As Cairo was the first African city to host the inaugural AAPSO conference, it was also home to several African liberation groups, thus, making it easy for Chinese officials at the embassy to

network with African political organisations. Relations between Africa and China gradually grew at follow-up AAPSO conferences that were held in Guinea (1960), Tanzania (1963) and Ghana (1965). As more African countries gained independence, China recognised African states' important role in global politics (Alden and Alves 2008: 48; Eisenman 2018: 437; Shinn 2019: 64).

African politics and security in the late 1950s mostly focused on efforts directed at dismantling the colonial system and reversing its damage upon nations on the continent (Alden and Alves 2008: 48). As a result, African leaders recognised the need to create a platform to unite African states to pursue this aim. Thus, several leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda and Patrice Lumumba, agreed to hold the All-African People's Conference (AAPC) to explore ways of realising African aspirations. The first AAPC gathering was held in Accra, Ghana, from 8 to 13 December 1958 (Makinda and Okumu 2008: 11). China, together with other powers such as the Soviet Union, India, Canada and the UK, sent their delegations to participate at the conference as observers.

Between 1958 and 1961, follow-up engagements among African leaders and conferences in Tunisia (1960) and Egypt (1961) led to an agreement to establish a proper organisation. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was thus established in 1963, which became the institutional expression of the Pan-African movement (Packer and Rukare 2002: 366; Murithi 2012: 663; Yusuf 2019: 37). As a result, and similar to the PRC, the OAU declared "non-interference" in the domestic affairs of African states as one of its key principles (Makinda and Okumu 2008: 23; Whitaker and Clark 2018: 33-34). Likewise, China's relations with the African continent at this time were centred on its support of anti-colonial movements in African countries. Ukeje and Tariku (2018) noted that the PRC, as a dedicated supporter of liberation groups' anti-colonial movements in Africa, also established a political and pragmatic relationship with the OAU (Ukeje and Tariku 2018: 293-294). However, Beijing's communist ideology did not particularly resonate with African leaders at the time for both sides to have a direct and concrete engagement (Ukeje and Tariku 2018: 293-294).

As the US-Soviet struggle for global influence during the Cold War intensified in the 1960s, China faced competition from its ally, the Soviet Union, for supporting the anti-colonial movements in Africa, which damaged relations between the two powers (Eisenman 2018: 433; Whitaker and

Clark 2018: 54). The 'Sino-Soviet split', as it came to be called, troubled many African countries as they aspired to maintain good relations with both the Soviet Union and the PRC (Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 35). Regardless of the unease, Africa benefitted through aid from the two powers as they vied to outdo each other (Whitaker and Clark 2018: 54). Furthermore, Beijing's rivalry with Moscow, which had been involved in African affairs for longer (including in the processes leading up to the formation of the OAU), presented a major barrier for China and the OAU to develop an effective relationship (Ukeje and Tariku 2018: 294-295).

China, however, had an advantage over the Soviets due to its image as a member of the developing world, thanks to its history of struggles against Western encroachments, which it shared with most developing countries. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai thus embarked on an African tour, visiting ten African countries between late 1963 and early 1964, which marked a new era in China-Africa relations (Alden and Alves 2008: 48-49; Shinn 2019: 64). According to Shinn (2019: 65), Zhou's African tour initiated a new foreign policy emphasising the significance of regular high-level interaction between Chinese and African leaders. As a result, China succeeded in having fourteen newly independent African states establish formal diplomatic relations with the PRC by 1965 (Taylor 2006: 23).

Despite the Sino-Soviet tensions, by 1980, political relations between Africa and China had risen significantly, with more than 40 African states having established diplomatic ties with the PRC (Konings 2007: 346). Relations between China and Africa between 1970 and the late 1980s, however, experienced some decline for several reasons. First, African countries struggled with post-colonial state building, with many drifting towards authoritarianism and being plagued by internal instability. The transition from colonies to independent states did not open up opportunities for peace and economic development in Africa as many had anticipated. In the immediate post-colonial era, many of the newly independent African states had neither enough time nor expertise to create viable political structures. Most, if not all, of them, were hampered by extreme poverty and scarcity of resources and skills to pursue developmental objectives and engage effectively with international actors (Shinn 2019: 69).

Second, Beijing's Maoist economic policies in China failed to deliver sufficient development for the populous country, while the 1960s Cultural Revolution exacerbated the consequent socio-economic ills. Thus, China's ability to assist other developing nations became constricted. Thirdly,

compelled by the need to modernise its economy to address its domestic issues, China began focusing on transforming its economy. This transformation led the introduction of a free-market economy, opening up to FDI and closer cooperation with Western developed countries (Konings 2007: 346; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 111-112).

Sino-Africa relations, despite setbacks, recorded some milestones between 1970 and 1989. With the help of several African states at the UN, for example, the PRC won diplomatic recognition against Taiwan in the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 1971. China also managed to provide technical assistance and economic aid to the tune of US$4.8 billion to several African countries and to support various liberation movements (Konings 2007: 346). The most cited case of China's commitment to the African continent, even during its time of domestic upheavals, is the 1,860 km Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA). The project aimed to connect the Copperbelt in landlocked Zambia with Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. The ultimate goal of this project was to stimulate economic activity between the two countries and break Zambia's reliance on the White-ruled Rhodesia (currently Zimbabwe) for transportation of its copper resources. The TAZARA project was constructed and financed by China through a $405 million interest-free loan in 1975 (Alden and Alves 2008: 51; Konings 2007: 346-347; Shinn 2019: 67; Taylor 2007: 34).

What differentiated China's assistance or aid to African countries was that its loans were politically non-conditional, interest-free, had flexible repayment schedules, and were based on principles such as equality, mutual benefit and respect for the sovereignty of the host (non-interference). Beijing's development assistance, as a result, provided a realistic alternative to Western aid as the former's loans and assistance to African states came with terms that seemingly presented no threats to economic independence and state sovereignty (Konings 2007: 346; Tull 2006: 466-467). This strategy strengthened the image of China as an anti-imperialist emerging power and an ally of previously colonised and developing countries against the "unjust" Western-led (neo)liberal international order.

However, Alden and Alves (2008: 51) indicated that China at this time was still very much a developing nation seeking fast modernisation to address domestic demands. These ambitions, therefore, restricted much of its external policy initiatives. On the other hand, Africa remained an important ally for China's global power aspirations. Therefore, as the authors explained, the solution was to reduce its aid and focus on projects requiring lesser investments but quicker returns.

However, China was more focused on cultivating deeper relations with Western powers, as leaders in Beijing realised that, for China to 'catch-up' with the developed countries, it needed closer cooperation with them. Consequently, Africa, as Alden and Alves (2008: 53) noted, "was relegated to a relatively marginal role in China's foreign policy during this period".

As the 1980s decade closed with the end of the Cold War, it ended negatively for China. The Chinese Government's deadly crackdown on the democratisation movement in Tiananmen Square in Beijing on 4 June 1989 led to the deaths of hundreds or thousands (depending on the source[3]) of protesting civilians. The incident damaged China's relations with Western nations as they viewed Beijing's handling of the protests as a brutal violation of human rights, which have become sacrosanct in Western politics. The US and the EU responded by imposing an arms embargo against the PRC (Naidu *et al* 2009: 89-90; Taylor 2004: 86; Tull 2006: 460).

5.2.3. Post-Cold War China-Africa relations: The 1990s

The end of the Cold War resulted in global structural changes that positively impacted the African continent. The collapse of the Soviet Union effectively ended the East-vs-West competition for influence upon African countries (Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 46). African countries were no longer under pressure to choose between socialist and liberal ideological approaches. Accordingly, they were at liberty to establish bilateral or multilateral partnerships with any actor of their choice without fear of antagonising any other actor. The downside, however, was decreasing interest and engagement with Africa from Western countries (Alden and Alves 2008: 53; Anshan 2014: 2014: 265; Makinda and Okumu 2008: 81; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 45-46). Nevertheless, Shinn and Eisenman (2012: 45) also noted that, for China, the situation presented an opportunity "to take advantage of the relative disinterest in Africa's traditional donor countries and to initiate a more normal relationship based on economic interaction".

China was experiencing an unprecedented economic boom in the 1990s, thanks to the economic reforms that were instituted in the 1980s under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping (Hanauer and Morris 2014: 28). But the country was facing an international backlash and diplomatic isolation, particularly from Western countries, for its handling of the Tiananmen Square protests. However,

[3] The Chinese government put the number of civilian deaths at 200; while protest leaders claimed up to 3,400 deaths. But some Western media have recently claimed that at least 10,000 died (BBC 2017; Blakemore 2020)

in contrast to the West, the reaction from African leaders to the incident, like in most developing countries, was mainly silence, with a few African leaders expressing support for the Chinese Government (Alden and Alves 2008: 53; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 45; Taylor 2004: 84-85). Emboldened by the support from the developing world, Beijing thus condemned Western criticism as imperialist and hegemonic interference in the domestic affairs of China (Taylor 2006: 70).

Beijing subsequently launched a global diplomatic strategy aimed at strengthening its relations with developing countries, with a particular focus on Africa, to counter the attempts by Western nations to isolate China in internal affairs. Consequently, as Alden and Alves (2008: 53) indicated, Chinese officials were dispatched on goodwill missions across the world, promoting high-level state visits to China and normalising relations with as many countries as possible, irrespective of their ideological allegiance. By 1992, China's Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, had visited fourteen African countries, while Beijing also received several leaders from Africa. In fact, after the Tiananmen crisis, as noted by Anshan (2014: 262), the first Head of State, the first Head of Government (Prime Minister) and the first Foreign Minister who visited China were all from African countries.

As a result, China also ramped up its development assistance to African countries, but with states that had supported China after the Tiananmen Square saga as the main recipients (Alden and Alves 2008: 53). African leaders as well largely welcomed Beijing's efforts to build closer relations with the continent due to the waning relations between Africa and the West. However, some scholars indicated that China seemed to be a compatible partner for many African states as several leaders on the continent held opposing views with their Western counterparts on the subjects of human rights and democracy (Alden and Alves 2008: 53; Tull 2006: 461). According to Tull (2006: 461), "this discourse served as a powerful glue whereby China sought to construct a common identity with African states vis-a`-vis the paternalistic West".

As globalisation in the post-Cold War era increasingly emphasised economic growth and development, China-Africa relations also began to focus on economic cooperation to meet the demands of Africa's shortage of investments. The focus was particularly on infrastructure development and China's need for natural resources to sustain its fast-growing economy. Sino-African trade thus grew impressively during the 1990s, with Chinese investments in Africa increasingly featuring as an important aspect of relations between the two sides (Alden and Alves

2008: 53; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 46). However, the end of the Cold War was accompanied by an apparent democratisation wave that was sweeping across the African continent in the early 1990s (Taylor 2006: 65-66; Yu 2018: 492).

Yu (2018: 492) pointed out that some of the leaders in Africa that have been longstanding associates of Beijing, including the first president of independent Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, were pressured to reform their governments in favour of Western-style democratic processes. Following multiparty elections in 1991, Zambia's new leaders accordingly vowed to promote liberal democratic rule in the country and to switch formal diplomatic relations with China from the PRC to ROC, as leaders in Taipei sought to carve out a special status for Taiwan within the international community (Yu 2018: 492). The author noted that the PRC was dealt a further blow as several other African countries, such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, were also pressured to sever formal relations with Beijing in favour of Taiwan.

During Nelson Mandela's Presidency (1994-1999), whose leadership against the apartheid regime received immense support from China, South Africa's Government also abandoned the 'One China' policy for dual recognition of both the PRC and Taiwan. According to Yu (2018: 492), these political transformations in Africa nearly jeopardised relations between the PRC and several African countries that recognised Taiwan in the 1990s. The Taiwan issue, therefore, emerged as another important reason that spurred Chinese leaders to revitalise relations, particularly economic cooperation, between China and African countries.

In 1996, Taiwan became another thorny issue for China's relations with Western countries, in what has been termed the 'Taiwan missile crisis' or "Third Taiwan Strait Crisis" (Alden and Alves 2008: 54; Pradt 2016: 9). China's missile tests around Taiwan in between 1995 and 1996 in attempts to stop Taiwan's campaign for independence were thwarted by a superior military response by the US as it came to assist Taiwan to defend itself against the PRC. While leaders in Beijing were infuriated by the US response, they were forced to acknowledge the PRC's inability to stop US forces from coming to Taiwan's assistance (Chen 1996: 1055-1056). China thus retreated and began a strategic global political campaign against Taiwan and the US (Tull 2006: 461-462).

Officials in Beijing started to identify the PRC as the leader of the developing world to further isolate Taiwan's diplomatic recognition among developing countries. Chinese leaders, as a result, refrained from using the term "Third World" and started to describe non-Western states,

particularly the previously colonised, as 'developing countries'. China also began campaigning for a multipolar world in an attempt to counter US hegemony in world affairs (Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 48; Tull 2006: 461). The PRC benefitted from its image as a member of the developing world and emerging power, and its strategy paid off in Africa. In 1998, The South African Government announced that, in line with the 'One China' principle, it would recognise the PRC as the legitimate governing authority of the Chinese nation. Subsequently, Beijing launched a "Going Out" or "Going Global" policy in 1999 to promote Chinese investments abroad. This resulted in high-level state visits between China and African countries that fully revived Africa-China relations (Alden and Alves 2008: 54; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 114).

5.3. China-Africa relations in the FOCAC era

5.3.1. Building a strategic partnership

There are contending views concerning whether it was Chinese or African leaders that initiated the idea of creating the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) (Alden and Alves 2008: 54; Anshan 2014: 275; Development Reimagined 2021: 8; Du Plessis 2014:123; Muekalia 2004: 8; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 48; Taylor 2011: 38, 2019: 118). Chinese and African leaders, notwithstanding, agreed to establish the FOCAC in 2000 because of the need to formalise the rapidly growing relations between China and African countries. The FOCAC, which holds high-level leadership conferences triennially alternating between China and African countries, emerged as an institutional platform for coordinating cooperation across different sectors between the two sides.

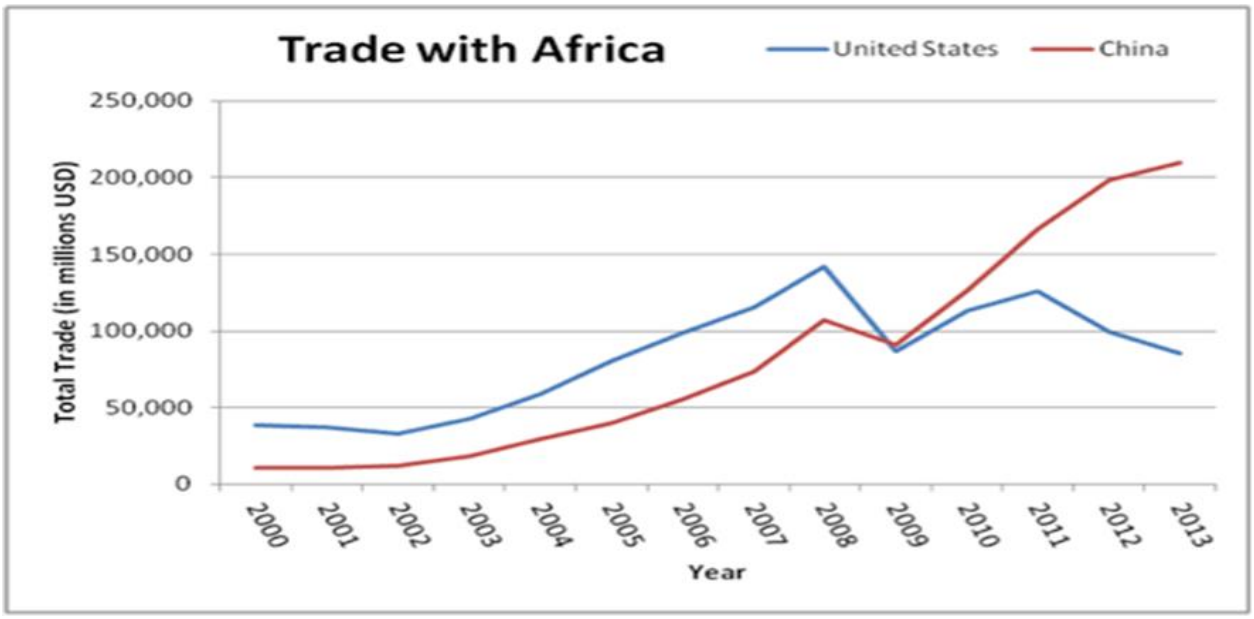
So far, the FOCAC has had eight conferences, three of which were summits (with the heads of state from both sides attending) and five Ministerial Conferences. The first FOCAC conference in 2000 adopted two documents, namely the "Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Programme for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development" (FOCAC 2000a; FOCAC 2000b). The latter document pronounced that "Ministers from China and 44 African countries exchanged views and are convinced of the imperatives for a dynamic, new strategic partnership between Africa and the PRC" (FOCAC 2000b)

Taylor (2011: 64-65) noted that the apparent overall success of the first and second FOCAC conferences led, in 2005, to the proposal to upgrade the 2006 FOCAC gathering to a summit (between the heads of states), which was held in Beijing. China-Africa trade recorded significant growth during this period, going from US$10.6 billion in 2000 to US$55.5 billion by 2006, elevating China to Africa's third largest trading partner (Islam 2021; Tull 2006: 464). Before the summit, in January 2006, the Chinese Government had also formalised and launched its African Policy Paper (Xinhua 2006a). The document, as Taylor (2011: 65) observed, was the first of its kind in China's diplomatic history with the continent, and one of the key outcomes was the prioritisation of security cooperation with African countries.

The document listed four dimensions of security cooperation that Beijing and African countries will engage in, namely, military cooperation, conflict resolutions and peace-keeping missions, judicial and police collaborations, as well as non-traditional security cooperation (WPCAP 2007: 383-384). The 2006 summit itself was the largest gathering of high-level leaders from China and African states in the history of Sino-Africa relations (Taylor 2011: 70). The gathering concluded with the announcement of a 'new type of strategic partnership' between China and the African continent (FOCAC 2006a). Since then, Africa-China relations have increasingly intensified and institutionalised with the creation of mechanisms, among others, such as the China–Africa Development Fund in 2007, the annual African Union (AU)-China Strategic Dialogue, which was first held at the AU headquarters in November 2008 (Taylor 2011: 78).

The follow-up 2009 and 2012 FOCAC conferences equally built on the momentum, witnessing increasing agreements and commitments to deepen relations, and increasing high-level attendance from both sides, particularly as more African countries began recognising the PRC over the ROC (Taiwan) (Taylor 2011: 81-82). The 2009 FOCAC conference also raised international cooperation between China and Africa to become a key collaboration area, directly responding to the 2008 global financial crisis caused by the US's top banking institutions. Figure 3 below depicts China-Africa trade from 2000 to 2013. It shows that China-Africa trade consistently grew since the establishment of FOCAC in 2000. As can be seen in the figure, the US trade with Africa declined after the 2008 global financial crisis, allowing China to take the lead as Africa's largest trading partner.

Figure 3: China-Africa trade 2000-2013



Source: Taylor (2011)

In 2011, before the 2012 conference, China-Africa relations reached a new level when the AU Commission (AUC) was admitted as a full member of FOCAC and no longer just an observer (Benabdallah 2015: 61; Van Hoeymissen 2011: 99). According to Benabdallah (2015: 61-62), Chinese leaders played a key role in pushing for the AU to become a full member of the FOCAC from an observing member, indicating that Beijing was willing to accommodate the collective interests of African countries within the FOCAC structure. This move indeed provided African countries with an opportunity to develop an overarching African policy to engage China and to align the Africa-China strategic partnership with the continental aspirations of the AU. The AU has since become a key part of Africa-China relations, symbolised by the organisation's new US$200 million headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, financed and constructed by China in 2012 as a "gift" to Africa.

5.3.2. AU's Agenda 2063 and the "Chinese Dream" within the FOCAC

Deepening relations between the AUC and China have become noticeable since the 2012 FOCAC conference. At the 21st Ordinary Assembly of the AU to mark the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the OAU in 2013, African leaders launched the AU's Agenda 2063 as a roadmap for continental

integration, development, and peace and security to be achieved by 2063. Three documents were adopted for the Agenda, namely, the Framework Document, its Popular Version, which encompassed the key "aspirations" or goals that will be pursued (AUC 2015a), and the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan, which serves as a preparation of medium-term development plans by AU member states. The implementation plan identifies goals and priority areas in each aspiration outlined in the Popular Version.

It also outlines twelve initiatives or "flagship projects" that the AU would like to see implemented as catalysts for implementing the broader Agenda 2063. These key projects included, first, infrastructure ambitions such as establishing a high-speed train network connecting all African capitals. Secondly, the economic goals, such as creating the Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to promote intra-Africa trade and strengthen the continent's position in the global economy. Finally, as part of peace and security goals such as "silencing the guns" by 2020, ending all wars and civil conflicts on the continent (AUC 2015b).

One of the crucial strategies that the AU outlined to pursue its Agenda 2063 aspirations and goals was to leverage its strategic partnerships with major world powers. At the time of writing, the AU had established formal strategic partnerships with nine world powers. These world powers included China (through the FOCAC), the League of Arab States (LAS), South America Cooperation Forum (SACOF), Japan (through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development [TICAD]), the EU, the US, Turkey, India, and South Korea. Though not officially mentioned as a partner on the AU's list, France has held summits with Africa since 1973. Furthermore, Russia also seemed to be pushing for a partnership with Africa when it hosted the first Russia–Africa summit in Sochi in late 2019, with over 40 African heads of state in attendance (PSC Report 2019).

In the same year that the AU Agenda 2063 was introduced, the newly elected Chinese President, Xi Jinping, started promoting the "Chinese Dream". This involved a vision for China to be a fully developed nation and be restored to its "rightful" position as a great power by 2049 (Alden 2017:24; Shinn 2019: 77; Zhang and Niway 2018: 129). The first stage of China's Vision focuses on the 'First Centenary Goal', which entails China becoming a "moderately prosperous society in all respects" by 2021 (the centenary of the CCP). This stage, which some believe China has achieved its goal (Munene 2022), aimed at expanding China's national power through

technological innovation and advances to sustain economic growth and improved governance systems. The second stage (Second Centenary Goal) seeks China to achieve "national rejuvenation" by becoming a fully developed and great world power by 2049, the centenary of the PRC. This stage involves attaining a world-class military with a sufficient global presence and establishing what the Chinese Government calls a global "community with a shared future for mankind" or "community of a common destiny"– an alternative global system of mutually-beneficial economic, political, and security relations (Li 2021: 43).

Figure 4: Countries that have signed BRI agreements

Source: Development Reimagined 2019

A crucial strategy that China's President announced to pursue the Chinese Dream was the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), previously called the 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR). The BRI is a global development project that aims to enhance trade and investments between China and its key partners in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas through maritime and land routes, which will sustain China's economic growth in the process. Figure 4 above shows the number of countries around the world that have joined the BRI. As can be seen in the figure, China's BRI has attracted more than 140 countries. In Africa, the first countries that signed up for the BRI project were East and North African countries such as Kenya, Djibouti, Tanzania and Egypt. In Figure 5 below, the map shows the number of African countries that have signed up for the BRI since 2015. As can be seen in the figure, 52 countries in Africa had signed some BRI-related Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China by 2022 (Gu *et al* 2022: 6).

Figure 5: African member states of the BRI

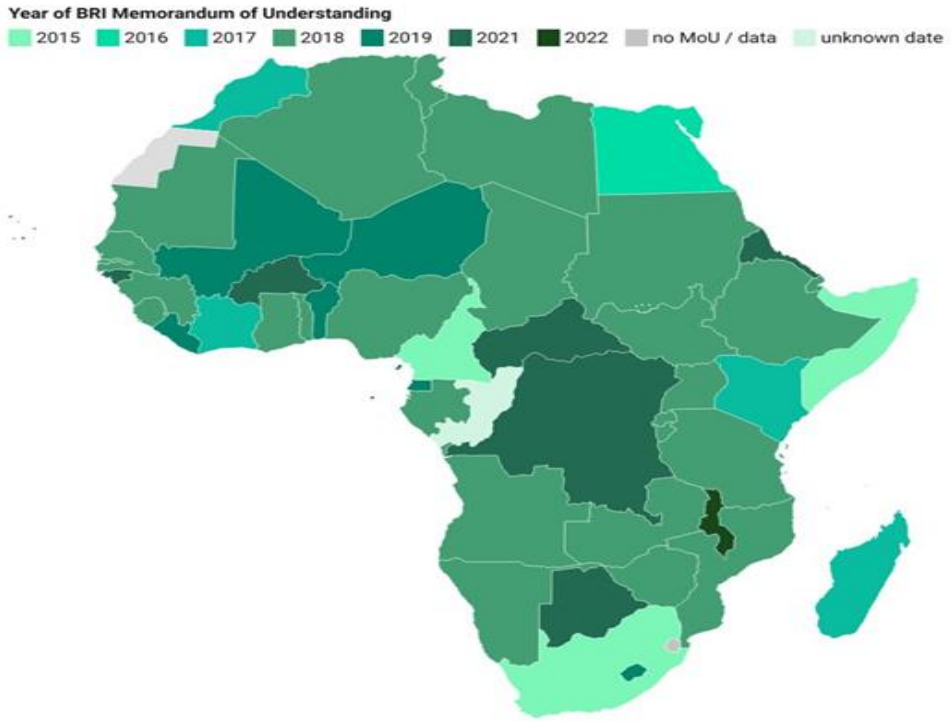


Figure 5. *(Source: Gu et al 2022)*

Chinese and AU leaders issued a joint statement in 2014 declaring commitments to reciprocal cooperation for the realisation of Agenda 2063 and the "Chinese dream" (AU 2014 as cited by

Benabdallah 2015: 53; PRC Embassy in South Africa 2014). In 2015, China subsequently established its permanent mission to the AU, the third after the US and the EU (Carrozza 2018: 2).

The Chinese President went on and asserted in his book, *The Governance of China*, that (Xi 2014: 333-341):

> more than 1.3 billion Chinese are working hard to realize the Chinese Dream of great national renewal, and more than one billion Africans are striving to realize the African dream of gaining strength through unity and achieving development and rejuvenation

In 2015, prior to the second FOCAC summit and fifth Ministerial Conference of the same year, China published its Second Africa Policy Paper (Xinhua 2015):

> to further clarify China's determination and goodwill to develop friendly and cooperative relations with Africa and expound the new vision, approach and measures of China's Africa policy under the new circumstances with the aim of guiding the multi-faceted exchanges and cooperation between China and Africa in the years to come.

The document stated intentions to upgrade the strategic partnership between Africa and China to a "comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership" (Xinhua 2015). This was formally established at the summit, which was held in Johannesburg, South Africa. The conference was concluded with declarations of ten comprehensive and ambitious plans covering various sectors to the tune of $60 billion, funded by China. The amount was triple the $20 billion funding that Beijing pledged at the previous FOCAC conference. African Union (AU) and Chinese leaders thereafter met at the AU headquarters in May 2018 and "renewed their commitments to consolidate and deepen the longstanding AU-China strategic partnership" (AU 2018).

The 2018 FOCAC summit held in Beijing emphasised commitments to deepen relations further and align Africa and China's strategic goals. Its Action Plan declared that (FOCAC 2018):

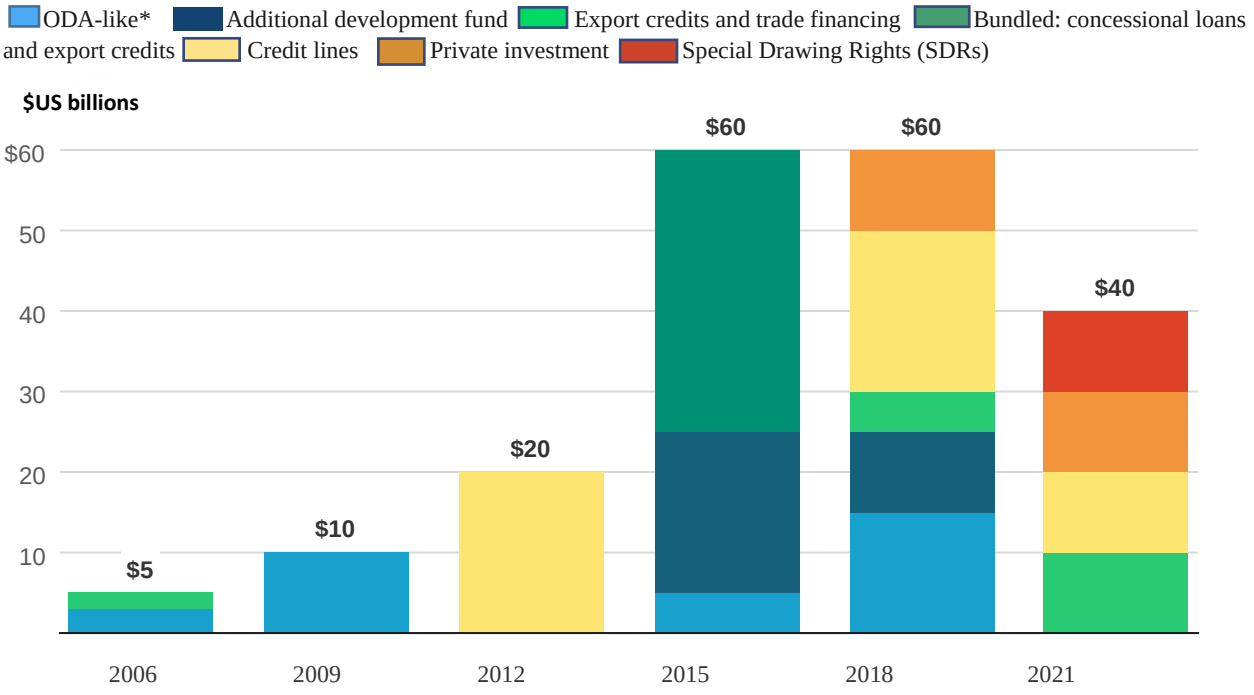
> as China […] works to realize the two centenary goals and the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation, and as Africa […] implements Agenda 2063, the two sides share similar philosophies, compatible strategies and complementary strengths in terms of development

The conference was attended by 53 out of 54 African countries, with only eSwatini (Swaziland) absent from the gathering as it retains diplomatic relations with Taiwan. An analysis by Quartz showed that more African leaders attended the FOCAC conference in 2018 than the UN general

assembly convened that year, pointing to "the shifting dynamics and priorities of the African continent" (Dahir 2018).

The most recent FOCAC conference was held in Dakar, Senegal, from 29-30 November 2021 in the midst of a global coronavirus pandemic that broke out in the city of Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The virus quickly spread across the world in 2020 and forced almost all countries to impose extraordinary restrictive measures to limit the spread of the virus. The pandemic killed more than 6 million people around the world and devastated the global economy. Nevertheless, both China and the African continent fared better compared to other regions, such as Europe and North America, in terms of human fatalities and the impact of the virus on their economies. Unlike in 2018 and 2015, the Dakar FOCAC was a ministerial-level gathering rather than a summit. While the African heads of state attended the conference in person, the Chinese president attended virtually and delivered a speech via live video. Thus, several observers met the FOCAC with mixed reactions, with others viewing it as a "downgrade" (Cichocka and Gavas 2021; Scarfe 2021; Sun 2021a). Sun (2021a), for example, postulated that the China-Africa partnership was losing momentum and that China might be "leaving Africa after two decades of robust and ever-growing engagement".

Figure 6: China's FOCAC Commitments since 2006



Source: Cichocka & Gavas (2021)

Some observers pointed particularly at China's reduction of financial commitments. The above figure 6 shows China's FOCAC commitments from 2006 to 2021. As can be seen in the figure, Beijing's financial pledges to assist Africa increased from US$5 billion to US$60 in 2015. However, they dropped to US$40 billion in 2021(Cichocka and Gavas 2021; Sun 2021b). Further, drops in the number of activities, such as official development assistance (ODAs) and capacity building, including reductions in security collaborations, were also noted (Cichocka and Gavas 2021; Sun 2021b). However, the most significant aspect of China's pledges in the 2021 FOCAC, according to Sun (2021a), was the total omission of financial commitments for infrastructure development. The author noted that the word 'infrastructure' did not feature at all throughout the keynote speech by China's President (Sun 2021b). The absence of infrastructure financing in the 2021 FOCAC was a surprise to many observers, given that infrastructure development in Africa has been a key aspect of China's engagement with the continent. However, a new development was Beijing's reallocation of US$10 billion of its Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) towards Africa from the US$40 billion that it received from the IMF (Cichocka and Gavas 2021).

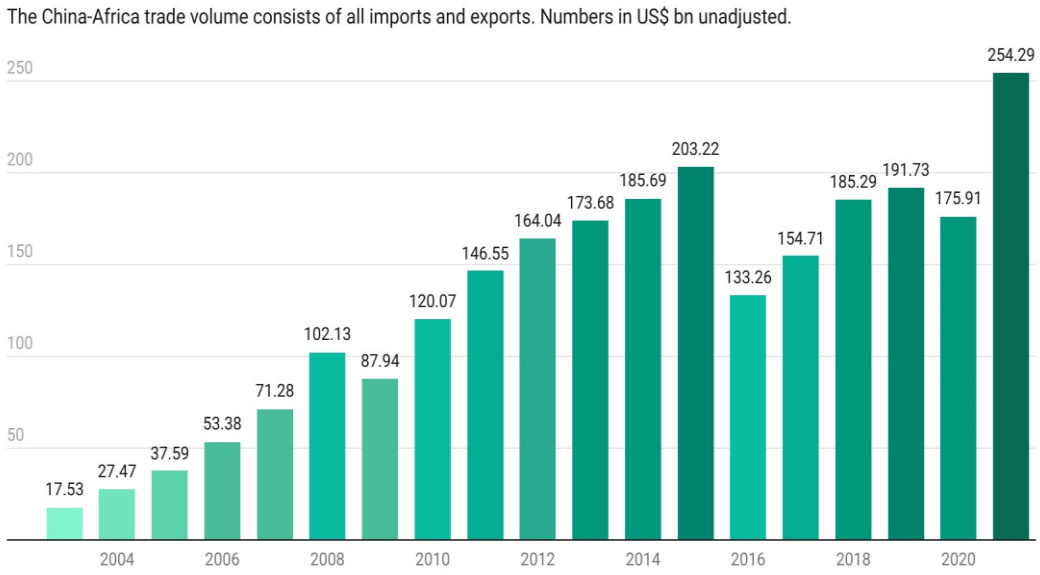
The 2021 FOCAC concluded with the adoption of four documents: The Declaration of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC, the Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024), the Declaration on Climate Change, and the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 (FOCAC 2021b). The latter is explained as a joint vision "to determine the directions and objectives of mid- and long-term cooperation and promote a closer community with a shared future for China and Africa". According to the document, the vision encompasses the aims of China's own Vision 2035, the AU's Agenda 2063, and the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (FOCAC 2021b).

Sun (2021a), who took particular interest in examining the China-Africa Cooperation 2035, argued that the Vision "suggest retrenchment or, at the minimum, reorientation of China's economic engagement with Africa". According to the author, the signs of this can be seen in China's reduced infrastructure funding and pledges for related projects that are planned for 15 years instead of the usual three years between the conferences. Cichocka and Gavas (2021), however, argued that the FOCAC conference in Dakar revealed one more time "the impressive depth and breadth" of Sino-Africa relations not only at the state level but also on the societal level, going beyond the narrow "prism of development aid". The authors pointed out that while the conference featured reduced

Chinese financial commitments and loans to African countries in comparison to previous gatherings, Beijing's pledge to provide one billion COVID-19 vaccines to the continent, in addition to its financial commitments, surpassed the combined efforts of the US and EU to supply vaccines to Africa (Cichocka and Gavas 2021).

Furthermore, as documented by Gu *et al* (2022), China-Africa total trade reached an all-time high in 2021. Figure 7 below shows trade between China and Africa from 2003 to 2021. Although with fluctuations, trade between the two sides has been increasing since the establishment of FOCAC in 2000. It reached a first high of US$203 billion in 2015 and then declined significantly the following year. However, the trade increased again from 2017 and surged to US$254 billion in 2021, up by 35% from the previous year (Gu *et al* 2022: 11). The high trade volume in 2021 has been attributed to the additional Chinese exports of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), such as masks and hazmat suits, as well as pharmaceutical products and testing equipment for the COVID-19 pandemic to Africa (Mureithi 2022). However, Gu *et al* (2022: 11) indicated that the strong increase in China-Africa trade volume in 2021 is remarkable as data from China's customs agency shows that it is "made up of an increase in both Chinese exports to Africa (29.9% year-on-year) and African exports to China (43.7% year-on-year)".

Figure 7. China-Africa trade 2003-2021



Source: John Hopkins University (2022)

5.4. Development of China-Africa security relations

5.4.1. The Cold War era

Security cooperation between China and African countries is a subject that has increasingly gained attention from observers and scholars. Scholars usually indicate that this field was not of interest in the early years of FOCAC as China and Africa began institutionalising their relationship (Alden 2018; Duchâtel *et al* 2016: 1; Benabdallah 2016: 17-19; Grieger 2019: 4; Yu 2018: 489). However, security relations between Africa and the PRC, as documented by studies such as Eisenman (2018), Shinn (2008) and Shinn and Eisenman (2012), date back to the Cold War era in the 1950s when African countries fought against colonialism.

Following the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the Chinese leader, Mao Zedong, positioned the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to support African liberation movements that were leading the struggle against colonialism. Shinn and Eisenman (2012) noted that China began by assisting Algeria's Front de Libe'ration Nationale (FLN) as the North African nation fought against France for independence. Following the 1955 Bandung Conference, the PRC expanded its assistance to African liberation movements to train their fighters. Between 1955 and 1979, more than 3000 African fighters from at least thirteen countries were trained by the PLA in China (Eisenman 2018: 437; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 166). In addition, Beijing hosted more than 400 African delegations seeking weaponry, with hundreds of Chinese military instructors also stationed in Africa for training African fighters (Eisenman 2018: 437; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 166).

According to Eisenman (2018: 437), at the first AAPSO conference in 1957 in Cairo, a CCP delegation that attended networked with African liberation groups to strengthen relations. Representatives from China subsequently participated in follow-up conferences held between 1958 and 1961 in Ghana, Tunisia and Egypt. The PRC also emerged as the major supplier of arms, military training and advice to the OAU's Liberation Committee (Nantulya 2021a; Shinn 2008: 156; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 164-165). The Committee was created to coordinate cooperation between armed liberation groups against colonial rule in different African countries (Nantulya 2021a; Shinn 2008: 156; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 164-165). According to Shinn (2008: 156), Beijing contributed approximately 75% of the military aid that the OAU's liberation committee received from non-African actors between 1971 and 1972. By the mid-1960s, several African

countries such as Guinea-Bissau, Tanzania, Ghana, Congo-Brazzaville, Mozambique and Zambia had collaborated with China to receive arms and train rebels and guerrilla fighters (Nantulya 2021a; Shinn 2008: 156; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 164-165).

As the Sino-Soviet split infiltrated African anti-colonial struggles in the 1960s, however, the PRC's support for some of the liberation groups in Africa became controversial. Fuelled by its competition with the Soviet Union, China often supplied arms and military training to any liberation group that was not receiving assistance from the Soviets, irrespective of their position or influence within their societies (Konings 2007: 345; Alden and Alves 2008: 49; Taylor 2000: 93). Konings (2007: 345) noted that, as a result, some of the movements supported by China were "unrepresentative, ineffective, and even discredited" within their communities. According to Shinn (2008: 156), Beijing went as far as encouraging dissidents or disgruntled members within some Soviet-backed groups to split and form their own organisations.

This led to tensions and conflict between liberation movements supported by the Soviets and Chinese-supported opposition groups in several African countries such as Angola, Mozambique and the Republic of the Congo (previously called Congo-Léopoldville). Shinn (2008: 156) documented that, in Angola, for example, Beijing originally backed the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) that fought for Angola's independence against the Portuguese army from 1961 to 1974. However, in the mid-1960s, as the MPLA started working closely with the Soviet Union, China shifted its military support to the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), both of which were backed by the US (Shinn 2008: 156).

Shinn (2008: 156) indicated that Chinese leaders sought to avoid past mistakes and to make Beijing's military assistance to African countries a positive aspect of China's foreign policy. Thus, Beijing revised its African policy and sought to normalise relations with legitimate governments of the continent regardless of their relations with other major and great powers (Konings 2007: 345). As Konings pointed out, one of the reasons for the policy shift was that Chinese leaders had come to accept that the idea of a socialist revolution did not resonate with Africans. Moreover, the PRC needed as many political allies as possible to achieve its goal of replacing the ROC at the UN assembly (Konings 2007: 345).

According to Shinn and Eisenman (2012: 165), China subsequently increased its military support to African countries between the late 1960s and 1970s. The authors stated that Beijing transferred hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of arms to fifteen African countries. This was achieved with a range of equipment such as fighter aircrafts, tanks, gunboats, small arms, ammunition, and antiaircraft guns, with a large chunk of these supplies going to Tanzania, the DRC, Congo-Brazzaville, and Cameroon (Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 165). During the 1977 Shaba crisis in Zaire, as noted by Shinn (2008: 159), Beijing also provided military assistance to Mobutu Sese Seko's Government to fend off invading rebels from Angola.

The late 1970s, however, saw a fundamental change in China-Africa security relations in line with the broader changes in the relationship at this juncture (Konings 2007: 344; Shinn 2008: 159; Van de Looy 2006: 4). The economic reforms introduced by Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, affected Beijing's policy on military support to developing countries as well. China's arms transfer to African countries, except for Egypt, declined considerably during Deng's era. This is when Beijing started to focus on profits to pursue broader economic goals and development, and, therefore, on new and wealthier customers in Asia and the Middle East. A handful of other countries, such as Guinea-Bissau, Zimbabwe, Zaire (now DRC) and Sudan, also continued to receive arms transfers and training from China during this period. According to Shinn and Eisenman (2012: 167), the bulk of Chinese arms supply during the late 1970s and early 1980s consisted of cheap copies of Soviet weaponry from the 1960s. However, towards the end of the 1980s decade, China's supplies to African countries included more high-tech and heavier equipment such as tanks and fighter planes (Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 167).

As most African countries were still struggling with persistent colonial legacies, with most of them having turned into authoritarian regimes, access to arms and ammunition from suppliers such as China and the Soviet Union led to internal, mostly ethnic-based, conflicts and violence. Though the OAU was formed as a continental platform to respond to such urgent issues, Makinda and Okumu (2008: 75-76) indicated that it lacked the resources and political leadership to take necessary actions to address peace and security issues. This became evident when the OAU could not provide solutions for civil wars that broke out in Sudan in 1983 and continued for almost two decades and in Somalia in the late 1980s.

According to Makinda and Okumu (2008: 77), the plight of Africa's peace and security situation was a major issue for the founders of the OAU. However, leaders in the African countries understood the concept of security from a state-centric perspective, that is, prioritising the state through principles such as "territorial integrity, state sovereignty, and the protection of state boundaries" (Makinda and Okumu 2008: 77). These principles, in turn, constrained the OAU to act in circumstances wherein relations between African countries and major powers from outside the continent, such as China and the Soviet Union, were contributing to instability and conflict in Africa.

5.4.2. The post-Cold War period

The end of the Cold War in 1989 was accompanied by both the "broadening and deepening" of the concept of security (Buzan *et al* 1998: 21-23; Krause and Williams 1996: 230) and the democratisation wave across the African continent. As a result, the new security agenda within the OAU encompassed efforts to address non-military threats that would fit the objectives of continental integration envisioned by the founders of the organisation (Alao and Alden 2018: 15; Makinda and Okumu 2008: 77). Thus, as Alao and Alden (2018: 15) observed, the security debate in Africa reached a turning point in the early 1990s when political instability and conflicts led to devastating civil wars and war crimes. This was seen in countries such as Liberia, Somalia, DRC and Rwanda, while the international community and Africa's development partners failed to provide suitable responses. Most of the victims in these conflicts were women and children, who actually died from malnutrition and disease spread due to the ongoing violence and the consequent mass displacements (Williams, 2009 as cited by Chun 2018: 192).

Simultaneously in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, China's military assistance to African countries increased, mainly to countries that supported China against the Western backlash. Shinn and Eisenman (2012: 168) noted that many countries preferred Chinese weapons as they were relatively inexpensive and easy to operate and the Chinese were among the few arms suppliers willing to sell weaponry to some perceived rogue states in Africa. Chinese arms were also modelled on Soviet weaponry, "which formed the basis of many African countries' arsenals" (Shinn 2008: 160). Shinn and Eisenman (2012: 167) explained that China in the 1990s supplied several African countries with an assortment of equipment, ranging from military trucks,

transport aircraft, troop-carrying helicopters, tanks, and air-guard fighters to antitank mines and high-altitude bombs.

Shinn and Eisenman (2012) further pointed out that the Chinese also assisted countries such as Sudan and Angola in building their own arms-manufacturing firms. The authors also explicated that the sale of small arms and light weapons constituted a key part of Beijing's arms transfers to Africa during this time, with deliveries of these weapons ending up in conflict-ridden countries such as Rwanda, DRC, Ethiopia, Sudan and Nigeria (Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 168). Beijing also sold large quantities of military equipment to both of the warring sides during the 1998-2000 Ethiopian-Eritrean war (Shinn 2008: 161; Whitaker and Clark 2018: 345). For other scholars (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 41; Whitaker and Clark 2018: 345), China's hands-off policy to arms sales was based on the country's broader national economic interests, which prioritised profit making.

According to Yu (2018: 492), while violent conflicts often plagued several African countries in the 1990s, Beijing avoided involving itself in UN-led peacekeeping missions in Africa. The author explains that China viewed the operations as part of the US-led democratisation processes in African countries. Chinese leaders viewed this as "a Pandora's box" that triggered instability in African countries and undermined China's political and economic contributions to the continent (Yu 2018: 492). Though the democratisation processes in Africa had some negative impact on China-Africa relations, China stepped up its high-level visits to African countries in the latter half of the 1990s, particularly to bolster political and trade relations. In 1996, Chinese Premier Jiang Zemin toured Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, Mali, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. By 1998, African states had increased their military attaché in Beijing from nine in 1988 to thirteen (Shinn 2008: 161).

As China and African states made preparations for the first FOCAC conference, Williams (2009 as cited by Chun 2018: 192) noted that sixteen African states in 1999 were involved in internal armed conflicts. New forms of security threats, such as religious extremism and terrorism, were also on the rise on the African continent. These threats, as Makinda and Okumu (2008: 82) explained, began in 1992 in Algeria when the Islamist group, Islamic Salvation Front, resorted to violence after its bid to govern the country was denied through democratic elections. Subsequently, the OAU adopted a Declaration Against Extremism in the same year at its summit in Dakar, Senegal. However, the threat of terrorism became more apparent later in 1998 as operatives of the

notorious terrorist organisation, Al-Qaeda, orchestrated the bombings of two US embassies in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and Nairobi (Kenya). As a result, the OAU summit in Algiers the following year adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism (Makinda and Okumu 2008: 82). Security relations between China and Africa, however, continued along commercial lines in line with Beijing's new economic policies since Deng's Presidency.

5.4.3. China-Africa security relations in the FOCAC era

The establishment of FOCAC in 2000 signalled the common perceptions among African and Chinese leaders that Africa-China cooperation was mutually beneficial. Therefore, the relationship must be strengthened by forming an organisational or institutional platform to coordinate cooperation. While trade and investment experienced significant growth, matters of peace and security remained the least of their priorities in the early 2000s. Notwithstanding, the Beijing Declaration at the first FOCAC conference acknowledged the peace and security issues that afflicted African countries. The document declared that Chinese and African leaders "note, with grave concern, that efforts over the years have failed to bring about political, economic and social stability in some African countries" (FOCAC. 2000a).

However, the consensus was that "economic and social factors are at the root of political instability, social tensions and frequent conflicts in Africa" (FOCAC. 2000a). China, thus, for the first time, participated in UN-led peacekeeping missions in Africa to address the conflicts in Liberia and the DRC in the early 2000s (Taylor 2011: 63). According to Shinn (2008: 161), Chinese military cooperation with Africa in the early 2000s appeared to be focusing on African countries rich in energy and mineral resources, such as Sudan, Libya, Zambia and South Africa, among others. However, they did provide modest supplies and military training to almost all countries on the continent that have formal political relations with the PRC. Though violent conflicts were raging in some of these states, Taylor (2011: 39) indicated that conflict and instability within the China-Africa discourse were directly blamed on the "many irrational and inequitable factors in the current international political and economic order […]".

In the early 2000s, African leaders were simultaneously reviewing the OAU's efficacy in addressing the continent's most pressing issues, mainly as a result of the peace and security calamities that characterised Africa throughout the 1980s and 90s. Leaders subsequently reached

an agreement that the organisation was largely failing to provide solutions to the grave intra-state conflicts afflicting several countries on the continent. There was acknowledgement among the leaders that the OAU was also not serving its pan-Africanist goals of preventing external interferences on the continent (Packer and Rukare 2002: 366).

The organisation was therefore transformed into the African Union (AU) and relaunched in 2002 in Durban, South Africa. An important outcome in the organisation's transformation was the adjustment of the principles of non-interference and state sovereignty in circumstances that appear to pose significant peace and security concerns (AU 2000:4). The AU included the principle of "non-indifference", which calls for outright intervention in cases either where serious human rights violations are committed by non-state or state actors, or wherein the state fails to provide security for its citizens (AU 2000:4).

Efforts to address peace and security issues were further enhanced by forming the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), comprised of five key sub-structures. These sub-structures include the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Panel of the Wise, the African Standby Force (ASF), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), and the Peace Fund. Additionally, the AU's objectives were buttressed by the eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs), such as the SADC, ECOWAS, and EAC, that are often described as the "building blocks" towards the main goal of continental integration (Alao and Alden 2018: 16; Ukeje and Tariku 2018: 299-300; Makinda and Okumu 2008: 83). The AU thereafter began to play a major role in conflict resolutions on the continent, starting with the Darfur crisis that erupted in 2003. In this conflict, the representative from the AU mediated in the negotiations between the Government of Sudan and three groups, including the Sudan Liberation Movement and the Justice and Equality Movement. The negotiations concluded in 2004 with the signing of a Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement, with 60 observers and 300 soldiers deployed to monitor the implementation of the agreement (Makinda and Okumu 2008: 83).

The Darfur crisis, however, was a defining moment in China-Africa relations that changed the trajectory of the relationship, as it captured international attention with reports revealing the potential extent of China's role in conflicts and violence in African countries. Some reports alleged that China's increased investments in Sudan's oil industry enabled the Sudanese Government to acquire more weapons and intensify its military crackdown against civilians in the Darfur region

(Kaplinsky *et al* 2006: 40; Manyok 2016: 2-3; Taylor and Wu 2013: 465-466). In addition, according to a report by a research project at the Graduate Institute of International Studies, China became Sudan's largest arms supplier shortly before the violent conflict in Darfur broke out. The report further established that the Sudan Army Forces were using Chinese weapons and military equipment to commit genocide on ethnic Darfuri people in the region (HSBA 2007: 5-6; Taylor and Wu 2013: 465-466).

However, the increasing arms trade between China and Sudan continued unabated even after the 2004 UN Security Council (UNSC) arms embargo against Sudan. Moreover, analysts noted that Chinese leaders knew about the numerous atrocities perpetrated by the Sudanese Government in Darfur (HSBA 2007: 5-6; Kaplinsky *et al* 2006: 40; Manyok 2016: 2-3; Tull 2006: 476). However, Beijing abstained from voting and vetoed some resolutions by the UNSC condemning the actions of President Omar Al Bashir's regime and in South Sudan and seeking to impose travel and financial sanctions against his Government (HSBA 2007: 5-6; Kaplinsky *et al* 2006: 40; Manyok 2016: 2-3; Tull 2006: 476). Manyok (2016: 2) also indicated that, when the UN and AU called upon China to deploy its soldiers in the Darfur region of Western Sudan to assist in peacekeeping, Beijing leaders refused to heed the call. However, China rapidly deployed its military forces in response to a security situation in Sudan, where Chinese oil companies operated (Manyok 2016: 2).

The PRC's conduct in Sudan consequently drew widespread international criticism (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 43). It raised further questions about China's intentions on the African continent (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 43). The matter was taken up by a UN Panel of Experts in 2006, which subsequently issued a report condemning Beijing's arms sales to the Sudanese Government and pronounced that China was violating an arms embargo against Sudan. China throughout this time dismissed allegations that it violated the arms embargo and that its weapons were being used by the Sudanese Government to commit genocide in Darfur (Manyok 2016: 2).

However, there were indications that the violent conflicts and instability in several African countries were becoming a concerning issue within Africa-China affairs. This became evident in the contents of the Addis Ababa Action Plan adopted at the second FOCAC conference held in Ethiopia in 2003. The Plan contained a subsection discussing peace and security issues on the African continent. It applauded China's participation in peacekeeping operations in Africa and

stressed that "China should consider intensifying participation" not only in peace-keeping but also in areas such as capacity building, conflict resolution and mediation, and cooperation on non-traditional security issues such as terrorism, transnational organised crimes, trafficking of SALWs, infectious diseases and natural disasters (FOCAC 2004).

Developments towards the 2006 FOCAC also suggested that leaders in Beijing had been scrambling for damage control. They tried to balance economic interests and their country's image as an ally of developing countries and a legitimate and responsible emerging superpower. China's first African Policy paper, published in January 2006, had, for the first time, a section pronouncing proactive cooperation on matters of peace and security. While China still emphasised state sovereignty and territorial integrity, the "peace and security section" pronounced "high-level military cooperation, conflict settlement and peace-keeping operations, judicial and police cooperation, and collaboration on non-traditional security areas" (Xinhua 2006a).

Beijing committed itself to support the AU's conflict resolution and management processes and advocated for the UN to do the same. The document also declared that China would mobilise resources to continue supporting and participating in UN-led peacekeeping missions on the African continent (Taylor 2011: 66; WPCAP 2007: 383-384). Consequently, Chinese leaders held public engagements with their Sudanese counterparts wherein, for the first time, they openly prompted the Sudan government to work with UN peacekeepers in Darfur. The Chinese also expressed support for the Darfur Peace Agreement that was eventually signed in May 2006 in the Nigerian capital, Abuja (HSBA 2007: 8-9; Makinda and Okumu 2008: 83).

For several observers, China's new policy in Africa indicated a shift from its rigid non-interference foreign policy principle to a subtle and creative form of intervention (Aidoo and Hess 2015; Alden and Yixiao 2018; Shinn and Eisenman 2020). The nuanced approach to security cooperation was reflected at the 2006 FOCAC, of which its follow-up Action Plan announced that (FOCAC 2006b):

> the Chinese Government will continue to strengthen its cooperation with the AU and sub-regional organisations and institutions in Africa, support the AU's leading role in resolving African issues, and take an active part in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa

Former Chinese President Hu Jintao subsequently met with his Sudanese counterpart, Al Bashir, in Khartoum in early 2007 to publicly showcase Beijing's support for the peace agreements on the

conflict in Darfur. China's leaders also made calls for the acceleration of the peace negotiation processes in order to achieve a comprehensive resolution for Darfur (HSBA 2007: 9). While China's approach to security cooperation with Africa seemed to be evolving, analysts noted that its official policy continued to provide protection for Bashir's regime against international rebuke (Manyok 2016: 2; Waddington 2007). This became evident in March 2007 when China and Russia, together with some countries in the Middle East, urged the UN to reject a report from a fact-finding mission in Darfur, led by a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, which concluded that the Sudanese Government had not ceased to commit atrocities in the region (Waddington 2007).

China and African countries, notwithstanding, increasingly prioritised security cooperation since 2006. Training of African military officers continued to be an important aspect of security collaborations between China and Africa. According to Thrall (2015, as cited by Benabdallah 2020: 69), by 2006, "every African army had at least one colonel or brigadier general who graduated" from China's University of National Defence. By 2007, Military attachés of African countries in China had also increased to eighteen, from thirteen in 1998. While China, which only had nine military attaché offices in Africa in 1985, increased to at least fourteen in 2007 (Shinn 2008: 163). Before the 2009 FOCAC conference, China had appointed its first special representative on African affairs in 2007, which started regularly holding political and security consultations with African countries (Taylor 2011: 78).

Taylor (2011: 78) noted that an issue that further spurred China to act on its peace and security relations with Africa was the Olympic games that were due to be hosted in Beijing in August 2008. As the author explained, China, fearful that its role in the Darfur genocide may negatively affect its hosting of the global event, embarked on a major public relations campaign to convince the international community of its positive role in resolving the conflict. In November 2008, the China-AU Strategic Dialogue mechanism was established to meet "on an ad hoc basis to discuss recent international developments, with a special focus on security-related issues". In the first meeting of the Dialogue, as Taylor (2011: 78) observed, Chinese and AU leaders deliberated on general matters of the collaboration between the AU and China but also on controversial issues in countries such as Sudan, Somalia and Zimbabwe.

The 2009 FOCAC Action Plan, consequently, reinforced commitments to address issues of peace and security in Africa as pronounced at the 2006 summit. This time, however, the declaration

added that China would support "the concept and practice of 'Solving African Problems by Africans'" (FOCAC 2009), also known as "African solutions to African problems", which has been continued to be emphasised after that. According to other scholars, the emphasis of this concept sought to align security cooperation between China and African countries with the principle of non-interference (Benabdallah 2020: 71; Xuejun 2018: 75). As the 2009 FOCAC Action Plan explained that, China would increase its support of "efforts of the AU, other regional organisations and countries concerned to solve regional conflicts" in Africa (FOCAC 2009). Benabdallah (2020: 69) pointed out that China's support for "African solutions" ranged from "equipment donations, personnel trainings, logistical help (Chinese antipiracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden), to peacekeeping missions". In this way, China will not be interfering in African affairs but will only be providing assistance and support in the implementation of decisions that African nations have taken to resolve their issues.

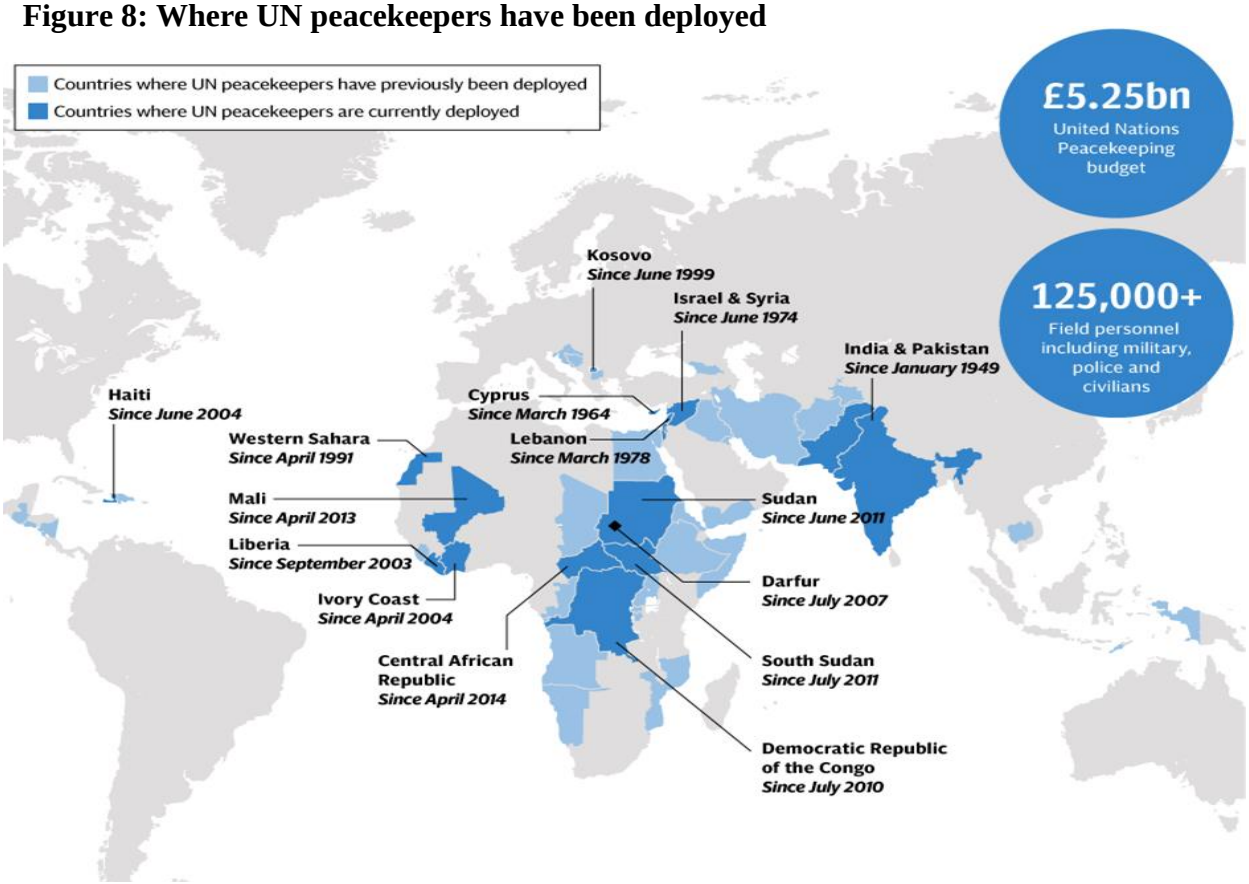
When Hu Jintao's era as China's president came to a close in 2012, the FOCAC Action Plan of the same year stated that China would initiate the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security (ICACPPS) "to enhance cooperation with Africa on peace and security issues" (FOCAC 2012). Xuejun (2018: 68) pointed out that the ICACPPS "marked the formal expansion of Chinese policy interest in the African peace security environment". Accordingly, the ICACPPS declared that China would, within its means, provide assistance that includes capacity building, funding and various ways of support to the APSA. Security cooperation thus became an integral part of discussions within the FOCAC meetings that followed the 2012 conference. According to Benabdallah (2020: 75), Beijing increased military training programs for African military officers by way of hosting military personnel from different African countries at Chinese military academies for training and sending Chinese military instructors to African countries to train their counterparts on the continent.

At the FOCAC summit in 2015 held in South Africa, the Johannesburg Action Plan had a dedicated section outlining "security cooperation" commitments. Section six of the Plan reemphasised bolstering security cooperation between the two sides, including China's commitments to supporting AU and UN-led peacekeeping missions in Africa. It also pronounced China's pledge to provide US$60 million to assist the AU's military programmes and support the operationalisation of the APSA, including the African Capacity for the Immediate Response to Crisis (ACIRC) and

the ASF. Beijing subsequently increased its participation and financial contribution to the UN's peacekeeping operations.

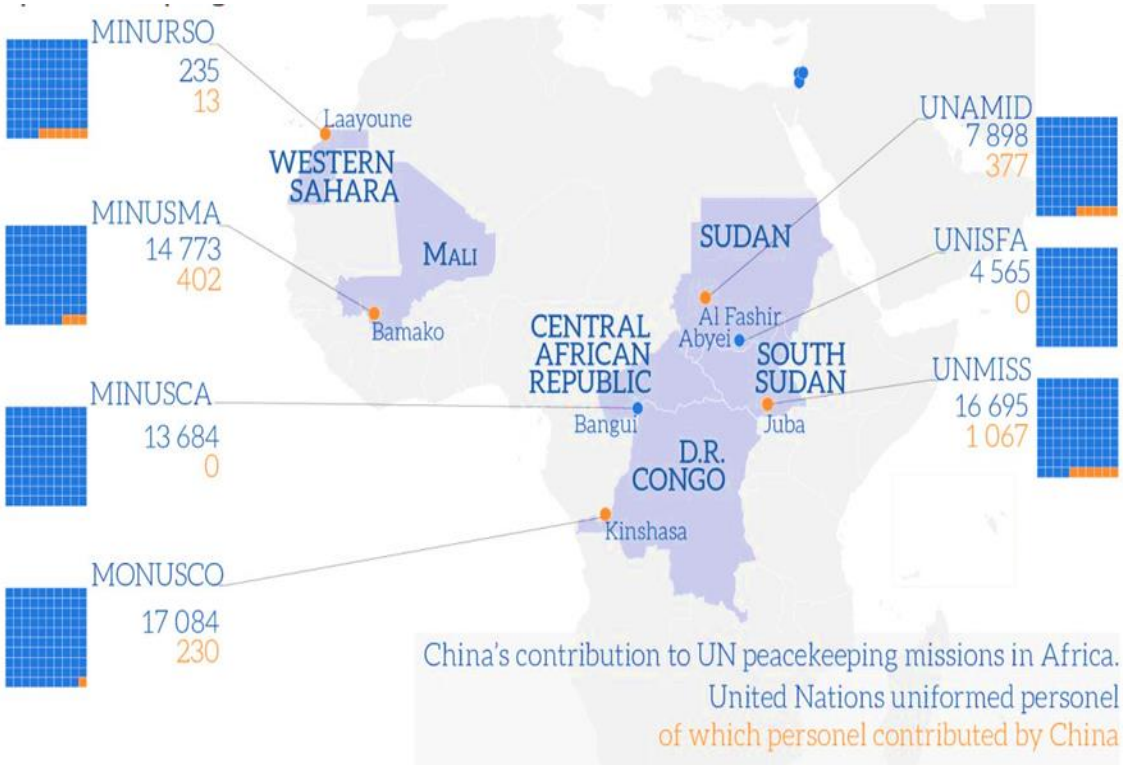
By 2016, China had become the largest troops-contributing country among the five UNSC permanent members (P5), with approximately 2,639 troops and other personnel deployed in nine peace-keeping operations across the African continent (Coleman and Job 2021: 1453; Ukeje and Tariku 2018: 303). Ukeje and Tariku (2018: 303) also highlighted that Beijing played an important role in the fight against piracy in the Horn of Africa between 2008 and 2011 "by actively conducting 400 successful missions, escorting 4,300 vessels and rescuing 55 ships". The below figure 8 shows the countries around the world wherein the UN has deployed its peacekeepers. As shown in the figure, the UN has deployed several peacekeeping missions around the world since 1949, with most of these operations taking place on the African continent. Figure 9 focuses on the UN's peacekeeping operations in Africa. As can be seen in the figure, Chinese peacekeeping troops were deployed in five out of the seven UN-led missions on the African continent as of 2019.

Figure 8: Where UN peacekeepers have been deployed



Source: World Economic Forum (2016)

Figure 9: China's contribution to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa



Source: Grieger (2019)

The 2015 FOCAC commitments were reiterated in the Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021) and Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024) following the 2018 summit and the 2021 Ministerial Conference. Before the 2018 conference, China-Africa security relations reached a new level when China set up its first overseas naval base at the crucial geostrategic point of Djibouti in 2017, which is officially described as a logistics base (Barton 2018a: 424; Grieger 2019: 11; Tanchum 2021). This move, however, raised concerns from some Western and African observers about an expansionist China and a further erosion of its non-interference principles (Attah-Asamoah 2019; Barton 2018a: 425), while others, as pointed out by Yu (2018: 493), spread speculations that the Chinese installed the military base in a bid to protect their commercial interests in Africa.

The 2018 Beijing Action Plan, like the Plan from the previous conference, indicated that security was increasingly being prioritised in China-Africa relations. The document announced plans to form the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum as a sub-forum of FOCAC dedicated to

"conducting more exchanges" between Chinese and African actors on peace and security issues (FOCAC 2018). The new sub-structure held its first meeting in July 2019 in Beijing, with the AU and 50 African countries sending almost 100 senior military representatives to attend (Chen *et al* 2019). In the same vein, the Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024) of the most recent FOCAC conference declared to "strengthen the implementation of the China-Africa peace and security plan and that "both sides will continue to hold China Africa Forum on Peace and Security" (FOCAC 2021a).

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the development and nature of contemporary China-Africa relations. The chapter showed that China-Africa relations have a long history that traces the origins of the relationship to the pre-Christian era. While intermittent contact between the two sides has been recorded for several centuries, contemporary China-Africa relations commenced in the 20th century. A new course for China-Africa relations was charted in the 1950s as the PRC emerged from the 'century of humiliation' in 1949 to support African nations that were fighting against colonisation. The shared history of suffering foreign invasions and subjugation between the PRC and African states inspired solidarity between the two sides and formed the basis of mutual resistance against neo-imperialism during the Cold War.

Despite challenges engendered by the rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union and, in turn, the fallout between Beijing and Moscow, China and African states developed a growing partnership between the 1960s and 1970s. This was marked by the PRC's replacement of Taiwan at the UN in 1971 with the help of African countries. However, by the 1980s, economic and security issues in African countries and China hampered their relations. China reduced its economic assistance to developing nations, including in Africa, to focus on deepening relations with developed nations to accelerate its internal economic modernisation project.

The chapter also showed that the end of the Cold War in 1989, in conjunction with the Tiananmen Square crisis during the same year, opened a new chapter for China-Africa relations. The latter event led to the revitalisation of China-Africa relations, as the aftermath of the incident dented relations between China and Western nations. At the same time, African countries appeared to support China against the alleged human rights violations of its citizens. Scholars and analysts such as Alden and Alves (2008: 53), Pairault (2021), Taylor (2004: 84-85), and Tull (2006: 462)

noted that the reaction by many African leaders to this incident demonstrated the common view among Chinese and African politicians that the West was continuing to meddle in the internal affairs of other sovereign states.

Thus, the 1990s saw increased political and economic relations between China and Africa and the establishment of the FOCAC mechanism at the end of the decade to institutionalise cooperation between them. The FOCAC proved to be a major success as trade, in particular, between the two sides grew massively and propelled China to overtake the US and the EU as Africa's largest trading partner. The perceived successes of the FOCAC in the early 2000s prompted the formation of the China-Africa strategic partnership in 2006, which was upgraded to "a new type of comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership" in 2015. The last FOCAC gatherings have further reiterated commitments to strengthen cooperation between Africa and China.

Furthermore, the chapter discussed the security relations between China and Africa that have become a key priority of their strategic partnership. The chapter showed that while many studies point out that security cooperation between China and African countries is a recent development, other studies have documented the long history of such cooperation between the two sides. As contemporary China-Africa relations emerged in the 1950s, Beijing supported several African liberation groups with arms and military training. In line with the broader challenges facing China-Africa relations during the Cold War, however, security cooperation between the two sides experienced similar upheavals in the 1960s and 1970s. China's assistance to some African liberation groups often caught controversy during this era as it competed against the Soviets to support the decolonisation movement in Africa.

China-Africa security relations also took a different turn following China's economic reforms in the late 1970s. Politically Beijing dropped its ideological interests and sought to normalise relations with all legitimate African governments. However, as China strove to attract FDI and modernise its economy, its military policy to developing countries began focusing on making profits and increasing Beijing's share in the global arms trade. Arms transfers from China to Africa further increased in the 1990s in accordance with the trajectory of relations between the two sides following the 1989 Tiananmen Square saga. Beijing continued to provide weaponry and training of military personnel at the bilateral level to nearly all African countries after the establishment of FOCAC, as the platform mainly focused on economic cooperation.

However, the Darfur crisis in 2003 changed the course of China-Africa security relations as China's role in the conflict raised global concern. Chinese and African leaders subsequently acknowledged the need for the FOCAC mechanism to start prioritising security cooperation. This largely marked by the creation of the ICACCPS in 2012 and other related sub-structures in the following years. However, the importance of security cooperation in Sino-Africa relations was epitomised by China's installation of its first military base on foreign soil in 2017 in Djibouti.

While the increasing security cooperation between China and Africa has mainly been attributed to China's economic and military interests (Barton 2018a: 424; Attah-Asamoah 2019; Maru 2019), Benabdallah (2016: 22-24) contended that the African continent does benefit from the new inclusive security cooperation approach. As the author explicates, for too many African countries, collaborating with China to address peace and security issues is an important opportunity to enhance their efforts at capacity-building and as a realistic approach to end the chronic cycles of conflicts and instability.

The next chapter presents the study's findings and adopts Wilkins' strategic partnership model (SPM) to analyse the Chapter-Africa strategic partnership.

CHAPTER 6. AN SPM ANALYSIS OF THE FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AFRICA AND CHINA'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study and uses Wilkins' Strategic Partnership Model (SPM) as the analytical tool to understand China and Africa's strategic partnership. Accordingly, the chapter addresses the main research question: How does the strategic partnership between AU/Africa and China affect the AU's Agenda 2063? The question probes especially how the partnership affects the peace and security objectives of the Agenda. In this chapter, the focus is on the first and second research sub-questions. The first question (1) why have Africa and China established a strategic partnership? Moreover, the second question (2) how do the AU and China contemplate and plan to address emerging challenges in their strategic partnership? In line with the main research question, this chapter seeks to achieve the main research aim, which is to understand how the China-Africa strategic partnership impacts the AU's Agenda 2063 peace and security objectives.

The chapter commences in the first section with a discussion of the respondents interviewed as part of the data collection process, along with some of their published works on China-Africa relations. The second section proceeds to use the SPM to present and analyse the findings, starting with the formation stage of the China-Africa strategic partnership. This part seeks to answer the first research sub-question. This section examines the historical and underlying factors and issues in the global context that motivated Chinese and African actors to seek closer co-operation.

In the third section, the chapter analyses how the implementation of China and Africa's strategic partnership has unfolded. The section aims to achieve the second research objective: to understand how Africa and China contemplate and plan to address emerging challenges in their strategic partnership. This aim is approached in two ways. First, the section analyses the institutional framework constructed to coordinate cooperation in different sectors, focusing on the mechanisms created to advance security cooperation. Secondly, the section probes the approach adopted by the partners to tackle issues of peace and security.

6.2. Demographic data of interviews respondents and some of their works on the topic

Table 2: Interview respondents

Name	Gender	Location	Education	Field of work (occupation)
Professor Chris Alden	M	London, United Kingdom	PhD/ Professor	Academic/think tank (Professor/ researcher)
Professor David Monyae	M	Johannesburg, South Africa	PhD/ Professor	Academic (Professor/ researcher)
Dr Emmanuel Matambo	M	Johannesburg, South Africa	PhD	Academic (researcher)
Professor Garth Le Pere	M	Pretoria, South Africa	PhD/ Professor	Academic (Professor/ researcher)
Participant X	F	Oslo, Norway	PhD	Think tank (researcher)
Dr Philani Mthembu	M	Pretoria, South Africa	PhD	Think tank (researcher)

Source: The author based on fieldwork

As discussed in chapter four (research methodology), the total number of respondents interviewed during this study was six. Table 2 above provides the demographic data of the interviewees, including their professions and location. These are experts from various think tank institutions and universities. The first respondent was renowned China-Africa scholar Dr Chris Alden. He is a Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and a Research Associate at the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). Alden has been working on the China-Africa topic since 1990 and has edited/co-edited and authored/co-authored numerous books and articles on the topic.

Alden is one of the authors that have written extensively on the subject of the increasing security co-operation between China and Africa. Alden *et al*'s (2018) *China and Africa: Building Peace and Security Co-operation on the Continent* is one of the most comprehensive books on the subject; he edited and co-authored some of its chapters. One of Alden's chapters which he co-authored with Zheng Yixiao, argues that Beijing's shifting security policy in Africa is centred on

its longstanding "determination to carve out a new global position for its military that is commensurate with and reflects its expanding economic status and interests on the international stage" (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 40).

In the second interview, two respondents opted to do the interview in one session as they worked in the same institution. These are Dr Emmanuel Matambo and Prof David Monyae from the Centre for Africa-China Studies (CACS) at the University of Johannesburg, one of the South African universities hosting a Confucius Institute. Monyae is co-director of the Confucius Institute. He is one of the most recognised experts on China-Africa relations. He provides analysis of the relationship between China and Africa for several mainstream media platforms in South Africa. In *The African Union—China Partnership: Prospects and Challenges*, Monyae (2018) provides a critical analysis of the burgeoning partnership between the AU and China. In the chapter, the author argued that the AU-China partnership appears to be pursuing mutually beneficial outcomes (Monyae 2018: 289, 297). However, China's commitment to security cooperation in Africa is still questionable (Monyae 2018: 289, 297). He further states that Beijing's focus on its bilateral relations with African countries impeded its relationship with the AU, which contributes to its internal challenges (Monyae 2018: 289, 297).

Monyae also co-authored with Bhaso Ndzendze in *China's belt and road initiative: linkages with the African Union's Agenda 2063 in historical perspective* to show how the two China and Africa's strategic development goals can be aligned within the FOCAC framework for mutual benefit (Ndzendze and Monyae 2019). Monyae's colleague, Dr Matambo, is a Senior Researcher and Director of Research at the CACS. He has been working on the China-Africa topic since 2015. In *China: Africa's wise men from the East*, Matambo (2021) analyses perceptions of Africa's state and non-state actors on China. The author found that perceptions of state actors in Zambia compared to non-state actors such as trade unions and individuals contrast sharply. State officials are likely to describe China more positively, while views of non-actors on China vary, but common themes are opportunities, caution and distrust.

The fourth respondent was Dr Garth le Pere, an Extraordinary Professor at the University of Pretoria and a Senior Associate of the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection. Le Pere has also written extensively on the topic of China and Africa. In *US-China Geoeconomic Tensions: Implications for the African Continental Free Trade Area*, le Pere (2021) scrutinises how the

rivalry between China and the US is unfolding in Africa and how it affects the continent's nascent free trade agreement. Le Pere also co-authored *The Role of China in Africa's Industrialization: The Challenge of Building Global Value Chains* with Mzukisi Qobo to analyse the dilemmas of African countries' dependence on commodities as the world enters the fourth industrial revolution. The authors argue that Beijing, through its partnership with Africa and "the imperative of a concerted industrialization endeavour, can contribute to assisting the continent to move up value chains" (Qobo and le Pere 2017: 2).

The fifth interviewee, Participant X, opted to remain anonymous in this study. The interviewee is a senior researcher at a research and think tank institution in Oslo, Norway. This participant is also one of the authors who contributed significantly to security co-operation in the China-Africa topic. Their chapter in the book, *New Perspectives on China's Relations with the World* (2019), examines how China used a discourse of solidarity and comradeship against imperialism to socialise African leaders into its conception of South-South relations and its view of the security-development nexus approach. In another publication (2021), this author expounded on the argument by pointing out that China's increasing involvement in African affairs has found justification and acceptance in Africa through its security-development nexus approach that presents a coherent discourse of non-interference.

The sixth and final respondent was Dr Philani Mthembu, executive director at the Institute of Global Dialogue (IGD) in Pretoria, South Africa. Mthembu is among the authors that have advocated for a common African policy on China to enhance Africa's agency in the relationship. He is the sole author of *China and India's Development Co-operation in Africa: The Rise of Southern Powers* (Mthembu 2018), in which he explains "the determinants of China and India's development cooperation in Africa". Mthembu also co-edited and co-authored chapters in *Africa-China Co-operation Towards an African Policy on China?* (2021). His chapter with Faith Mabera in the book advances an argument pointing to the necessity of enhancing African agency by developing a coordinated approach for the continent to not only deal with China but also to engage other external powers such as the US and EU (Mthembu and Mabera 2021: 2).

From the following section, the chapter proceeds to present the findings of this research using the SPM to analyse the formation and implementation phases of the China-Africa strategic partnership.

6.3. Formation of the Africa-China strategic partnership: strengthening an age-old relationship

This section attends to the first research question that probes the basis and purpose of the Africa-China strategic partnership. The aim is to uncover the underlying factors that led to China and African countries to establish a strategic partnership and the purpose of this partnership. According to the SPM, the formation stage is governed by three key factors: environmental uncertainty, strategic fit, and a system principle.

6.3.1. Environmental uncertainty: mutual needs and interests

According to Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online), Mthembu (personal interview, 29 April 2021), and Participant X (personal interview, 19 April 2021, online), the establishment of a strategic partnership between China and Africa was simply a solidification or an upgrade of the growing diplomatic and economic relations between the two sides. le Pere (personal interview, 14 April 2021, online) argued that the FOCAC was "really a consequence of the maturation of the strategic partnership" between Africa and China. In this way, le Pere holds a view similar to other scholars (as discussed in the literature review chapter), such as Bano and Falki (2016), Du Plessis (2014) and Shelton (2016: 260), which implies that China and Africa have been in a strategic partnership long before the FOCAC was established in 2000. Matambo and Monyae (personal interview, 2 April 2021, online), in my joint interview with them, also shared the same view as le Pere. They stated that China had been a strategic partner to Africa in that it has never been merely a donor but has sought to assist Africa and help itself in the process (Matambo and Monyae personal interview, 2 April 2021, online). This point can also be noted in Monyae's (2018: 284) observation that Beijing's "tradition of developing cooperative frameworks and strategic partnerships" commenced during the Cold War with collaborations with Asian and African countries.

The intention to establish a strategic partnership between Africa and China was formally expressed in the Programme for China-Africa Co-operation in Economic, and Social Development adopted at the first FOCAC conference in 2000. The document cited the "unjust and inequitable world order" and "globalisation" as issues in the international environment that posed uncertainties and challenges for developing countries (FOCAC 2000b). As a result, this prompted the "determination

to strengthen the existing co-operation between China and African countries in all fields" (FOCAC 2000b). The 2006 Beijing Declaration that established the new type of strategic partnership between Africa and China stated that "the world today is undergoing complex and profound changes" and is "faced with the growing trend of economic globalisation" (FOCAC 2006a). The interview respondents did not mention any environmental uncertainties that drew China and Africa together. However, the changes and challenges mentioned in the 2006 FOCAC Declaration can be traced to the early 1990s. This emerged when the international order's uncertainty was engendered by the historical end of the Cold War in 1989.

For Africa and other developing countries, the end of the Cold War opened the door for more cooperation partners for economic or other interests without concerns of antagonising other actors. However, as Du Plessis (2014: 115) mentioned, other developments in several African countries in the immediate post-Cold War era presented an increased uncertainty for Africa's position in international affairs. The structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed upon African countries since the early 1980s coupled with the West's unilateral push for democratisation on the continent left many African countries highly indebted, politically unstable and economically marginalised. Consequently, the continent's strategic importance and status sharply declined in the early 1990s following the end of the Cold War (Anshan 2014: 265; Du Plessis 2014: 115; Murithi 2012: 664; Makinda and Okumu 2008: 81). The 1990s decade thus also commenced with diminished constructive engagement between Africa and its traditional Western donors and partners (Alden and Alves 2008: 53; Anshan 2014: 266; Shinn 2019: 71). Japan was the only major developed power that shown interest in strengthening relations with Africa in the early 1990s, hosting the first Tokyo International Conference of African Development (TICAD) in 1993 (Anshan 2014: 273-274).

For China, the economic reforms introduced in the late 1970s saw immense economic growth for the country in the 1980s and 1990s (Yee and Storey 2002: 2). But the collapse of the Soviet Union in between 1989 and 1991 left China as the main communist power and, therefore "the successor to the Cold War 'Soviet menace'" for some Western powers, particularly the US. Furthermore, the 1989 Tiananmen Square crisis greatly tarnished the image of the PRC in the West. Thus, as Pradt (2016: 10) and Yee and Storey (2002: 2-3) argued, a "China threat" narrative emerged among some US policy-makers and scholars in the early 1990s. The narrative depicted China as the next major

threat to the liberal international order and world peace. Western governments were thus urged to adopt a hard-line towards Beijing to pressure China to follow the liberal democratic political path (Yee and Storey 2002: 2-3). Therefore, the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident posed a threat to its growing relations with Western nations and its rising economy (Yueh 2019: 22). Particularly as China's economic growth was largely still dependent on Western FDI, technology-transfer and Western markets for most of its exports (Yueh 2019: 22).

Several scholars and analysts (Alden and Alves 2008: 53; Pairault 2021; Taylor 2004: 84-85; Tull 2006: 462) maintained that the supportive reaction from African leaders to the Chinese government after the Tiananmen Square incident, in contrast to the West's, provided an impetus for the revitalisation of China-Africa relations in the 1990s. Interestingly, as documented by Anshan (2014: 270), the adverse effects of the West's push for democratisation in Africa subsided in the mid and late 1990s, and the continent saw some economic recovery and political stability in several African countries. Consequently, in what has been termed "the new scramble for Africa" (Alden 2007: 93; Carmody 2011), some Western powers revised their policies towards Africa in the latter half of the 1990s as a response to the growing relations between China and a number of African countries. For example, in 1998, then US President, Bill Clinton, undertook an 11-day tour visiting six African countries, followed by the first America–Africa 21st Century Partnership Ministerial Conference held in Washington in 1999.

The US Congress also passed the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in 1999, which came into effect in 2000. This act was implemented to allow some countries in sub-Saharan Africa tax-free access to the US market for certain products. The former French President, Jacques Chirac, followed suit by visiting five African countries just three months after the US President visited the continent. The same year, France also held the Franco-African Summit Conference in Paris (Anshan 2014: 271-273). The trend continued for most of the 2000s and 2010s with other major and emerging powers, such as South Korea, India, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, seeking to increase their engagement with the African continent through summits. However, unlike China, Western powers continued to push for democracy and liberal norms in African countries. This was evidenced by the US-Africa Leaders Summit in 2022, in which the US pledged US$165 million to support democratic processes and US$75 million "to counter democratic backsliding" in Africa (Usman, Ovadia and Abayo 2022).

Between China and the major Western powers, relations did not completely breakdown despite the Tiananmen incident being seen as an atrocity in the West. As Campbell and Ratner (2018: 62) noted, the US's 1990 National Security Strategy during George H. W. Bush's Presidency rationalised the need to strengthen ties with Beijing, stating that it was "crucial to China's prospects for regaining the path of economic reform". These sentiments were reiterated by Bush's successor, Bill Clinton, and motivated the US to maintain China as the most-favoured-nation (MFN) in global trade, a status granted to the PRC by the US in 1980 (Campbell and Ratner 2018: 62).

However, the 1996 Taiwan missile crisis threatened Beijing's relations with Western nations once more, as China and the US came close to a military confrontation over Taiwan. Alden and Alves (2008: 54) noted that "Africa emerged once again as an important supporting platform for China", providing further grounds for strengthening China-Africa relations that would see the formation of the FOCAC in 2000. Despite the Taiwan issue, Western nations themselves continued to increase trade relations with China (Campbell and Ratner 2018: 62). Western nations, for example, supported its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 (Campbell and Ratner 2018: 62). According to Islam (2021), China's entry into the WTO was an "event of epic geopolitical and economic importance", leading to the astronomical economic growth of its economy. By 2005, China's share of the value of global trade went from one-fifth to one-third (Islam 2021; Waldron 2005: 717).

Perceptions of China in the US had improved in the mid-2000s as Beijing supported Washington's "War on Terror" following the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Pradt 2016: 11). Chinese leaders also attempted to allay global fears that a rising China would seek to challenge the status quo by framing their country's growth as a "peaceful rise" (Dellios and Ferguson 2012: 70; Shinn and Eisenman 2020: 277-278). This was later adjusted to "peaceful development" due to the potentially threatening nature of the term 'rise' (Dellios and Ferguson 2012: 70; Shinn and Eisenman 2020: 277-278). However, the "China threat" theory was simultaneously being heightened by some US scholars and government officials, portraying China's rapid economic and military development as a "threat to American security" (Menges 2005: xvi; Roper 2014: 2).

Consequently, as argued by Anshan (2014: 282), the mutual requirements of opposing imperialism and the establishment of a just world order provided internal driving forces for strengthening China-Africa relations. Huang (2008: 299) pointed out that Beijing realised that the US was

determined to frustrate the growth of Chinese firms in the global energy industry. This was evident after the China National Offshore Oil Company's (CNOOC) bid to acquire the US-owned Unocal was thwarted in 2005. According to the author, the outcome of this bid directly encouraged China to strengthen its strategic partnership with African countries (Huang 2008: 299).

However, the increasing engagement between China and Africa also engendered uncertainty in their partnership. While yielding significant economic gains for China and Africa, it also led to security predicaments in several African states such as the DRC, Angola, and Sudan (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 43; HSBA 2007: 5-6; Taylor and Wu 2013: 465-466). In particular, the Darfur crisis in 2003 was one issue that posed challenges for China-Africa relations as Chinese weapons were reportedly used by the Sudanese government to massacre civilians (HSBA 2007: 5-6; Kaplinsky *et al*, 2006: 40; Manyok 2016: 2-3).

Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online) and Participant X (personal interview, 19 April 2021, online) point out that the turning point for China-Africa relations, however, was the aftermath of the anti-government uprisings– dubbed the "Arab Spring"– that started in Tunisia in December 2010 and rapidly spread to several Arab countries, including in Libya where China had tens of billions of dollars' worth of investments in the oil industry. China incurred huge financial losses in Libya and was unable to provide immediate assistance to its more than 30 thousand citizens living in that country as the rebellion there quickly turned into a full-blown civil war (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 45; Barton 2018a: 415; Shinn 2019: 74). As Carrozza (2021: 1187) indicated, "it is from 2011 that China's position on security matters began to be clearly articulated". Therefore, the 2012 FOCAC conference that established the ICACPPS was strongly inspired by the security issues that have transpired since the beginning of the new millennium, particularly between 2009 and 2012.

Respondents in the interviews cited some slightly varying reasons behind China's increased involvement in Africa's security issues, but their views converged around one point, that is, it was unavoidable. Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online) stated that China was forced to "get involved" in Africa's security issues as its interests on the continent were increasingly being threatened. Matambo and Monyae (personal interview, 2 April 2021, online) indicated that due to its growing economy and increasing investments in the African continent, China had to "police its own interests". Participant X (personal interview, 19 April 2021, online) also asserted that China

was primarily driven by the need to protect its investments and citizens living and working in Africa. According to Mthembu (personal interview, 29 April 2021, online), the more China increased its footprints on the continent, the more it was bound to engage with Africa in more areas. le Pere (personal interview, 14 April 2021, online) stated that China's decision was based on principles as it has declared support for Africa's peace and security architecture during the creation of FOCAC.

The literature also generally points to the same view. First, the 2003 Darfur crisis exposed the extent of China's role in African conflicts (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 43; HSBA 2007: 5-6; Kaplinsky *et al* 2006: 40; Manyok 2016: 2-3; Taylor and Wu 2013: 465-466; Tull 2006: 476). China was, therefore, at risk of being seen not only as an enabler of wars and human rights violations but also as a new but indifferent plunderer of African resources (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 43; Keet 2008: 81; Taylor 2006: 740). Secondly, the increasing number of Chinese multinational companies (state-owned and private) investing and operating in African countries were often drawn into local disputes concerning issues. These disputes included, for example, violations of local labour laws (for example, not prioritising locals for employment), operating licences, increasing fatal accidents in Chinese-operated mines and abuse against local employees by Chinese managers.

These issues tarnished China's business reputation, but most importantly, they led to increasing resentment and security threats against Chinese companies, citizens, businesspeople and tourists in several African countries (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 43-45; Barton 2018b: 38-39; Grieger 2019: 4; Yu 2018: 493). However, Zeleza (2008: 180) indicated that many African leaders have come to see China as an alternative development model and a source of investment and development assistance. China also valued its access to Africa's raw materials and market for its finished products and investment outlets. Moreover, the political alliance between China and Africa has proven crucial for China's global interests. The circumstances thus forced China, as a major world power, to re-evaluate and redevelop its African policy in early 2006.

6.3.2. Strategic fit

As mentioned in chapter 3, the strategic fit is the strategic significance or relevance of the partnership in world politics. What typically makes a partnership important is what each partner

brings to the table, how the collaboration shapes each partner's pursuit of key goals and the partnership's impact on global politics.

First, several scholars and analysts cite that Africa's abundant natural and human resources place the continent strategically in world politics (Akpan and Onya 2018: 143; Taylor 2006: 937-938). According to Matambo and Monyae (personal interview, 2 April 2021, online), despite Africa's poverty and security dilemmas, the continent remained of significant importance to the world, as evidenced by the increasing summitry diplomacy towards Africa by great powers such as China, the US, Japan, France, EU and other major powers such as South Korea and Turkey since the 1990s. Monyae (follow-up personal interview, 3 August 2022, online) further expounded that Africa has always had the potential to become economically self-reliant, but leaders have realised that the continent cannot develop within an "imperialist world order". Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online) and Mthembu (personal interview, 29 April 2021) also argued that Africa holds geostrategic relevance in world politics not only for its mineral and human resources but also as a region that has demonstrated political and economic recovery, and therefore, an attractive market for finished products as its middle class grew.

According to the database firm Statista, in 2006, the African continent had a combined population of 939 million, mostly young people averaging 19 years of age. By 2022, it had risen to 1.4 billion and is projected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050 (Saleh 2022; Paice 2022). Furthermore, a UN report indicated that the African continent holds about 30% of the world's mineral reserves, 12% of the planet's oil, 8% of its natural gas reserves and 40% of the world's gold. Africa is also home to approximately 90% of the world's chromium and platinum and houses the largest reserves of uranium, platinum, diamonds and current sought-after minerals such as cobalt and lithium (UNEP 2022). In 2019, the continent produced almost 1 billion tonnes of minerals worth US$406 billion (Al Jazeera Staff 2022).

On the other hand, China had a population of 1.3 billion in 2006, averaging 33 years old, which is believed to have peaked at 1.45 billion in 2021-2022 and is projected to decline in the years towards 2030 (Textor 2022). Moreover, since the early 1980s, China has been one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and is anticipated to surpass the US as the world's largest economy by 2030 (Dellios and Ferguson 2012: 2). le Pere (personal interview, 14 April 2021, online) argued that China and Africa have "a strategic supply and demand relationship". As several studies

indicated (Alden 2007: 13-14; Anshan 2014: 267-268; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 114; Shelton and Paruk 2008: 5; Taylor 2006: 937), the China-Africa partnership has produced observable benefits for the continent as trade between the two grew from US$1.4 billion in 1990 to almost US$10 billion in 2000, and to US$39.7 billion by 2005.

Secondly, as other studies pointed out (Alden and Alves 2008: 55; Konings 2007: 359; Nantulya 2020: 481, 502-503; Olewe 2021), China and Africa present a formidable political alliance in global politics, thanks to the one-third of votes in the UN which Africa represents, the largest single regional voting bloc, and China's veto-powered permanent seat at the UNSC. Although others have argued that such political interests "take a back seat to hard national and economic interests and priorities" (Grieger 2019: 2; Huang 2008: 297; Taylor 2006: 941), economic relations between Africa and China appear modest.

In 2006, Africa accounted for only 4% of China's total trade with the world, while China made up 9.3% of Africa's total global trade (Alden 2007: 8; Pairault 2021; Shinn and Eisenman 2012: 114-115). By 2020, these figures rose slightly, with Africa making up 4.5% of China's global trade, while China accounted for 13% of Africa's (Pairault 2021). As a result, Pairault argued that geopolitical interests have been at the core of modern China-Africa relations. Some scholars have argued that this political alliance is particularly important for China to its ambition of reshaping global governance institutions and norms in accordance with its interests (Nantulya 2020: 502-503; Olewe 2021; Pairault 2021; Shinn and Eisenman, 2020: 281-286).

6.3.3. System principle

The system principle of the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership is rooted in three issues: the shared Sino-Africa history of falling victim to foreign intrusion and subjugation, Africa's quest to play a meaningful role in global affairs as an independent actor, and China's perception of itself as a central world power (Matambo and Monyae, personal interview, 2 April 2021, online). Thus, as Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online) pointed out, both China and African countries have "diagnosed many global issues in a similar way" due to their shared history and strong interest in resisting Western imperialism and hegemony. le Pere (personal interview, 14 April 2021, online) also noted that, as a result, Africa and China have advocated for a new international system

characterised by multipolarity as a normative alternative to the current US-dominated unipolar system.

For this reason, as le Pere (personal interview, 14 April 2021, online) pointed out, African countries, individually and under the AU, have sought to increase their participation in the South-South cooperation agenda with other developing and emerging powers such as Brazil, China, Saudi Arabia and India. South-South cooperation presents the opportunity for countries of the Global South or developing world to engage as equals and collaborate on issues of common concern. For Africa, South-South cooperation also presents an alternative against the conventional North-South relations in which developed nations such as the US and EU states have dominated the economic and political terms of relations, mostly to the detriment of African countries.

Matambo and Monyae (personal interview, 2 April 2021, online) pointed that China has also been "quietly protesting" against the Western-dominated world system by attempting to run a "parallel system within the system". However, Participant X (follow-up written response, 19 August 2022, email) argued that "we need to separate the rhetoric of the proposed change from the reality of the intentions (at least China's)". According to the researcher, in theory, China advocates for a more democratic and less Western-centric world. However, in reality, China has little interest in a multipolar world; what Xi Jinping wants, as she argued, is a world where China is at the centre. However, Xi Jinping realises that this is impossible to achieve at the moment and probably not even desirable for its partners in the developing world (Participant X, follow-up written response, 19 August 2022, email).

China's aid to Africa since the 1970s was one of the first of its attempts to challenge the Western-dominated neo-liberal world order (Gilpin 2021: 7). Unlike the West, China has employed a state-led approach that seeks to achieve development first by targeting specific areas such as infrastructure, education and public facilities to stimulate economic activity and growth. China's non-traditional economic assistance and aid approach was first applied with its 30-year US$405 million interest-free loan for the Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA) project in 1975. Interestingly, Zambia had previously made a US$400 million loan request to the World Bank and other Western powers for the project but was rejected as too risky (Alden and Alves 2008: 51; Kobo 2013; Konings 2007: 346-347; Taylor 2007: 38).

Since then, China has ramped up its non-conventional aid and loans to Africa, particularly in the 1990s and FOCAC years, providing debt relief and the much-needed funds for African countries to finance infrastructure projects and improve their self-development capabilities. This approach, dubbed the "resources-for-infrastructure deals" by others (Alves 2013), has been helping to enhance economic growth and job creation in many African countries. Thereby generating increased income for the local people and improving their living conditions (Gilpin 2021: 7). le Pere (personal interview, 14 April 2021, online) made a similar observation and echoed the 'third strand of school of thoughts' in the China-Africa intellectual debates, as discussed by Asongu and Aminkeng (2013: 261-262), which contended that “China represents an alternative paradigm of development co-operation, which is very real”.

The FOCAC mechanism has become the platform to vocalise the China-Africa system principle of multipolarity further. The 2000 Beijing FOCAC Declaration, for instance, stated that (FOCAC 2000a):

> the injustice and inequality in the current international system are incompatible with the trend of the times towards world peace and development, hinder the development of the countries of the South and pose threats to international peace and security

The Programme for China-Africa Co-operation in Economic and Social Development, adopted at the same conference, pronounced that "China and African countries should position themselves to influence the establishment of a new world order which will reflect their needs and interests" (FOCAC 2000b). The establishment of this "new world order" was further emphasised by China in its 2006 African Policy Paper (Xinhua 2006a), prior to the FOCAC Beijing summit later that same year that formally declared a strategic partnership between Africa and China. The 2006 FOCAC Beijing declaration went further, calling for (FOCAC 2006a):

> reform of the United Nations and other multilateral international institutions to make them better meet the need of all members of the international community. […] Priority should be given to increasing the representation and full participation of African countries in the UN Security Council and other UN agencies

Since 2013, FOCAC has adopted China's slogan of building a global "community of a common destiny". Studies such as Nantulya (2020), Olewe (2021), Pairault (2021), and Shinn and Eisenman (2020) pointed out that the attempts by China to reshape the international system and promote multipolarity became more noticeable in the 2010s. One significant example was the launch of the

BRI in 2013, which, according to Nantulya (2019), aimed to shift the global centre of gravity away from Western powers to China. Furthermore, as recorded by Nantulya (2020: 502-504), China, through its partnership with Africa, managed to successively hold the position of UN Undersecretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs since 2007. This is a key position that is responsible for the UN's global development programmes. In addition, out of the fifteen specialised UN agencies, Chinese and nationals from African countries each headed four of them by 2019 (Nantulya 2020: 503).

Moreover, in 2017 and 2018, the UN passed two Chinese-initiated resolutions, which recognised the Chinese concept of the "Community of Common Destiny" as a concept that contributes to international values and governance. Nantulya noted that the two documents promoted Beijing's much-revered principle of non-interference and the Chinese state-led development model as an approach to enhancing human rights and social stability. Again, in 2019, China and 43 African countries collaborated to oppose the US' power to veto appointments to the Appellate Body of the World Trade Organisation (WTOAB), the trade dispute settlement system of the WTO. These developments largely took place in the backdrop of the US' apparent scaling back of its involvement in international affairs by Donald Trump's admiration (2016-2020) (Nantulya 2020: 503-504).

Coleman and Job (2021) described how China and Africa also have the potential to transform the UN Peacekeeping model, which has been grounded on Western liberal principles and norms. The model has also come to be dominated by Western powers such as the US, UK, and France, who are also permanent seat holders (also known as P5 members) of the UNSC. As the authors point out, the liberal UN Peacekeeping approach often engaged in "an expanding range of mandated tasks" that included "supporting elections, facilitating post-conflict peacebuilding, monitoring human rights and promoting the rule of law". However, this approach has frequently been compromised by inconsistent application of principles across different countries and regions, often undermining the purposes of peacekeeping missions and political stability in host nations. Consequently, the liberal approach has often faced resistance from the other two P5 members, China and Russia, accusing Western powers of pursuing a hegemonic agenda through the UN peacekeeping framework. Therefore, China and African countries have petitioned to reform the liberal UN peacekeeping model (Coleman and Job 2021: 1453).

According to the authors, China and Africa's attempts to transform international peacekeeping are significant for two reasons: first, Africa is the largest troop-contributing region at the UN. Furthermore, the most contemporary UN peacekeeping operations have been deployed on the African continent (see figures 8 and 9 in chapter five) and therefore have had the most impact on the region. Second, China is the world's second-largest economy, the only P5 state featured among the UN's top ten troop contributors and a major financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget (Coleman and Job 2021: 1453).

In summary, this section (6.3) finds that China and African countries established a strategic partnership to traverse a global environment unfriendly towards their interests. The two sides considered themselves compatible partners as they share a history of falling victim to invasions by imperial European or Western powers. Chinese and African leaders further recognised that the Western powers were now driving the contemporary environment's hostility towards their interests. In the past, this adversity was applied physically, primarily through military power, to impose exploitative political and economic systems upon weaker nations. However, in the new environment, this antagonism is wielded systemically through Western-controlled global political and economic structures consolidated in the globalised era. These structures are used to contain Chinese and African interests. These underlying issues are then the basis of China and Africa's shared worldview, which perceives the global order as an unjust system that needs to be transformed.

6.4. Implementation of the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership

This section aims to answer the second research question by analysing the implementation of the China-Africa strategic partnership. As Mthembu (personal interview, 29 April 2021, online) argued, an important aspect to look at is what material changes come into place once a strategic partnership is formally declared.

6.4.1. The institutional framework

The next phase after forming a strategic partnership is to build and maintain reciprocal and mutually beneficial relations. This phase, as Wilkins (2008: 364) explained, "is accompanied by

the diffusion of an institutional structure that governs interaction patterns between partners". The institutional shape typically indicates the envisioned depth of co-operation and approaches for addressing unexpected or undesired outcomes. Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online) indicated that the FOCAC serves a crucial purpose in China-Africa relations in that it is a point of departure, helps to define the relationship, and assesses what is working and what might be obstacles and challenges.

According to Alden, this explains more about the functions of strategic partnerships for China, which is to manage divergences. le Pere (personal interview, 14 April 2021, online), argued that FOCAC represents China and Africa's commitment to promoting the philosophy and spirit of South-South cooperation, which contrasts the conventional North-South co-operation framework. However, le Pere insisted that due to a lack of coherent common African policy on China, the FOCAC agenda has largely been shaped by China.

The institutional framework of the strategic partnership between China and Africa was launched through the Programme for China-Africa Co-operation in Economic and Social Development, adopted in 2000 at the inaugural FOCAC gathering, and the adopted Action Plans in the subsequent conferences and summits since then. The Programme stated that "China and African countries […] agree to adopt a workable programme towards the creation of a new strategic partnership". The document declared several mechanisms that would be created to coordinate co-operation in trade, investment, tourism, debt relief, financial co-operation, infrastructure development, arms control, and multilateral co-operation (FOCAC 2000b). China thereafter created the FOCAC Follow-up Committee comprising of various state departments and financial institutions. Beijing also established the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Mechanism on Foreign Human Resources Development Co-operation after the conclusion of the second FOCAC meeting in 2003 (Taylor 2011: 49).

Taylor (2011: 49) noted that efforts to create follow-up mechanisms were made in several African countries but were not as coherent and organised as China's committee was. Chinese and African leaders gathered in Zambia in 2001 for a consultation conference, in which an agreement was reached to implement the Procedures of the Follow-Up Mechanism of FOCAC as a concrete instrument to help standardise the forum. As Taylor pointed out, these Procedures officially came

into effect in 2002, stating that the FOCAC ministerial conferences would take place triennially alternating between China and an African country.

Additionally, high-level officials from China and Africa will gather as determined by both sides in the year before the FOCAC conference. Furthermore, leaders agreed that the Secretariat of China's FOCAC Follow-up Committee and the Beijing-based African diplomatic corps (comprising of African states that have diplomatic relations with the PRC) would meet regularly (Taylor 2011: 49). The African diplomatic corps has subsequently become the primary mode of communication between African governments and China's Follow-up Committee. It coordinates inputs and responses from different African governments upon FOCAC implementation programmes and plays a key role in organising FOCAC conferences and follow-up meetings (Anshan *et al* 2012: 14).

Following the formal declaration of China and Africa's strategic partnership in 2006, the accompanying Beijing Action Plan declared plans to create a framework of regular political dialogue and to create the China–Africa Development Fund to oversee Chinese investment projects in Africa (FOCAC 2006b). The latter came into effect in 2007, while the former, termed the AU-China Strategic Dialogue, was established in 2008 (Taylor 2011: 78). In 2012, the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security (ICACPPS) was added as a mechanism to integrate security co-operation within the FOCAC mechanism fully. While security co-operation was introduced in 2006, the launch of ICACPPS in 2012, as Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online) argued, was the definitive turning point for China-Africa relations.

Additionally, China launched the China-Africa Peace and Security Fund in 2016 with a budget of US$100 million to focus on operationalising the ASF (Nantulya 2020: 501). Three new mechanisms were also created at the 2018 FOCAC summit to bolster the ICACPPS further. These are the China Africa Peace and Security Forum, China Africa Defense Forum, and the China Africa Law Enforcement and Security Forum, which have been envisioned to serve as platforms for consultations to identify peace and security issues that need to be prioritised (Carter III *et al* 2019: 119). These bureaucratic structures show more coupling (figure 1, Y-axis, chapter 3) among the executive (heads of state), ministers, military heads, and state and private enterprise leaders.

Accordingly, the most prominent functional areas (figure 2, X-axis, chapter 3) are in diplomacy, economics and security, indicating a "tightly coupled" partnership (Wilkins 2008: 366).

Scholars such as Anshan *et al* (2012), Monyae (2018: 296), Shinn (2019: 79), and Taylor (2019: 119) have indicated, however, that Africa still lacks a well-structured FOCAC coordinating mechanism like China's, and this is largely due to lack of a consensus among African leaders and the AU to develop a coherent African policy on China. African countries that have established working follow-up committees for FOCAC programmes are only Ethiopia and South Africa. Most of the others usually coordinate with FOCAC through their Foreign Affairs ministries or departments (Anshan *et al* 2012: 14). Many scholars also asserted that, due to the entirety of the FOCAC process being bankrolled by China, it is Beijing, through its follow-up committee, that is largely in control of the processes (Monyae 2018: 297; Taylor 2019: 119). This involves all the processes from setting the agenda for the conferences, the documents adopted at these gatherings, priority areas for investment projects, and the implementation stages (Taylor 2019: 119). As a result, cooperation between China and African countries have largely been occupied by Beijing's quest for natural resources, particularly in the first decade of the FOCAC mechanism as China overtook Japan to become the world's second largest importer of petroleum products (Konings 2007: 352; Taylor 2006: 943). Thus, much of Chinese investments flowed more into resource-rich nations in Africa such as Angola, Sudan, Libya, Zambia and South Africa. This links to what Shinn (2008: 161) also highlighted, as mentioned in chapter five, that Sino-Africa security cooperation in the 2000s was between Beijing and African countries primarily rich in energy and mineral resources.

Participant X (follow-up written response, 19 August 2022, email) argued further that the FOCAC framework makes it easier for China to express its preferences than for the over 50 African countries plus the AU. Accordingly, Le Pere (follow-up interview, 23 August 2022, online), Africa has mostly been reacting to China's initiatives and inputs throughout much of the FOCAC process. Echoing these points, Monyae (2018: 297) asserted that the FOCAC Declarations and Action Plans illustrate Africa's "passive approach towards its relationship with China". Showing cognisance of this issue, Chinese and African leaders have jointly declared "readiness to leverage the role of the Chinese Follow-up Committee of FOCAC and welcome the efforts by the African side to establish and improve the mechanism for implementing follow-up actions" (MFA-PRC 2022b).

6.4.2. China and Africa's approach to security co-operation

Some studies indicated that, since the end of the Cold War, China has sought to accelerate its rise as an independent "pole" to counterweigh the US-dominated unipolar system and to particularly validate the effectiveness of its development model (Tull 2006: 461; Yu 2018: 491). China's security-development-nexus approach, also known as the "developmental peace" or "development-first" model, has been at the centre of its domestic policy paradigm since the late 1970s when the then-Chinese President, Den Xiaoping, introduced economic reforms in the country (Benabdallah 2016: 20; Carrozza 2019: 15-151; Xuejun 2018: 72). By 2015, China's government reported that it had "lifted more than 700 million people out of poverty, accounting for more than 70% of the global reduction in poverty" (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2016). According to Mthembu (follow-up interview, 23 August 2022, online), the CCP-led government in China is legitimate in the citizens' eyes because it has delivered on its development promises.

China's development model has also become a central aspect of the country's foreign policy. As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi remarked at a World Peace Forum event in 2013, "When conducting diplomacy, we must be fully committed to development, which holds the key to numerous problems in the world" (Wang 2013). Contrary to the West's approach that prioritises liberal democracy and respect for human rights as the pre-conditions for peace and development, The Chinese model focuses on national sovereignty, political stability and economic development (Benabdallah 2016: 20; Coleman and Job 2021: 1463). These are seen as requirements for the actual realisation of civil liberties and human rights. The Chinese further contend that "attempts by foreign countries to discuss democracy and human rights violate the rights of a sovereign country" (Akpan and Onya 2018: 147).

As Benabdallah (2016:24; 2021: 1188) noted, China's development model has resonated with many leaders on the African continent. However, Participant X (follow-up written response, 19 August 2021, email) pointed out that the security-development nexus had been in place in Africa before forming the strategic partnership between China and Africa. Makinda and Okumu (2008: 77) indicated that the security-development nexus approach in Africa could be traced to 1991 when the OAU declared that "[…] security should be seen in its wholesomeness and totality including the right of peoples to live in peace with access to the basic necessities of life […]". The AU further

proclaimed that "security includes human rights, the right to participate fully in the process of governance, the right to development, education and health, and the right to protection against poverty, marginalisation, and natural disasters" (AU, as cited by Makinda and Okumu 2008: 77). The security-development nexus has also been incorporated into the AU's Agenda 2063. The document asserted that (AUC 2015a: 6):

> a prosperous, integrated and united Africa, based on good governance, democracy, social inclusion and respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law are the necessary pre-conditions for a peaceful and conflict-free continent

Although Africa's approach appears to resemble the Western model as it links liberal democratic values with prosperity, Mthembu (follow-up interview, 23 August 2022, online) argued that it does not contradict China's approach since Africans have perceived development as a basic human rights issue. Likewise, Monyae (follow-up personal interview, 3 August 2022, online) emphasised that, from an African perspective, "access to basic necessities is among the primary human rights issues". Coleman and Job (2021: 1463) echoed these sentiments, elaborating that Africa and China "hold overlapping positions, de-emphasising liberal democratic peacebuilding principles but supporting robust operations that reinforce host-state stability".

Other scholars argue that the development-first model suits Chinese and Africans because of its non-interference principle. Rather than seeking political reforms, it focuses on capacitating incumbent governments to address socio-economic ills effectively (Carrozza 2021: 1191; Gilpin 2021: 7). Furthermore, the model, according to other studies (Benabdallah 2020: 71; Xuejun 2018: 75), endorses the concept of "African solutions for African problems" in that it "highlights African ownership and sovereignty in conflict management and post-conflict reconstructions on the continent". Carrozza (2021: 1191) indicated that African agency and independent decision-making could be seen in that China does not dictate how its loans and aid recipients should spend the funding. The distinctiveness of Beijing's strategy towards Africa of peace through development, argued Xuejun (2018: 75), is not only demonstrated by the prioritisation of economic development but it is also reflected in that it concentrates significant resources on primary areas. This includes providing safe water to local populations, building basic infrastructure, and setting up medical facilities and farming projects (Xuejun 2018: 75).

Ryder and Eguegu (2022) indicated that in the discussions leading up to the establishment of FOCAC, African leaders requested the inclusion of security cooperation within the mechanism; however, the Chinese resisted the call. As the authors explain, Beijing at the time was a newcomer in the field of global security "with only 52 personnel deployed in UN peacekeeping operations, no naval presence outside the Western Pacific, and minor representation in UN bodies" (Ryder and Eguegu 2022). Ryder and Eguegu, therefore, implied that China was reluctant to engage in matters of peace and security in Africa due to insufficient deployment of military personnel outside its borders and inexperience in the field of international security.

On the other hand, the call for the FOCAC platform to include security co-operation at its conception by African leaders implies that they preferred a proactive approach to address peace and security issues on the continent rather than leaving it to the devices of economic development. However, African leaders acknowledged China's experiences in achieving domestic stability and peace through development and strengthening the capacity of the state (Shelton and Paruk 2008: 24). This was reflected in the document that was adopted in the 2000 FOCAC conference, emphasising that "economic and social factors are at the root of political instability, social tensions and frequent conflicts in Africa" (FOCAC. 2000a). The FOCAC mechanism, therefore, adopted a pragmatic approach, guided by China's developmental peace model and adjusting to the unfolding situation on the African continent (Xuejun 2018: 68).

Accordingly, the Africa-China strategic partnership established in 2006 adopted the security-development nexus as the approach to security co-operation. Under the banner of "friendship, peace, co-operation and development", the 2006 FOCAC declared that the international community should "encourage and support Africa's efforts to pursue peace and development and provide greater assistance to African countries in peaceful resolution of conflicts and post-war reconstruction" (FOCAC 2006a). The accompanying Action Plan, thus, placed more emphasis on political, economic, international affairs and social development to "pursue common development and progress". (FOCAC 2006b). According to Taylor (2011: 63), concrete implementation follow-up processes generated significant results for China-Africa co-operation by the next FOCAC conference in 2009, particularly in economic relations.

Several African leaders subsequently applauded the FOCAC's trajectory and achievements so far and commended Beijing's dedication to making the Sino-Africa partnership a success (Shelton and

Paruk 2008: 151). Also, in 2010, a study by the Centre for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University examining the implementation of the commitments made at the 2006 FOCAC summit concluded that "overall, the implementation of the Beijing Action Plan in the five countries is fairly advanced" (CCS 2010: xiv). However, now there was an appreciation of the need to tackle security issues more effectively with a proactive approach, leading to security co-operation being prioritised. Shinn (2019: 75) noted that China continued to supply a substantial amount of conventional weapons to African countries during this time. However, Beijing also stepped up its training and capacity-building for the African security architecture, as well as increasing its troop deployment in UN-led peacekeeping missions in Africa as part of its FOCAC commitments (Shinn 2019: 75).

The 2012 ICACPPS, in the same manner, rather than focusing only on military supplies, has been designed to provide (FOCAC 2012):

> financial and technical support to the African Union for its peace-support operations, the development of the African Peace and Security Architecture, personnel exchanges and training in the field of peace and security and Africa's conflict prevention, management and resolution and post-conflict reconstruction and development

As a conception of China, the task of implementing the ICACPPS has been headed by Xi Jinping, who took over as China's president in 2013. However, the key components that should guide the implementation of the ICACPPS have not been specified clearly. Notwithstanding, security cooperation between China and Africa has continued at the bilateral level but shifted to the multilateral, particularly since 2011 following the inclusion of the AU as a full member of the FOCAC. On the multilateral level, China steadily increased its troops and financial support for the UN's peacekeeping operations in Africa and financial support for the AU's peace and security projects, in line with the 2012 FOCAC commitments (Coleman and Job 2021: 1453; Ukeje and Tariku 2018: 303). Additionally, capacity training for African security sector personnel and high-level military visits and exchanges remained an important part of China-Africa security co-operation (Shinn 2019: 78).

Sino-Africa security co-operation became more comprehensive following the 2015 FOCAC summit. China's Second Africa Policy, published in early 2015, committed the PRC to support Africa's peace and security efforts at the bilateral and multilateral levels and to implement the ICACCPS (Xinhua 2015). Also, in a 2015 UN General Assembly meeting, China offered to

provide the AU's peace and security architecture with US$100 million in military assistance within a five-year period to enhance the operationalisation of mechanisms such as the ASF and ACIRC (Coleman and Job 2021: 1459). Since then, all FOCAC conferences have reinforced commitments to deepen security co-operation in Africa (FOCAC 2015; FOCAC 2018; FOCAC 2021a). Among other key developments, this saw China becoming more involved as a mediator in conflict areas on the African continent and emerging as the largest troop contributor to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa than the other UNSC P5 states since 2016 (Alden and Yixiao 2018: 52; Benabdallah 2020: 71; Coleman and Job 2021: 1453; Ukeje and Tariku 2018: 303).

In 2015, China also sent its first combat unit to the UN mission in South Sudan with an expanded security mandate than the unit that was mainly responsible for protecting and guarding peacekeeping forces in Mali. China also committed 8000 troops to the UN's Peacekeeping Standby Readiness System, also known as the Rapid Reaction Force (Coleman and Job 2021: 1458), a move welcomed by its AU partners (Nantulya 2020: 500). Furthermore, China played an important role in pacifying the main belligerents in the South Sudan crisis that broke out in 2013 and was involved in mediation processes with several stakeholders in 2021 (Ryder and Eguegu 2022). Between 2014 and 2016, the Chinese PLA also provided the Nigerian army with crucial high-tech equipment, such as armoured drones and precision missiles, to counter the Boko Haram terrorist activities that threatened to destabilise the entire West African region (Bayes 2020: 35-37).

The year 2017, as mentioned in chapter 5, saw China-Africa security co-operation reaching a new level with the installation of Beijing's first military base on foreign land in Djibouti. The base has officially been described as a logistics facility to support China's commitments to humanitarian operations, international anti-piracy missions off the coast of East Africa, and promoting peace and security in Africa (Carter III *et al* 2019: 119; Nantulya 2020: 500). Carter III *et al* (2019: 119) indicated that US$25 million was also released from the China-Africa Peace and Security Fund in 2017 to improve the development of the ASF's own logistics facility in Cameroon. Furthermore, an additional US$30 million was disbursed to Tanzania's Chinese-financed military training centre to enhance the East African Standby Force. In 2018, Beijing further committed to supporting the construction of a Regional Logistics Depot of the SADC’s Standby Force in Botswana (Nantulya 2020: 500).

Consistent with the security-development approach, China and Africa have been cooperating on peace and security matters in the context of their alignment of the 'Chinese Dream' and Africa's Agenda 2063, both separately launched in 2013. Several scholars indicated that the two concepts converge along common goals of development and prosperity (Alden 2017: 24; Benabdallah 2015: 53; Kagwanja, as cited by Xinhua 2018; Shelton 2015; Zhang and Niway 2018: 129). Thus, while security co-operation rose to prominence in China-Africa relations, the main focus has been economic and trade relations, seen as key to development and peace, and ultimately, security (Bayes 2020: 18-19).

Section 6.4, in summary, finds that while the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership can be rated as 'tightly coupled', Africa primarily relies on China for initiatives and methods of implementing the FOCAC agreements, as well as for approaches to address unexpected or undesired outcomes. African countries and the AU have largely been reacting, mostly consenting, to China's initiatives and decisions on the direction and institutional shape of their strategic partnership. African leaders, notwithstanding, sought the FOCAC mechanism from its inception to adopt a comprehensive and proactive co-operation approach in accordance with the major issues afflicting the African continent, particularly security. However, Africa's bargaining position in the formation and present stages of the FOCAC platform has been weakened not only by the asymmetry of the relationship but also as a consequence of the lack of a common African strategy to engage Beijing.

Therefore, the African side settled for the development-based approach in anticipation that Chinese investments in infrastructure development on the continent has the potential to drive economic development and address the root causes of conflicts and instability. This reactive approach proved mainly ineffective as it left peace and security issues to the forces of economic activities. Beijing was subsequently the side in the partnership that presented solutions as it revised its African policy in the mid-2000s for the FOCAC to adopt a more proactive approach. The institutional framework of the FOCAC and the approach adopted on security co-operation, thus, indicates Africa’s reliance on China. This point echoes the arguments advanced in BRI studies such as Taylor and Zajontz (2020) and Venkateswaran (2020) that China-Africa relations reinforce the external dependency of the continent.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of this study and used Wilkins' SPM as the analytical tool to answer the main research question, which is to probe "how the China-Africa/AU strategic partnership affect the AU's Agenda 2063 peace and security objectives?". The study first investigated the driving forces behind the creation of the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership. Applying the SPM to data collected from the interviews and the literature, the findings show that strategic partnerships are established within an environment wherein certain events or actions by other actors engender uncertainty or threats to others. This aspect may seem similar to the motivations behind the formation of other collaborations, such as military alliances and coalitions. However, the key difference, as pointed out in chapter 3, is that strategic partnerships are not threat-driven and do not designate a certain actor as a threat to the interests of the partnering actors.

As the findings show, China and Africa's motivations to cooperate closer trace their roots to the 1950s. However, the 1989 Tiananmen incident at the end of the Cold War was a turning point in Sino-Africa relations. The West's campaign for democracy in African countries in the 1980s and 90s and their rebuke of the PRC's handling of the protests in Tiananmen Square confirmed to the Chinese and several African leaders that Western imperialism was their common adversary. While China and African countries expressed anti-imperialist rhetoric, they did not explicitly declare any country as a threat to their interests, and their partnership was by no means established to counter any threatening third actor. However, China and Africa's strategic partnership developed from a common understanding between Chinese and African leaders that, like in the Cold War era, the international system was unconducive to realising their respective aspirations.

In accordance with the SPM, the importance of each partner to the other's strategic interests and goals also played a role in the formation of the China-Africa partnership. The demands of the post-Cold War globalised economy highlighted mutual interests in the form of, on the one hand, Africa’s need for investments to address its infrastructure dilemmas and, on the other, China's need for raw materials to maintain economic growth. This aspect shows that economic co-operation is a key focus of strategic partnerships, unlike military alliances. Since the early 1990s, China-Africa relations have been characterised by increasing trade and investments between the two sides. As economic relations steadily grew, the establishment of FOCAC in 2000 was aimed at coordinating

co-operation between the two sides across different sectors more efficiently, but trade and investments remained prominent.

Strategic partnerships also embed a system principle that is based on the partners' worldview. This worldview then shapes the views of the partners regarding how the international system should operate. China and African countries, in this regard, were influenced by their historical solidarity against colonialism and imperialism. They used this to maintain unity in the post-Cold War era against persistent Western criticisms of the PRC and several African countries on their human rights records. Therefore, in accordance with the partnership's system principle, economic cooperation between China and African countries departed from the conventional system. In particular, Chinese investments and development assistance to African countries did not separate states according to their governing political ideology or stance on issues such as human rights and civil liberties.

This non-traditional approach to economic cooperation has been extended to security relations. China's peacekeeping approach in Africa also deviated from traditional principles. Unlike liberal peacekeeping methods that pressure governments to institute democratic reforms and enact laws to protect human rights, China's approach focuses on creating domestic stability by strengthening the capacity of the state to address conflicts and threats. This approach, informed by the security-development nexus, proved effective in relatively improving the economic conditions of several African countries, including perceived rogue states, such as Sudan and Zimbabwe, which have been excluded from the liberal global investment and aid system. However, it also led to undesired consequences as the increased wealth in these ‘human rights-violating regimes' was directly linked to state violence against civilians.

Moreover, the findings of this study indicate that the institutional shape and security cooperation approach in China and Africa’s strategic partnership reinforces the dependency of Africa on powerful external partners. In the case of China and Africa, this is particularly demonstrated by how agreements are reached and implemented in their partnership. The two sides declare agreements and commitments during FOCAC conferences, that is, at the multilateral level. However, the actual signing and implementation of these agreements are executed at the bilateral level between China and individual African countries. Furthermore, these bilateral agreements are focused more on trade and investment ventures, such as infrastructure development, which largely

benefit China than the African continent, especially considering other pressing issues for Africa such as peace and security. Moreover, the terms of these agreements are usually concealed from the public. This makes it difficult for African countries to agree on a common policy, as they cannot share key information about their bilateral agreements with China that could be valuable in developing such a common strategy. The situation, therefore, creates a much deeper predicament for African countries as the most viable approach to offsetting their asymmetric relationship with China, which perpetuates Africa's dependency, is through a common strategy to engage Beijing.

The next chapter (7) completes the presentation of the findings of this study. It applies the last phase of the SPM to analyse of the effectiveness of China and Africa’s strategic partnership in terms of achieving the goals of the partnership.

CHAPTER 7: EVALUATING THE AU/AFRICA-CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

7.1. Introduction

Like other forms of collaborative mechanisms between international actors, strategic partnerships are established to pursue certain goals as set out by the partnering actors. As pointed out in the literature review, while the phenomenon of strategic partnership can mean 'anything' for different actors, there is consensus among scholars that they serve important purposes for the partners (Blanco 2016; Czechowska 2019; Envall and Hall 2016; Michalski and Pan 2017b). Grevi (2010: 3) pointed out that strategic partnerships are regarded as 'strategic' by the partners as they are seen as mechanisms that can enhance their ability to achieve their fundamental goals or preserve their core interests. The author asserted that perhaps the most important thing about strategic partnerships is that "they deliver" (Grevi 2010: 3). This implies that such partnerships are effective in goal achievement.

This chapter completes the presentation of the findings of this study, as began in the previous chapter. Accordingly, the chapter applies the third phase of Wilkins' (2008) SPM evaluation to assess the effectiveness of China and Africa's strategic partnership to answer the third and fourth research sub-questions. In line with the third sub-question, the chapter seeks to achieve the third objective of this study, namely, to understand the areas of convergence and divergence. The chapter also aims to answer the fourth sub-question by analysing how engagements in the China-Africa partnership have affected the peace and security aspirations of the AU's Agenda 2063.

The chapter is structured as follows to achieve these aims: the first section analyses the alignment of values and interests between China and Africa within their strategic partnership. The second section tackles the fourth sub-question by analysing the progress towards achieving key goals of the Africa-China partnership, particularly examining how China's 2049 vision links with and affects the AU's Agenda 2063. Lastly, the chapter examines factors that indicate the loyalty and commitment of partners to the partnership. The loyalty and commitment will shed light on the sustainability and future prospects of the partnership between China and Africa.

7.2. Assessing the effectiveness of the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership

While many China-Africa observers and Western leaders have raised concerns about 'Chinese colonialism' or 'imperialism' in Africa, African leaders have commonly refuted these claims and strongly defended the positive economic transformation in African countries affected by the intensified cooperation between China and Africa (Carrozza 2021: 1191; Dahir 2018). For example, in reaction to the opening speech by China's President Xi at the 2015 FOCAC summit, then AUC chairperson, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, said, "President Xi Jinping's speech was great in the sense that it identified areas where Africa is interested in and which are in our agenda 2063. Those are areas we are going to cooperate on and take this relationship to new heights" (Bernardo 2015).

In addition, during the 2018 FOCAC summit in Beijing, several African heads of state praised the contribution of China to Africa's development trajectory. Rwandan President, Paul Kagame, Chairperson of the AU at the time, stated that "China understood Africa's global position and engaged it as an equal partner". Former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, as well said Kenya "appreciates China's support of the country's development agenda". South Africa's President, Cyril Ramaphosa, who was co-chairing the summit, further expressed that "in the impact that it has on African countries, FOCAC refutes the view that a new colonialism is taking hold in Africa, as our detractors would have us believe" (Dahir 2018). Likewise, in *China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals*, the Chinese government praised their relationship, declaring that "China has formed a distinctive approach to win-win cooperation with Africa. The approach is in line with the traditional Chinese philosophy, 'Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you'" (Xinhua 2021a). Additionally, in his keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the 8th FOCAC ministerial conference in Dakar, Senegal, China's President also asserted that the Africa-China partnership has "written a splendid chapter of mutual assistance amidst complex changes and set a shining example for building a new type of international relations" (Xinhua 2021b).

The above sentiments indicate that African and Chinese leaders are satisfied with the progress and effectiveness of the Sino-Africa strategic partnership. The views are somewhat corroborated by a survey published in 2021 by the pan-African institute, Afrobarometer. According to this survey, although the US remains the preferred development model for the majority of ordinary Africans, 63% of them believe China has had a positive influence in their country. In fact, the researchers

noted that China's influence is more widely seen as more positive than that of the US (Sanny and Selormey 2021: 8). To test the validity of such views, the SPM, as mentioned in chapter 3, will assess the China-Africa strategic partnerships using three performance evaluators: alignment and compatibility of the partners' interests and values, progress towards the achievement of goals, commitment and trust, and other factors that may affect the prospects of the partnership.

7.2.1. Alignment of values and interests: muting divergences to focus on convergences

There was consensus among the interview respondents and in the literature that China and Africa have very incompatible political values, at least on paper. On the one hand, since the days of independence, African countries have been experimenting with the Western liberal democratic model as a blueprint for progress and development. Nevertheless, from the 1960s to the 1980s, as several newly-independent African countries plunged into socio-economic and security crises due to poor governance and despotism, the liberal model was further endorsed by many African leaders as a solution to the Continent's dilemmas. OAU leaders thus resolved to adopt the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, also known as the Banjul Charter, in 1981, which came into force in 1986, to promote human rights in Africa. As Adam (2022: 695-696) indicated, the Banjul Charter was the first attempt in post-colonial Africa to regionalise the issue of human rights and serves as a crucial document on the matter which all AU member states, except Morocco, have signed and ratified.

South Africa's relatively peaceful transition in 1994 from its apartheid system to a genuine democracy legitimised the democratisation wave that has been sweeping across the Continent since the late 1980s (Taylor 2007: 65-66; Yu 2018: 492). In 2002, the OAU's successor, the AU, accordingly placed Western liberal values, such as democracy, protection of human rights and civil liberties, good governance, and the rule of law, at the centre of Africa's integration agenda (Adam 2022: 696; Makinda and Okumu 2008: 58). These principles were further expressed in the Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP) adopted by the Second Extraordinary Session of the AU in 2004 in Sirte, Libya (AU 2004), and in the AU's Agenda 2063.

As Aspiration 3 (2.8) of the AU's Agenda 2063 reads, "Africa will be a continent where democratic values, culture, practices, universal principles of human rights, gender equality, justice and the rule

of law are entrenched". In addition, when it comes to matters of peace and security, Aspiration 4 (3.5) further asserts "good governance, democracy, social inclusion and respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law" as the "necessary pre-conditions for a peaceful and conflict-free continent" (AUC 2015a: 5-6). The majority of African countries have thus adopted, on paper, the Western democratic model. This model is often symbolised by features such as multi-party politics, popular national elections, an independent judiciary, free media and guarantees of civil liberties such as freedom of expression and access to information.

On the other hand, since its establishment in 1949, the PRC's ruling party, the CCP, has proclaimed Marxism-Leninism and Maoist communism as its official ideology, promoting leading principles such as harmony, hierarchy, and voluntarism. Post-Mao China leaders adjusted Chinese political ideology to include Den Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping's thoughts, and thereby, as Joseph (2019: 182) noted, "taken the country a long way down the 'capitalist road' that the Chairman fought hard to prevent". However, the CCP's constitution still officially proclaims the "realization of communism" to be its "highest ideal and ultimate goal" (Constitution of the Communist Party of China 2017: 1/28).

China has therefore come to be characterised by a blend of values such as harmony, civility, integrity, patriotism, prosperity, and other Western-oriented values, but with "Chinese characteristics". This include values such as freedom, justice, democracy and human rights (Shinn and Eisenman 2020: 283). In contrast to Western definitions, Chinese interpretations of concepts such as the rule of law, freedom and justice privilege the society and maintenance of social order over the individual (Gow 2017: 99, 102). Once more, development plays a critical role in how the Chinese define such concepts. For example, the Chinese insist that "the right to development is an inalienable human right" and that it is through development that basic civil liberties can be protected. Accordingly, Chinese officials assert that "poverty is the biggest obstacle to human rights" (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2016). Accordingly, the collective rights of society to progress is more important than individual civil liberties, with the CCP entitled to the power to determine the limitations of personal freedoms (Gow 2017: 99, 102).

Due to the important "supply and demand" component of the China-Africa relationship, however, as argued by le Pere (personal interview, 14 April 2021, online), the two have managed to set aside

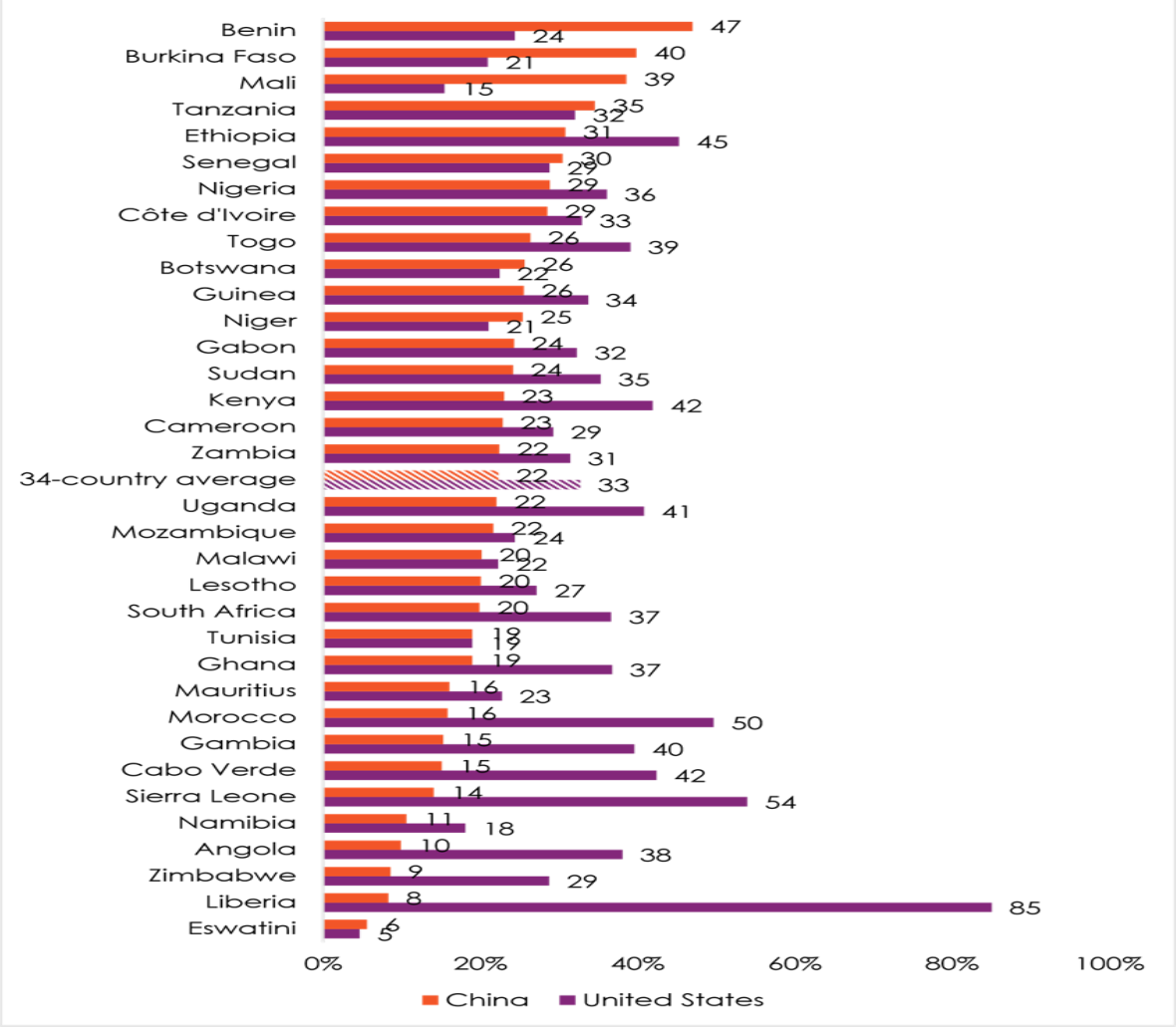
their divergent political values to capitalise on their converging economic and development interests. On the same note, Matambo and Monyae (personal interview, 3 August 2021, online) assert that abject poverty and lack of economic opportunities are viewed as the root causes of conflicts and instability in Africa. Therefore, for many African leaders, addressing the root causes of conflicts and social unrest has become a paramount goal over liberal political values such as freedom of speech.

As a result, some African countries have shown interest in replicating China's development approach in their countries in the hope that poverty eradication, the creation of jobs and improved living conditions may generate political stability and peace in Africa as in China (Dahir 2018a). Rwanda is one African country that is often viewed to be steadily succeeding through the development-first model. According to Benabdallah (2020: 3), China's development model and its governance practices and norms "become more legitimated when they are adopted, mimicked, or at least received positively by the international community". Mthembu (personal interview, 29 April 2021, online), however, argued that China does not want to intentionally export its development model to Africa as this would contradict its non-interference and anti-imperialist foreign policy. Rather, China intends for Africa to learn from the Chinese and construct a model suitable for the African context.

Concerns have been raised, however, that sacrificing political values for economic interests undermines the AU's democratic and human rights aspirations as some African countries are being lured to replicate China's non-democratic system (Taylor 2006b: 952-953; Tull 2006). This may lead to instability and civil strife as many people on the African Continent have been exposed to democratic ideals. Figure 10 below, for instance, visualises an Afrobarometer survey that found that in 23 out of 34 African countries, the majority of citizens appreciate China's positive contribution to their economies but prefer the US' liberal development model (Sanny and Selormey 2021). As can be seen in the figure, this includes states such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Angola and Nigeria, wherein Chinese investments have effected significant infrastructural improvements. Tull (2006: 474) argued that "Africa's autocrats" benefit from development assistance, investments, trade and tax incomes from Sino-Africa relations, which expand the limits of their powers and "help them to rein in domestic demands for democracy and the respect for human rights".

With technological advances, such concerns have been heightened by reports alleging that some African governments have sought to copy China's "digital authoritarianism" (Lamensch 2021). Several Chinese telecommunications companies reportedly provided surveillance technologies to Ethiopian, Ugandan, Sudanese, Zambian and Zimbabwean governments to spy on political opponents and repress dissent on the internet (Nantulya 2019; Parkinson, Bariyo and Chin 2019). However, other studies (Curtis and Kennard 2019; Lamensch 2021) show that Chinese companies are not particularly deviating from international practices. Rather, they are protected by the "technological neutrality" principle– that technology suppliers do not involve themselves in the

Figure 10: Best model for development: China vs. U.S. | 34 African countries | 2019/2021



Source: Afrobarometer- (Sanny and Selormey 2021)

internal political decisions of states that buy their technologies. Curtis and Kennard (2019), for example, detailed how some Western companies themselves have been, and are still, supplying technologies to "human rights-abusing autocracies" such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar. The authors point out that these countries have used Western technology to stifle political opposition and supress online dissent (Curtis and Kennard 2019).

Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online), in addition, pointed out that since China has risen to be the second largest economy, divergences in economic interests between Africa and China have also emerged due to their different stages of economic development. Africa's commodity-dependent economies rely on a stable international economy that has a healthy demand for commodities. As documented by several scholars (Alves 2013; Taylor and Zajontz 2020; Yueh 2019), China's economic rise was partly driven by the growth of its construction, industrial and manufacturing sectors, as the country increasingly became an attractive location for multinational corporations to open large factories to capitalise on China's large cheap labour pool. An ample supply of natural resources was required to feed this growth, and Africa became among the major sources.

China's massive demand for these raw materials consequently led to the 2000s "commodities boom"— an increase in the global prices of commodities such as oil and metals (Alves 2013: 209; Taylor and Zajontz 2020: 278-279; Yueh 2019: 25). The higher prices consequently improved the revenues of African countries such as Angola, Nigeria, and Sudan, which commodities account for most of their GDPs and are a major source for earning foreign currency (Alves 2013: 209; Taylor and Zajontz 2020: 278-279; Yueh 2019: 25). An investment strategy that saw China's state-owned companies investing particularly in infrastructure development, mining and energy generation facilities in African countries accompanied this quest for natural resources (Alves 2013: 209; Taylor 2006: 942). Alves (2013: 217) noted that, China's contribution to developing hard infrastructure in Africa emerged as the most apparent positive dimension by far.

However, China has witnessed a significant transformation of its labour force with a growing skills-based economy. Its traditional cheap reserve pool of labour has dwindled as highly skilled workers rose in numbers (Li 2021: 46; Taylor and Zajontz 2020: 278-279; Yueh 2019: 26). According to Li (2021: 46), Chinese universities currently produce ten times the number of graduates that US institutions produce in the fields of science, mathematics, technology and

engineering. Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online) pointed out that China has also become more exposed to developments in many regions where it has substantial economic interests. In this way, China views Africa within the larger framework of its global relations as a major world power (Alden, personal interview, 31 March 2021, online).

According to le Pere (personal interview, 14 April 2021, online), both a threat and opportunity have, thus, emerged for Africa due to these developments. China, since the mid-2000s, has been making efforts to restructure its economy from a manufacturing-centred into a more service-oriented one, to focus on high-value-added service exports such as technology and finance. Wong (2020) indicated that the services sector in China has accounted for 50% of the country's GDP since 2015 and contributed 60% to its economic growth in 2020. As part of its 2049 centennial goals, the Chinese government aims to establish a world-class services industry by 2030 and get the sector to contribute 70-80% to the country's GDP, which is the average in the developed countries (Hsu 2017; Wong 2020).

If this goal is realised, Africa's importance to China's economic interests may further decline as the Continent already accounts for only 4.5% of China's total global trade (Pairault 2021), and, as Participant X (personal interview, 19 April 2021, online) highlighted, is not a high-priority region for Chinese FDI. Schiere (2011: 9) similarly observed that Africa also faces competition with other resource-rich regions such as Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Latin America and Australia, which are politically and economically more stable and have lower investment risks. Thus, to remain strategically relevant not only to China but also globally, Africa needs to be more assertive in terms of defining its interests and robustly cooperating with China for effective knowledge and technology transfer. As Yueh (2019: 21) indicated, China's state-owned companies benefited from positive spillovers of technology and knowledge transfer from Western investors during its early development stages in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, Monyae (2018: 297) emphasised the point that the onus is upon African countries to diversify their economies.

In answering the third research sub-question, the findings in this section show that though China and Africa were able to mute their divergent political values to focus on their convergent interests of economic development, their economic interests themselves are increasingly showing divergences. However, more importantly, the different political principles of Africa and China have direct implications on the key aspirations of the AU, particularly political and security

objectives. Since the era of independence, the African Continent under the aegis of the OAU/AU has struggled to realise its goal of entrenching liberal principles and democratic governance in African countries as some leaders often deviate from the ideal.

Notwithstanding, the aspiration continues to be pursued under the Agenda 2063. However, the success of China's development model in delivering economic growth and lifting hundreds of millions of its citizens out of poverty proves to some African leaders that a non-democratic government is not a global pariah as it is often portrayed to be. Accordingly, African leaders have publicly hailed Beijing's political system and development model, with some hinting that they want to replicate China's system in their countries. This lack of consistency in African leaders' views on democracy places the democratic and peace aspirations of the Continent in limbo. The effects of this inconsistency on the political and security landscape of the Continent have been witnessed in countries such as Uganda, Egypt, Zimbabwe and eSwatini (former Swaziland). This is evident from governments arresting opposition leaders, journalists and activists and using extreme force to crack down on protests and opposition gatherings.

7.2.2. Progress towards the achievement of goals: the AU's Agenda 2063 vs China's 2049 vision

As mentioned in chapter five, Chinese and African leaders have pledged to cooperate to realise their strategic visions: China's 2049 Vision and the AU's Agenda 2063, respectively. A number of scholars posit that the two visions share similarities and are complementary (Alden 2017:24; Benabdallah 2015: 53; Eisenman and Shinn 2018: 138; Ndzendze and Monyae 2019; Shelton 2015; Zhang and Niway 2018: 129). le Pere (personal interview, 14 April 2021, online) further argued that Agenda 2063 and China's Vision 2049 are framed differently but have the common goal of prosperity, though China has ambitions of actively shaping global politics in line with its interests. Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online) as well stated that the two visions do converge around the aspirations of development, but AU's Agenda 2063 is more of a clear project and is more comprehensive and detailed.

Likewise, Matambo and Monyae (personal interview, 2 April 2021, online) pointed out that China and the AU's visions are based on economic development. However, the researchers indicated that China's motives are centred more on returning to its past glory, while Africa's motives are focused

more on seeking to realise its historically denied or robbed potential (Matambo and Monyae personal interview, 2 April 2021, online). On the other hand, Participant X (personal interview, 19 April 2021, online) contended that the visions share similarities in theory, but there are more divergences than convergences. For instance, on the one hand, China's financial independence affords it more agency on the trajectory of its 2049 vision. In contrast, the AU's lack of coherence as a world actor and dependency on international funders restricts its agency on the direction of its own vision. In addition, China sees Africa within its larger global grand strategy of creating an international system in which China will be the dominant superpower (Cordesman *et al* 2019: 479; Nantulya 2019).

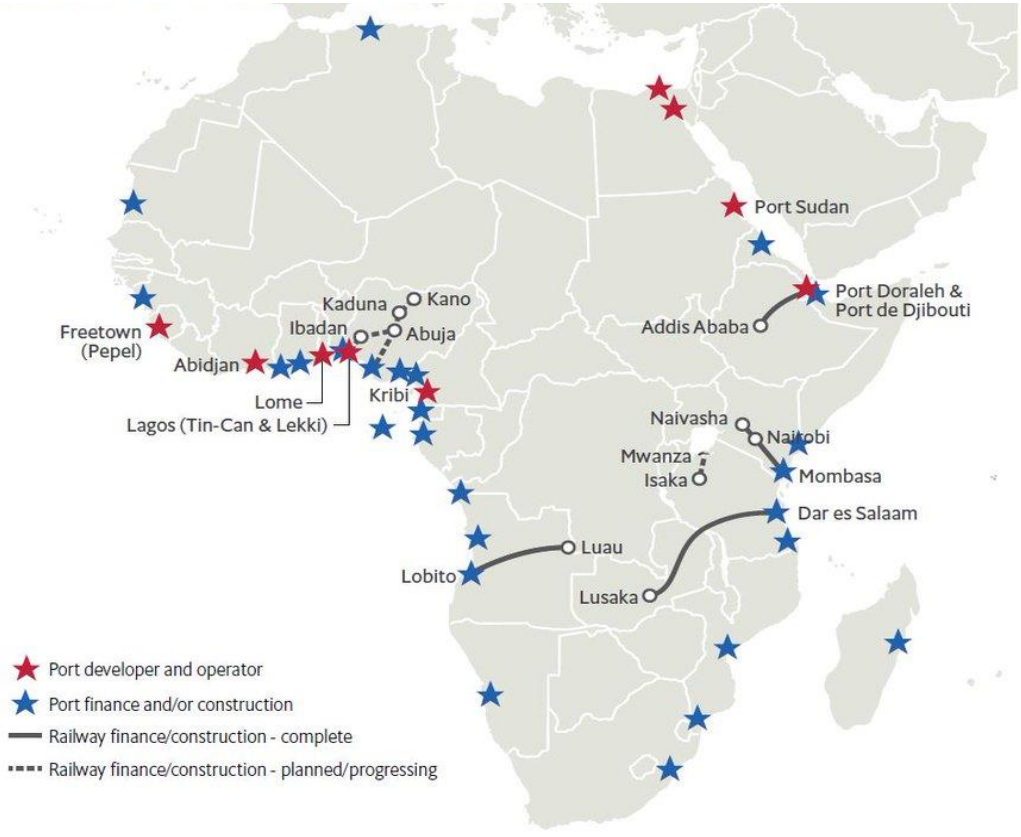
Some studies indicate that China has acted towards its 2049 PRC centennial goals and is making advances in key areas such as economic development, science and technology, military modernisation, the global presence of its military, and shaping global governance (Cordesman *et al* 2019: 477; Li 2021: 57). The African Continent has largely contributed to China's 2049 goals on the economic front, particularly as a steady source of natural resources for China's domestic development goals. Since the late 2000s, for example, the African Continent has become the second largest source of China's crude oil imports, accounting for 18-22% (Obi 2019: 173; Saleh 2021). The Continent's market for finished products has also provided a site for China to offload its industrial overcapacities, particularly coal, cement, steel, glass, solar, shipbuilding, and aluminium, for BRI projects in Africa (Nantulya 2019; Venkateswaran 2020: 4-5).

Furthermore, the strategic location of African countries such as Djibouti, Egypt, Kenya, and Tanzania have formed part of China's envisaged artery of BRI routes to facilitate its imports and exports. This is aimed at circumventing narrow maritime chokepoints contested by Beijing's rivals in the South China Sea (Nantulya 2019). Abegunrin and Manyeruke (2020: 196) indicated that the BRI "holds vast potential to reshape geo-economic maps at the regional, international, and global level". Other scholars point out that Africa has also provided a platform for China to establish its first military base on foreign land as China pursues its global military ambitions (Alden 2018; Miller 2022; Tanchum 2021). In addition, African countries, as discussed above in section 6.3.3, have played an instrumental role in China's global quest to displace US hegemony in world governance institutions such as the UN and WHO (Nantulya 2020: 502-503; Olewe 2021; Pairault

2021; Shinn and Eisenman 2020: 281-286), though this goal has not been achieved to a large extent.

In contrast, China has played a dominant role as an international partner for Africa's Agenda 2063. Nantulya (2020: 504) indicated that the AUs "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want" anticipates economic development on the Continent to be facilitated by Chinese expertise and models. One towering symbol that has come to embody China's influence in African affairs is the US$200 million AU headquarters funded and built by Beijing as a gift to the Continent. According to Alden (personal interview, 31 March 2021, online), China has demonstrated an interest in developing Africa above and beyond what most powers have done. Likewise, Matambo (personal interview, 2 April 2021, online) argued that China has invested so much in the African Continent that it wants Africa to succeed.

Figure 11: Chinese-backed port and rail projects in Africa



Source: China Global South Project (2021)

Indeed, since FOCAC was established, as Senkpeni (2021) and Anam (2021) noted, China has built over 10,000 kilometres of railways in Africa, which includes major railway projects such as the Mombasa-Nairobi, Addis Ababa-Djibouti, Abuja-Kaduna, and Angola's Benguela railway that connects the cities of Lobito and Luau. Figure 11 above is a depiction of ports and railway projects funded and constructed by Chinese companies. Approximately 100,000 kilometres of roads, 1,000 bridges, 100 ports, and more than 80 major power facilities worth billions of US dollars have been built in African countries by Chinese companies, to name just a few, irrespective of the country's governance approach or human rights record (Development Reimagined 2021: 39; Gu *et al* 2022: 11; Senkpeni 2021; Anam 2021).

Though mostly driven bilaterally, these mega infrastructure and energy projects have contributed towards Africa's goal of improving trade and the movement of people between African countries. For example, Angola's Benguela railway, which connects with the town of Luau close to the DRC border, also connects with the DRC's railway system that reaches the country's inner towns and cities. Although with limited impact and no coordination at the multilateral (FOCAC) level, the Chinese-funded projects have also contributed to the Continent's realisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2020, a key objective towards the goal of regional integration. The AfCFTA aims to facilitate intra-African trade by removing and reducing costly trade barriers between African countries (Development Reimagined 2021: 554-55).

While political leaders and ordinary people in Africa see China playing a positive role in Africa's development trajectory, many analysts have emphasised two key economic challenges (Gu *et al* 2022; Konings 2007; Mureithi 2022; Nantulya 2021c), including all respondents during the interviews of this study. These are the trade imbalance and Africa's indebtedness to China. The former owes to Africa's reliance on raw materials and minerals exports while importing more Chinese manufactured goods and insufficient technology transfer to boost Africa's manufacturing capabilities (Nantulya 2021c; Anam 2021). The latter is largely due to Chinese creditors willing to offer politically non-conditional loans even to some economically risky African countries, often resulting in opaque lending terms and costly and seemingly uneconomical projects.

This has resulted in several African countries, such as Angola, Djibouti, Zambia, Kenya, and Mozambique seriously indebted to China (Nantulya 2021b; Venkateswaran 2020: 6-7), with fears that some sovereign assets have been used as collateral to the debt, particularly in the case of

Kenya's China-funded Standard Gauge Railway (SGR). In the case of Kenya's SGR and similar others in the DRC and Siera Leone, however, such assertions have been proven to be inaccurate (Bräutigam and Rithmire 2021; Bräutigam *et al* 2022; Gelpern *et al* 2021). Research by Bräutigam *et al* showed that major Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Africa that many analysts have described as a "trap" to keep African countries in debt are, in fact, "carefully and creatively constructed to reduce the risks of a sovereign default and enhance the bankability of a project" (Bräutigam *et al* 2022: 4). Bräutigam and Rithmire (2021) elaborated that Chinese lenders are open to negotiations for restructuring the terms of agreements on existing loans, and that, contrary to popular claims, Beijing has never expropriated sovereign assets from loan defaulting states, including the much-discussed Hambantota port of Sri Lanka

China's loans to Africa, notwithstanding, are indeed characterised by confidentiality clauses (Gelpern *et al* 2021: 24; Venkateswaran 2020: 4). These clauses, as highlighted by Gelpern *et al* (2021), bind the borrowers to "keep contract terms undisclosed unless otherwise required by law", but "allow the lender to terminate the agreement and demand immediate full repayment if the borrower defaults on its other lenders" (Gelpern *et al* 2021: 24). These contract terms guarantee Chinese lenders repayment from the borrowing countries and provide access to essential finance for countries avoided by global financial institutions dominated by Western powers. However, such confidentiality clauses contradict the democratic aspirations of the AU's Agenda 2063 of an Africa wherein "Institutions at all levels of government will be developmental, democratic, and accountable" (AUC 2015a: 6). These clauses prevent citizens from accessing information about the loans and holding their governments to account. Furthermore, offloading China's industrial excess capacities in Africa has adversely affected intraregional trade, particularly in East Africa, where local manufacturers were thriving. As Nantulya (2019) indicated, Kenya was a key exporter of cement to neighbouring countries such as Tanzania and Uganda until 2017, when the flood of Chinese cement in the region overwhelmed Kenyan exports.

The BRI as well has raised some questions. While others argue that the BRI may be a key driver for socio-economic development in some African countries (Yueh 2019: 31), Africa was not included in the original plans of China for the megaproject (Lammich 2021: 126; Ndzendze and Monyae 2019: 39). The BRI, as Nantulya (2019) asserted, is primarily "a Chinese geopolitical project designed to advance China's grand strategy" of restoring itself as a great power by 2049.

Additionally, a study by Taylor and Zajontz (2020: 278) analysing African states that readily signed BRI agreements— Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania— concluded that the project "may well perpetuate-if not deepen-Africa's dependent position in the global economy […]". The authors further pointed out that China's investments and infrastructure development projects in Africa are mainly designed to facilitate the extraction of the Continent's minerals and energy resources (Taylor and Zajontz 2020: 282).

Venkateswaran (2020) makes the same argument as Taylor and Zajontz. According to the author, 34 of the 48 African countries that have signed BRI MoUs, are located along the coast of Africa and have Chinese-funded port development projects that are either completed, under-construction or planned. These ports are linked with other Chinese-backed projects, such as roads and railways, which are also connected to mines, industrial parks and oil refineries operated by Chinese companies. For example, an industrial park in the Ethiopian city of Addis Ababa is located near a major highway connecting the railway line from Addis Ababa to Djibouti where a major port is accessible. In Gabon, the Chinese-operated Belinga Iron Ore Project is close to a railway line connecting to the city of Libreville's Cape Santa Clara port on the country's west coast. In Sudan, an oil refinery is near a railway line that connects Port Sudan and Senegal's Dakar Port (Venkateswaran 2020: 4).

More concerning is that the BRI's fate has become uncertain since China launched another worldwide development program, the Global Development Initiative (GDI), in September 2021 (Akeredolu 2022; Brînză 2022). Lammich (2021: 128) claimed that there are signs that China is attempting to extricate its African policy from the BRI. In fact, according to Brînză (2022), the "BRI is not only disappearing from Xi's speeches, but also from Xi's agenda". This view aligns with other scholars' observations who noted "a reverse trend of decreasing financial disbursements by the Chinese government in infrastructure and other commercial ventures in Africa" (Benabdallah 2020: 69; Cichocka and Gavas 2021; Lammich 2021: 128; Sun 2021b). Some analysts noted that though the GDI's two key goals are to help the UN achieve its 2030 sustainable development agenda and to assist, especially developing countries, in responding effectively to the COVID-19 aftershocks, the program lacks clarity and signals China's adjustment of priorities that might disappoint some BRI participants in the developing world (Akeredolu 2022; Brînză 2022).

On the peace and security front, since the establishment of the China-Africa strategic partnership in 2006 and particularly the launch of the ICACPPS in 2012, numerous China-Africa collaborative activities have been aimed at curbing violent conflicts and wars on the African Continent. These include China's contributions to UN-led peacekeeping operations in Africa, training of African military officers and financial contributions to the operationalisation of the APSA (as outlined in sections 5.4.3 in chapter five and 6.4.2 in chapter six). However, one of the key goals of the AU's Agenda 2063— "silencing the guns by 2020" (STG2020)— missed its target, and the goal of ending all violent conflicts and wars in Africa has now been extended to 2030 (Hooper 2021). The initiative sought to reach a milestone towards realising peace and security in Africa by ending the scourge of gun-driven violent conflicts on the Continent.

Since the STG2020 was launched in 2013, however, a range of violent conflicts continued, and new ones broke out in several African countries such as Cameroon, Ethiopia and The Gambia (Nshimbi 2020; Okumu *et al* 2020: 5-6). Chun and Alden (2018: 356) recorded that Africa has seen an overall decline in the number of large-scale political violence, such as civil wars and mass killings in "virtually all corners of the continent" since the end of the Cold War. However, starting in the mid-2000s, the Continent experienced a rise in so-called 'new wars' (religious extremism, terrorism and piracy) and anti-government rebellions induced by third-term crises (Chun and Alden 2018: 356; Okumu *et al* 2020: 5-6). In 2020, there were at least 21 states with active armed conflicts in Africa, a significant increase from 13 in 2018 and sixteen in 2019 (SIPRI 2019, 2020, 2021).

These states include those with substantial Chinese investments, such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, DRC, Sudan, and Mozambique. The following year, 2021, also saw coup d'états returning as a security concern for the African Continent. The year witnessed successful coups in four African countries (Chad, Mali, Guinea, and Sudan) and failed attempts in two (Niger and again Sudan) (Mwai 2022). The trend continued in 2022 with four failed coup attempts in Guinea Bissau, Mali, São Tomé and Príncipe, and The Gambia. However, two successful military takeovers took place in one country, Burkina Faso— one in January led by Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Damiba and the other in September when Damiba was overthrown by Capt. Ibrahim Traoré (Seay and Dionne 2022)

Okumu *et al* (2020: 27-37) documented some of the key challenges for the STG2020 initiative. These include the AU's internal issues, such as a lack of conceptual clarity among stakeholders

overseeing the implementation of the initiative. As the authors pointed out, for example, the AU's Agenda 2063 document refers to it as its "flagship project", while other AU senior officials have referred to it as a 'campaign', 'slogan', 'branding' or 'program', among other terms. According to the authors, these different understandings have caused confusion on how to implement the initiative (2020: 27). Furthermore, institutional challenges of the AU are consequent to misalignment between existing structures and the urgency of the STG2020. External influences include the AU's overreliance on external partners to finance and even implement the initiative (Nshimbi 2020; Okumu *et al* 2020: 30-37). Monyae (2018: 298) pointed out that the financial contributions of AU member states go towards operational costs.

However, all programmes of the AU are funded by external donors, which means programmes that are implemented by the AU are those that are in line with the interests of donors. The author, therefore, asked, "How will 'African solutions to African problems' be implemented when the African Union can barely fund its own programmes?" (Monyae 2018: 298). Moreover, two other major challenges to the STG2020 indicated by Okumu *et al* (2020: 35-36) are the supply of arms and, particularly, the continued exports of small and light weapons (SALWs) into Africa by foreign governments and the increasing foreign military bases in Africa. Atta-Asamoah (2019) pointed out that the main drivers for establishing foreign military bases in Africa are the commercial interests of AU member states. The author cited the case of Djibouti, indicating that the country earns approximately US$300 million a year through leasing its territory to foreign powers for their military bases (Atta-Asamoah 2019).

The external challenges to Africa's goal of ending violent conflicts and wars are important here because China is also involved. While numerous foreign powers play a larger role in Africa's overreliance on foreign funding, supply of arms and SALWs, and foreign military bases, China has been increasing its activities on these factors. The case of funding is understandable, as several African countries have faced difficulty in accessing loans from major global financial institutions. China has filled a crucial void by offering loans and grants that have stimulated economic growth and benefited ordinary Africans in the process. However, China's arms exports to Africa have emerged as one of the issues that pose challenges to the peace and security goals of the AU's Agenda 2063 (Mariani and Kirkham 2018: 337; Taylor and Wu 2013: 457). Whitaker and Clark (2018: 345) pointed out that while China sells heavy equipment, "it specializes more in small arms

and light weapons". A study by Campbell *et al* (2012: 108-109) also reported that China provided 72% of SALWs to Sudan between 2001–2008 despite evidence of their use in atrocities committed by the Sudanese government in the 2003 Darfur crisis.

China also opened a military base in Djibouti in 2017 despite the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) in 2016 having raised "deep concern" on "the existence of foreign military bases and establishment of new ones in some African countries". Figure 12 below shows the foreign military bases that currently exist in African countries. As the figure shows, the African Continent is a host to 47 known foreign military bases, of which 34 are US bases (Atta-Asamoah 2019; Benabdallah 2020: 67).

Figure 12: Foreign military bases in Africa

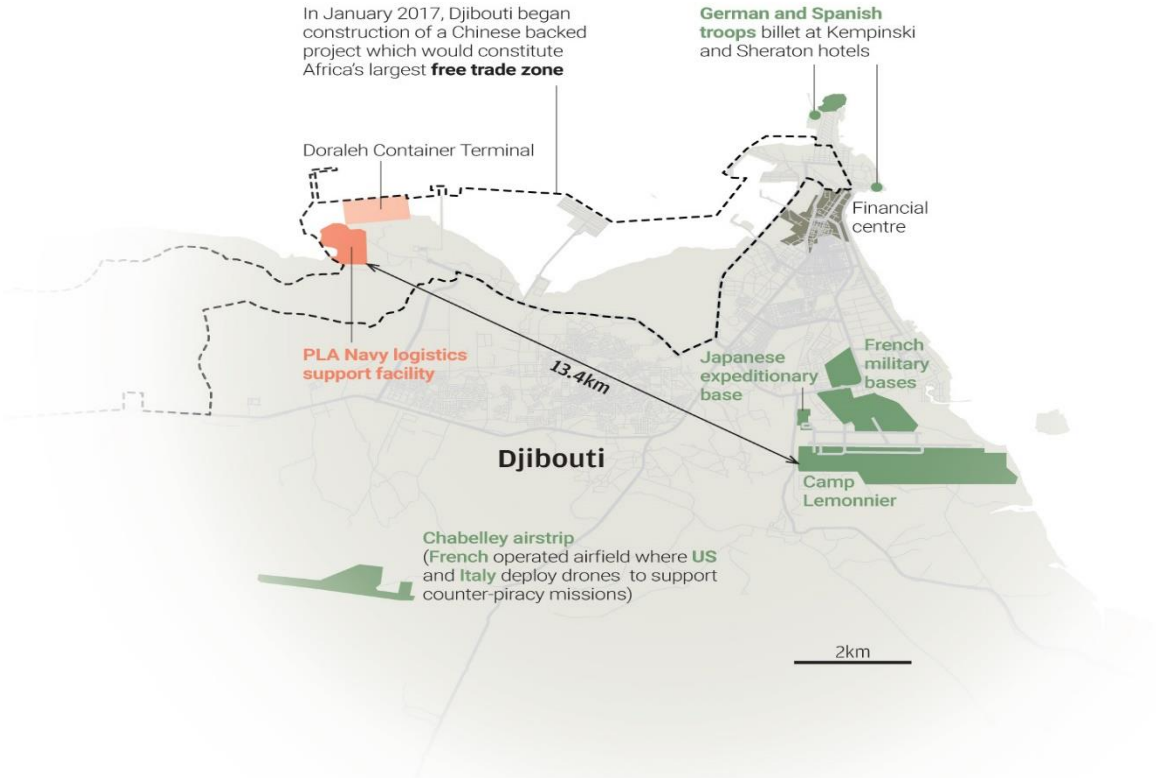
Source: Atta-Asamoah 2019- ISS

While China has only one military base in Africa so far, there are reports, although unconfirmed from the Chinese side, that Beijing is planning to establish more bases in Africa and other regions

such as the Middle East and Latin America, to pursue its global military strategy (Alden 2018; DOD-US 2021: 131; Miller 2022; Tanchum 2021). According to US Africa Command's (AFRICOM) director of intelligence, Eric Miller (2022), "China has a patient, long-term approach to achieving its global military ambitions", and it is only a matter of when, not if, it will build more military bases in Africa. While the presence of foreign military bases does not suggest a cause-and-effect link to conflicts on the Continent, the AU was concerned about "the inability of the Member States concerned to effectively monitor the movement of weapons to and from these foreign military bases" (AU 2016: 2).

Furthermore, the move by China to build a military base in Djibouti despite the AU's concerns indicates a clash of interests between the two and the influence of foreign actors in Africa on AU member states. Figure 13 below shows the foreign military bases in Djibouti. As seen in the figure, Djibouti hosts the US' Camp Lemonnier military base, just 13.4 kilometres away from the Chinese PLA's new navy facility, along with military bases of other major powers such as France, Germany and Japan in close proximity.

Figure 13: Foreign military bases in Djibouti



Source: South China Morning Post (2018)

As a result, Djibouti found itself in the middle of diplomatic tensions between China and the US over fears of a Chinese takeover of the Doraleh Container Terminal, Djibouti's main container port, in 2018, as Beijing financed the development of the port (Maru 2019). The same year, matters escalated when the Chinese and US military personnel accused each other of spying, with the latter claiming the former also used dangerous military-grade lasers against their fighter pilots (Vertin 2020: 8-9). Attah-Asamoah (2019), thus, noted that the US-China rivalry in Djibouti has not only turned the region and Africa as a whole into a "proxy turf for extra-regional competition" but has also increased the risks of escalation that can potentially harm the Continent's efforts to address issues of peace and security.

Attah-Asamoah's points are not an exaggeration when considering a Report to Congress by the US Department of Defense, which concluded that more Chinese military bases in Africa "could both interfere with US military operations and support offensive operations against the US" (DOD-US 2021: 131). This report essentially meant that Washington perceived the prospects of more Chinese military bases in Africa as a potential threat to US interests. In 2019, a communique by the AUPSC reflected on these issues, reiterating its concern about "the increase in the establishment of foreign military presence and military bases in Africa that were undermining national sovereignty and peace efforts" (AU 2019). The document further stated that AU Member States should support the implementation of the 2004 CADSP in recognition that (AU 2019):

> albeit this increase of foreign military presence and military bases in different parts of the Continent, the threats which they are supposedly expected to neutralize, continue to increase an intensity and geographic expansion in different parts of the Continent; also expresses concern that foreign military presence and military bases are contributing to the risk of rivalry and competition among foreign powers within Africa and undermining national sovereignty and peace efforts

Additionally, according to a SIPRI report, China is now the third leading arms exporter, including SALWs, to the African Continent, accounting for 10% of Africa's arms market, behind Russia (44%) and the US (17%) (Wezeman *et al* 2022: 7). Available data on arms transfers, however, is not precisely accurate as it captures only the reported transfers, and, particularly in Africa, this is further complicated by the lack of transparency in the arms trade industry (Bayes 2020: 34; Mariani and Kirkham 2018: 337). This is evidenced by the number of African states participating in the 2014 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which "regulates the international trade in conventional arms and seeks to prevent and eradicate illicit trade and diversion of conventional arms". Globally, only 111

states out of 193 have ratified or acceded to the Treaty, while only 26 African states have ratified it (The Arms Trade Treaty 2022).

While China has ratified the ATT, it "is among the least transparent" and many of its bilateral partners in Africa also lack transparency and have not ratified the ATT. Mariani and Kirkham (2018: 337) argued that this presents a major challenge for Africa as SALWs are the weapons of choice and cause of most instability across the Continent, and addressing the illicit flows of arms and ammunition requires better regulation and transparency. The uncontrollable flow of SALWs in Africa was mentioned as a security threat to the Continent in the Programme of Action adopted at the first FOCAC conference (FOCAC 2000b). This indicated that both Chinese and African leaders were cognisant of the issue in the formation stage of FOCAC. However, two decades later, it is one of the key challenges that the strategic initiative of STG2020 missed its target, and China's arms transfers to the Continent exacerbate the issue. The AU's new target of 2030 is more likely to be missed as well unless African leaders, within the context of the China-Africa strategic partnership and the need to implement the ICACPPS successfully, engage China on this issue with sincerity and more rigour.

Another example that shows conflicting interests between China and the AU is Beijing's involvement in the conflict over the Nile River between Egypt, and Sudan, on the one side and Ethiopia, on the other. As documented by Mbaku (2020), Egypt's total dependence (more than 95% of agricultural and drinking water) on the Nile prompted the country to sign British-facilitated treaties with Sudan in 1929 and 1959. These treaties guaranteed increases of water allocations to both Egypt and Sudan and granted veto power to the former over construction projects on the river, including in the upstream countries where the river originates. However, Ethiopia, whose Lake Tana and Blue Nile are the source of 85% of the Nile waters, was not a signatory of the Nile treaties. As a result, in 2011, Ethiopia launched a project for the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on its side of the Blue Nile, primarily for electricity generation.

The move was met with fury by Egypt as they saw the project as an existential threat to their country. Egyptian leaders dreaded the scenario of Ethiopia holding power to restrict the supply of water into Egypt through the dam. Tensions between the two countries raised fears of war as Egyptian leaders threatened to use military force to stop the GERD project. This, in turn, prompted

the Ethiopians to increase military defences. Egypt also engaged in a diplomatic strategy with the international community to avoid investing in the project, forcing Ethiopian leaders to source funds from within their country. However, China provided Ethiopia with funding for the turbines and other equipment needed for the hydropower project despite the ongoing feud and stalled AU-led negotiations (Mbaku 2020). China's actions in this regard fuelled divisions among the African countries that were involved in the dispute.

However, some of the major challenges lie within Africa itself rather than with its partnership with China. Full operation of the AU's security institutions and implementation of the ICACPPS, among others, have been undermined due to the AU's internal issues, such as dependency on foreign funding and support in every policy field, misalignment of goals by AU structures, and AU member states' lack of political will (Chun 2018: 126; Okumu *et al* 2020: 33). As Okumu *et al* (2020: 33) indicated, a prevalent issue among the majority of the AU member states is that they do not honour their commitments, with a significant number of them failing to ratify some of the key agreements that support continental structures such as the APSA. Apiko (2021: 3) and Taylor (2007: 32) echoed these points by noting that some African countries who benefit from their bilateral engagements with China intentionally resist the AU's involvement in their affairs with Beijing and therefore do not prioritise multilateral engagements. Furthermore, Grieger (2019: 4) claims that the FOCAC mechanism, rather than providing an opportunity for a common African strategy to enhance the Continent's agency concerning Beijing, encourages competition among African states. This setting has consequently weakened the ability of African countries "to leverage their diplomatic weight and push their own agenda" (Grieger 2019: 4).

7.2.3. Validation and reconfirmation

The aspect of validation and reconfirmation concerns commitment to the partnership and loyalty and trust between the partnering actors. These are typically demonstrated through consistent institutional programmes, and high-level leadership meetings and public declarations of cooperation or show of solidarity. This is important to motivate and boost the morale of all stakeholders involved in the partnership to keep the momentum, especially in times of challenges. In this regard, the China-Africa partnership has never been short of public shows of solidarity and statements reasserting commitment by leaders from both sides since the establishment of the

FOCAC mechanism. From the first FOCAC gathering in 2000 to the recent conference in 2021 in Dakar, Senegal, African and Chinese leaders in attendance have consistently praised the China-Africa partnership and vowed to intensify cooperation (Shelton and Paruk 2008: 151).

For example, in the recent Dakar conference, the adopted Action Plan declared that China and Africa "believe that over the past 21 years since its inception, the Forum has strongly promoted the development of relations between China and Africa, and become an important benchmark for international cooperation with Africa" (FOCAC 2021a). Such statements have been the mantra of FOCAC gatherings since the launch of the triennial gathering in 2000. Furthermore, each meeting saw a growing attendance as more African states shifted diplomatic relations from Taipei to Beijing and joined the FOCAC. These demonstrate the sense of loyalty or trust among African and Chinese leaders and the belief that their partnership is mutually beneficial or the willingness to make it so.

Trust and loyalty have also been reinforced by keeping promises or sticking to agreements. At the inaugural FOCAC conference in 2000, China's pledge to forgive more than a billion (US) dollars owed to it by heavily indebted African countries was an important gesture that strengthened its image as a genuine partner to Africa, which had an effective impression on African leaders. African leaders praised China and asked that (Zuma, as cited by Taylor 2011: 45):

> to provide meaningful expression to the new partnership between China and Africa, there has to be a radical expansion of the trade volume between the two regions from the current two percent in the year 2000 to double digits in the next five years

Indeed, China kept its promise of debt cancellation and restructuring and further announced a relief of US$10 billion in zero-interest loans for African countries in 2005. During the 2018 FOCAC summit, Beijing further declared debt forgiveness for Africa's least developed countries with intergovernmental zero-interest loans owed to China (Acker *et al* 2020; Sun 2020). Acker *et al* (2020) documented sixteen cases of debt restructuring worth $7.5 billion by China for ten African countries between 2000 and 2019. Accordingly, "China wrote off the accumulated arrears of at least 94 interest-free loans amounting to at least $3.4 billion" (Acker *et al* 2020: 5). Furthermore, the promises of increasing trade, investments and capacity-training are among the prominent achievements in the China-Africa partnership that have also strengthened the sense of loyalty and trust among the leaders.

An important point that also illustrates the commitment of African and Chinese leaders is how they have adapted the partnership to new circumstances or challenges. At the end of each conference, new or additional features have been incorporated into the existing contents of cooperation as demand increases or new issues emerge, and more financial pledges are to fund the expanding collaborations. For example, in the 2021 Dakar conference, the COVID-19 global pandemic was one of the key issues tackled. Being one of the manufacturers of COVID-19 vaccines, China thus pledged to donate one billion doses of its Sinovac vaccine to Africa to assist the Continent in accessing vaccines. It also included plans to address a thorny issue that many analysts to date still underline, which is the trade imbalance between China and Africa. Accordingly, the Plan declared that "China will continue to hold discussions with the African side on promoting China-Africa trade, in a bid to reach 300 billion US dollars in total imports from Africa in the next three years" (FOCAC 2021a).

Security cooperation is another issue that demonstrates the China-Africa strategic partnership's adaptability. Although leaders have consistently vowed to intensify efforts to tackle issues of peace and security in Africa, coupled with financial pledges and training of personnel, Africa's key continental security management structures, such as the ASF, CEWS and the Panel of the Wise, are not fully operational (Okumu *et al* 2020: 29-30). However, China and Africa have a historical bond that has stood the test of time. Furthermore, Chinese and African leaders continue to engage with each other on contentious issues that adversely affect Africa, coupled with their partnership's adaptability. This indicates that both partners are vested in making the partnership mutually beneficial in the long term.

While political leaders often tend to exaggerate the progress and benefits of the tasks or deliverables of their projects, researchers and the media's ability to unearth facts often put them under pressure to produce the desired results or work on their shortcomings. In the case of the China-Africa strategic partnership, this has proven to be a key factor that has led to the inclusion of issues such as security cooperation as one of the priorities of the partnership. Therefore, owing to the sense of trust, loyalty, and public declarations of an "unbreakable fraternity" between China and Africa, as the Chinese President puts it (Xinhua 2021b), the China-Africa strategic partnership will likely endure into the foreseeable future. Though there are no indications of factors that could

fundamentally destabilise this partnership, it is unlikely at the current trajectory to assist Africa to achieve its short-term, or even some key, Agenda 2063 goals.

In summary and answering the fourth research sub-question, the findings show that China has made considerable progress towards achieving its 2049 mission with the help of Africa's natural resources, the market for its finished products and the participation of African countries in the BRI. Likewise, several African countries have benefited massively in terms of infrastructure development projects funded by Chinese companies, which are important milestones for the AU's Agenda 2063. However, African countries continue to export less and import more goods from China, thereby continuing to incur trade deficits with China.

Furthermore, while not attaching political conditions and offering access to finance for states rejected by global financial institutions, China's loans in Africa are often characterised by a lack of transparency concerning the terms of agreements. These agreements, thus, adversely affect aspirations of the AU's Agenda 2063 as they deny citizens in African countries access to information and thereby hold their governments to account. Moreover, the findings show that China's collaboration with African countries to address peace and security issues has produced, on the one hand, benefits for Africa in peacekeeping operations, capacity building and training of African military personnel, and financial contributions to the APSA through the ICACCPS. On the other hand, China's activities in Africa exacerbate some of the peace and security predicaments that the aspirations of Agenda 2063 seek to overcome.

7.3. Conclusion

This chapter applied the third phase of the SPM to complete the presentation of the main findings of this study to answer the third and fourth research questions. A key indicator of the effectiveness of strategic partnerships in the SPM was evaluating progress in the achievement of key goals, which in China-Africa relations are the 2049 Vision (Chinese Dream) and the AU's Agenda 2063, respectively. The findings show that the Africa-China strategic partnership formally launched in 2000 through the FOCAC has produced remarkable economic benefits for both Africa and China. China's contribution to Africa's development has often been compared to what Western powers, especially EU countries, have brought to the Continent since the inception of colonisation. However, China's positive impact on Africa's economic development is unparalleled in country-

by-country comparisons. No Western country has collaborated with as many African countries and achieved the type of infrastructural changes and improved economic performance in these countries as China. China's BRI has become a central strategy in achieving not only the PRC's Chinese Dream but also an opportunity for Africa to pursue its Agenda 2063 ambitions.

The study, however, finds that the strategic partnership between the AU/Africa and China simultaneously contributes to challenges that pose major obstacles for Africa to achieve its Agenda 2063 objectives. First, although China's non-interference foreign policy has boosted the image of African countries as independent actors on the global stage, African leaders have been inspired by Beijing's fundamentalist view of the concepts of sovereignty and non-interference to hold a similar view, making it difficult for the AU to achieve its aspirations of politically integrating the Continent. Secondly, Beijing's one-party political system emboldens state leaders with authoritarian penchants in countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, and Rwanda Ethiopia to hold on to power, knowing that non-democratic governments are no longer pariahs of the world as their effectiveness in delivering economic development has been proven.

This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that many African leaders themselves have praised China's development model, leaving the AU's democratic aspirations in question. This raises serious doubts about the ability of African leaders to reach a consensus on the values under which governance on the Continent should be based. As pointed out in the chapter, citizens in many African countries prefer their governments to follow the liberal democratic approach to governance. This increases the prospects of authoritarian-leaning leaders resorting to state violence to repress dissent and popular protests. Africa has witnessed such scenarios in countries such as Uganda, Zimbabwe and Egypt, wherein governments have used excessive force to crush opposition rallies and arrested journalists, opposition supporters and leaders, and, with the help of Chinese technology, repressed online dissent and shut down internet connectivity.

Third, China's growing sale of arms to African countries adds to the peace and security challenges that the Continent faces. While major arms suppliers such as Russia and the US dwarf Beijing's share of arms imports in Africa, China accounts for 10% of the imports and previous statistics by SIPRI show that Chinese arms in Africa have been increasing. These sales include SALWs, the main weapons used in most violent conflicts in African countries. The easy availability of these

arms in Africa has been a key security issue since the 1990s and has been mentioned as one of the major challenges that led to the failure of achieving the objective of 'silencing the guns by 2020'.

Furthermore, as Beijing's rivalry with the US and other Western powers continues to unfold, China's military presence in Djibouti, among its competitors, has also raised concerns for the political and security stability of the region. Such concerns are validated by US intelligence reports describing the possibility of more Chinese military bases in Africa as a threat to US interests. Tensions between the US and China almost escalated in 2018 when the former's military officers in Djibouti accused the latter of using lasers against US pilots, while both accused each other of espionage. However, Beijing's military presence in Djibouti indicates that its global military ambitions clash with the AU's peace and security objectives. The AUPSC expressed concern about the increasing foreign military presence in Africa prior to the establishment of China's base in Djibouti.

Despite the challenges, the findings of this study show that there are currently no factors that could fundamentally jeopardise the China-Africa strategic partnership, thanks to the historical solidarity and loyalty amongst Chinese and African leaders. Chinese and African leaders are aware of the challenges experienced in African countries but continue to praise and reaffirm their commitment to their partnership. Furthermore, divisive issues such as the trade imbalance and the influx of arms in Africa continue to be debated within the FOCAC, which indicates that leaders have an interest in the sustainability and effectiveness of the partnership for both sides. Moreover, media and scholarly scrutiny pressurise China to prove that it is not a neo-colonial power in Africa, as some critics claim, but a genuine partner that seeks to make its relations with Africa truly mutually beneficial.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1. Introduction

This study problematised the AU/Africa-China strategic partnership and adopted Wilkins' (2008) strategic partnership model (SPM) to analyse how the partnership affects the AU's Agenda 2063 aspirations. First, the thesis surveyed the literature in Chapter two to understand how the IR scholarship explains the concept of strategic partnership and how the available research on the China-Africa topic explains the strategic partnership's origins between China and Africa. The literature showed that strategic partnerships as cooperation mechanisms between world actors had become a permanent and key feature of international politics. Though strides have been made in IR to formulate definitions and analytical models to investigate and understand them, the manner in which the concept is applied and interpreted by policy-makers and other scholars renders strategic partnership an essentially contested concept.

The chapter also showed that studies on the China-Africa topic that included the term' strategic partnership' in their titles imply that China and Africa have been in such a partnership long before the FOCAC mechanism was established. However, the difficulty in this understanding is tracing the moment the partnership was established. This is particularly difficult in the case of China and Africa as there are no records of either side proclaiming the other as a strategic partner or any structure formed by the two sides to coordinate cooperation prior to the creation of FOCAC. Notwithstanding, the review of literature analysed how China-Africa studies that attached the term strategic partnership in their titles understood this partnership, focusing on motivations behind the creation of the partnership and the convergent areas and challenges.

In light of the theoretical and conceptual impasse concerning the term strategic partnership, the third chapter discussed the main constitutive features or standard properties of such partnerships and developed a working definition of the term. Accordingly, the study adopted the definition that strategic partnerships are:

> flexible, non-binding formal structured frameworks designed for intensified, long-term cooperation between two or more actors to pursue mutually beneficial shared or unshared core interests or goals more effectively than could be achieved in isolation, and jointly manage risks and seize opportunities in other areas of strategic interest.

This definition diverges from the views of China-Africa scholars discussed in the literature review in that it specifies one of the features of strategic partnerships as a formal structure, which is therefore based on an agreement between the parties involved. Strategic partnerships are also cooperation mechanisms characterised by high levels of flexibility concerning the commitment of partners to the partnership itself. This allows partners to downgrade the importance of the partnership when expectations are not being met or, when differences are insurmountable, suspend or even terminate the partnership without any serious consequences for the withdrawing partner. As pointed out in chapter six, the former is the fate that the EU-China strategic partnership has suffered due to substantial challenges consequent to persistent and fundamental contradictions between the two parties (Cameron 2020; Kefferpütz 2019). This chapter also discussed the SPM, developed by Wilkins (2008), and how it was applied as an analytical tool to analyse the formation, implementation and evaluation phases of the China-Africa strategic partnership.

Chapter four discussed the research methodology that was employed to carry out the study. The study adopted a constructivist/interpretivist research paradigm, as the topic required the interpretation of meanings extracted from different data sources, such as texts and audio-visual materials, rather than applying a standard formula to study an objective reality. The study further employed an exploratory and explanatory research design to analyse a phenomenon that had not been studied or thoroughly explained in the current literature. In accordance with the research paradigm and design, the study's methodology used a qualitative research approach and methods for collecting data and analysis and employed Wilkins SPM as the analytical model to present and analyse the findings. While the qualitative data collection approach is standard, the distinctiveness of this methodology is that it built on previous studies that analysed the China-Africa strategic partnership, which did not consider the relevance of the concept of strategic partnership as an analytical model to understand the partnership.

The fifth chapter discussed the nature of China-Africa relations to provide a broad context of the topic. This chapter showed that China-Africa strategic partnership is centred on long-standing sentimental ties, with a fundamental interest in curbing Western imperialism and global dominance. China and Africa evolved from partners fighting against colonialism during the Cold War era to collaborators for development in their respective territories and transformation of the international system in the 21st century. As economic cooperation between China and Africa

steadily grew in the 1990s, the two established the FOCAC platform in 2000 to coordinate cooperation effectively in different sectors between the more than 50 African countries and the Asian giant. The two sides separately launched strategic development visions in 2013— the AU's Agenda 2063 and China 2049 Vision (Chinese Dream) — and aligned them within the FOCAC framework in the following years. Furthermore, the two sides established the ICACPPS in 2012, the China Africa Defense Forum and the China Africa Peace and Security Forum, to address issues of peace and security, in particular on the African continent. Accordingly, chapters six and seven presented the findings of the study and analysed them using Wilkins' SPM to answer the research questions.

This chapter will thus summarise the key findings in chapters six and seven, make policy recommendations and suggest areas for future research. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section summarises the main findings in accordance with the four research objectives of the study. Section two makes recommendations for China and the AU to implement in order to strengthen their strategic partnership and for African countries to enhance their strategies in engaging with China. In the fourth section, the chapter clarifies how the findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on both strategic partnerships and the China-Africa studies. This section further discusses the possible areas for future research that emerged from some issues that were not adequately discussed in the paper or that raised key questions. The last section makes the concluding remarks.

8.2. Summary of key findings

8.2.1. Revitalising a partnership to navigate a hostile environment

In line with the first research sub-question, the first objective of this study was to probe the underlying factors and reasons that led China and Africa to establish a strategic partnership. Based on the findings from the literature and interview respondents, the findings corroborate other studies' findings. This can be seen in, for example, Alden and Alves (2008), Konings (2007), Shinn and Eisenman (2012) and Taylor (2006), which pointed out that the renewed China-Africa relations in the post-Cold War era are rooted in a historical friendship but motivated by mutual economic and political interests.

For Africa, some environmental factors at the end of the Cold War presented uncertainties. The global ideological rivalry and pressures of aligning with either the East or the West at this time subsided, affording countries on the continent to pursue independent foreign policies. However, Africa at this time was reeling from violent conflicts and economic devastation consequent to Western-imposed SAPs and democratisation processes. This is while the Western powers themselves, at the same time, were reducing their engagement with the continent. For China, the 1989 Tiananmen Square crisis threatened the Asian country's promising development prospects as Western nations condemned Beijing's brutal handling of protests at the Square. As the 1990s decade progressed, China clashed once more with the West in the 1996 Taiwan missile crisis.

The West's reactions to Beijing's policies and actions drove Chinese and African leaders to closer cooperation as the two sides realised they had a common interest in resisting a new form of Western domination. China gradually increased its engagement with the African continent, with some scholars noting Africa's subsequent improved economic and security situation in the latter half of the 1990s decade. The relationship was solidified with the creation of a strategic partnership in 2000 through the FOCAC and the formal declaration of this partnership in 2006. However, prior to the formal declaration of the strategic partnership in 2006, increased Chinese investments in African countries such as Sudan and Zimbabwe were highlighted by some international observers as one of the main causes of security crises in those countries. Under pressure, China revised its approach and prioritised security cooperation in its first African Policy Paper, published in early 2006.

Second, China and Africa were motivated to forge closer cooperation by a mutual perception of strategic political and economic importance in a changing environment spurred by globalisation. On the economic front, the African continent was rich with natural resources, but African leaders came to realise that the imperialist Western-dominated world order was hindering development and security on the continent. Thus, China, whose economy was witnessing phenomenal growth but its government treading a political path opposite to the Western liberal route, presented a suitable alternative for the African continent. For African leaders, the Chinese demonstrated previously with the much-praised TAZARA project that its aid or development assistance does not come with conditions that threaten the political and economic independence of recipient countries. Thus, more investments and aid from China were sought by African leaders in particular to address

the continent's infrastructure woes. Likewise, China's fast-growing, export-driven economy needed more markets for its products and a stable supply of natural resources abundant on the African continent.

Politically, Beijing viewed Africa as a compatible partner as leaders on the continent not only assisted the PRC in replacing Taiwan at the UN but also supported the Chinese government during its political crises, even though one of the African goals is to entrench liberal political values within AU member states. The rationale here is the non-interference principle, which stipulates that states should respect and refrain from involving themselves in the internal affairs of other states. This is important for both Africa and China as they seek closer cooperation between themselves and with different actors in the global arena. For China and Africa, the former in particular, this shows that divergent development paths can coexist, even cooperate, and yield mutual benefits. The African continent can continue pursuing the liberal democratic aspirations of its peoples and still maintain good relations with the non-democratic PRC.

Thirdly, the collaboration between China and Africa in the past indicated with the 1971 UN vote on Taiwan that they could have an impact on the course of the international system. In the post-Cold War era, the system had come to be dominated by the US as the "leader of the free world" (West). As territories that suffered invasions and subjugations in the past, China and African countries have thus found common ground in advocating for the transformation of the liberal international order into a system of multiple poles of power (multipolarity) that should also embrace the interests of developing countries. Accordingly, China and Africa have sought to change dominant international principles on issues such as aid, global governance and peacekeeping, which mostly affect developing regions such as Africa. Some Western observers argue that China’s approach, especially on aid, is sponsoring conflicts and violations of human rights in Africa and around the world. However, other scholars have contended that China's development assistance system has produced tangible economic benefits in Africa, demonstrating that the liberal approach is not the only effective system. In fact, the Western approach is unsuitable in other developing countries as it restricts recipient states from developing solutions tailor-made for their specific realities, which China's model permits.

However, in answering the first research sub-question, this study highlights that China and African countries established a strategic partnership to navigate an environment that they perceived as

hostile to their interests. The two sides considered themselves compatible partners as they share a history of falling victim to foreign invasions. Moreover, the same powers that carried out these invasions drove the contemporary environment's hostility towards China and Africa's interests. The adversity of the environment in the past was applied physically, mainly through military power, to impose exploitative political and economic systems in conquered lands. However, the antagonism in the new environment is only exerted systemically by the same powers in the form of restricting Chinese and African interests through global political and economic structures and policies that have been consolidated in the post-Cold War era. These underlying issues are then the basis of China and Africa's shared worldview, which perceives the global order as an unjust system that needs to be transformed.

8.2.2. The unevenness of China and Africa's institutional framework and reactive approach

The second research sub-question probed how China and Africa anticipate and intend to address emerging challenges in the course of their strategic partnership. To answer this question, the second objective of this study was to understand the AU and China's respective perceptions of the consequences of their security cooperation and measures for addressing emerging challenges. An understanding of this aspect helped shed light on Africa's attempts or (in)ability to exercise agency in structuring their relations with China concerning 'what' they should cooperate on and 'how' the cooperation should be conducted. This aim was pursued in two ways: First, the research probed the institutional structure of the China-Africa strategic partnership, which usually indicates the anticipated depth of cooperation and approaches for addressing unexpected or undesired outcomes. Second, the study examined the approach adopted in the China-Africa partnership to tackle peace and security issues.

Corroborating other studies (Apiko 2021; Development Reimagined 2021; Mthembu and Mabera 2021; Monyae 2018; Nantulya 2021b; Taylor 2019), the findings show that, due to the asymmetry of the China-Africa relationship and the inability of African countries to develop a common policy on China, the African side has largely been reacting, mostly consenting, to China's initiatives and decisions on the direction and reshaping of their strategic partnership's institutional structure. While the partnership is based on principles such as equality and mutual respect, this has resulted

in an askew institutional framework in favour of China as Beijing built a dedicated and well-funded structure that essentially runs the entire FOCAC process.

Thus, commitments are made at the multilateral level during FOCAC conferences, but the actual signing and implementation of agreements are done at the bilateral level between China and individual African countries. Furthermore, the lion's share of the bilateral agreements is focused on trade and investments, while other key areas, such as peace and security, are implemented between China and the AU. In this way, the FOCAC structure is aligned more with China's strategic interests than the collective goals of African countries. This can be seen, for example, in terms of agreements that are negotiated at the bilateral level, which have more impact on the domestic context of African countries. Additionally, as will be shown in section 8.2.4 below, information about the terms of these agreements is barely made available to the public in the countries they are implemented. This makes it difficult for African countries to agree on a common policy because some of the key information that could be valuable in formulating such a collective strategy cannot be shared. Moreover, these agreements often result in projects that do not align with the collective agenda of the continent.

The other dimension of pursuing the second objective was analysing the security cooperation approach. The study finds that African leaders, notwithstanding, sought the FOCAC mechanism from its inception to adopt a comprehensive and proactive cooperation approach in accordance with the major issues afflicting the African continent, particularly peace and security issues. However, due to China's inexperience in the field of international security, as other scholars noted, Beijing was reluctant to cooperate with the African continent on matters of peace and security. However, Africa's bargaining position during the formation of the FOCAC platform was weakened by, as mentioned above, not only its uneven relationship with Beijing but also due to its inability to develop a common African policy to engage China. Thus, the African side settled for the development-based approach in anticipation that Chinese investments in infrastructure development on the continent has the potential to drive economic development and address the root causes of conflicts and instability.

This reactive approach proved mainly ineffective as it left peace and security issues to the forces of economic activities. Beijing was subsequently the side in the partnership that presented solutions as it revised its African policy in the mid-2000s for the FOCAC to adopt a more proactive

approach. It is also the partner that conceptualised and is responsible for funding and implementing the Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security (ICACPPS). The institutional framework of FOCAC thus indicates Africa's reliance on China to provide solutions to emerging challenges. This point has been made in other studies, such as Taylor and Zajontz (2020) and Venkateswaran (2020), who highlighted that the asymmetry of the BRI reinforces Africa's dependency on external actors.

The dilemma of Africa's limited agency in the FOCAC is that the asymmetry of the China-Africa relationship can most likely be countered after the development of a common African strategy to engage Beijing. However, as mentioned above, African countries' difficulty in developing a collective policy is heightened by bilateral agreements between China and individual African states. However, it is also a result of divisions among their leaders on key principles such as democracy and human rights and inconsistent application of them by the AU (discussed further in section 8.3.1). This weakens the credibility of the organisation and influences states to prioritise on their national interests, especially in cases wherein interests clash at the expense of the collective interests of the continent. Thus, African countries have been inclined to coordinate the implementation of FOCAC agreements at the bilateral level.

8.2.3. Consequences of sacrificing principles for economic benefits

The third research sub-question sought to investigate the areas of convergences and divergence in the security cooperation between China and Africa. Using the SPM, this aim was pursued through an analysis of the effectiveness of the partnership focusing on the alignment of interests and values between the partners to understand where they converge and diverge.

In answering the third research sub-question, the findings in this section show that though China and Africa were able to mute their divergent political values to focus on their convergent interests of economic development, their economic interests themselves are increasingly showing divergences. While disparities have always existed in the form of China mostly importing commodities from Africa and the latter importing manufactured goods from the former, the new discrepancies are being shaped by Beijing's economic restructuring and the lack of diversification among African economies. China's economic growth has traditionally been driven by construction

and manufacturing that, consequently, required an ample supply of raw materials. In turn, this drove up the prices of commodities and boosted revenues for African countries that mostly relied on exports of their natural resources. Access to these resources in Africa likewise encouraged Chinese investments in mining, energy generation and infrastructure projects such as roads and port development for efficient transportation of goods.

China, however, has steadily been shifting its focus to high value-added service exports such as technology and finance and aims for its services sector eventually to account for at least 70% of the country's GDP as part of its 2049 goals. Beijing's quest in this regard poses a critical challenge for the African continent as commodities still account for an overwhelming majority of exports from African countries to China, while the continent already accounts for less than 5% of China's total trade with the world. As pointed out in chapter 6, the Chinese economy's massive need for raw materials in the 1990s and 2000s led to a commodity price boom that benefited African commodity-based economies. Thus, less demand for these commodities from a major economy such as China will most likely reduce their prices and negatively affect many African countries. Experts noted that China's economic growth and development were enhanced by its increased productivity and innovation, a competence made possible by Beijing's recognition to solicit technology and knowledge transfer from Western investors in the early stages of China's development. Therefore, it is upon African countries to cooperate vigorously with Beijing on the matter of knowledge and technology transfer, lest the continent is left behind while China gets increasingly integrated into the global economy.

China's shifting economic interests in its BRI project have also been highlighted by other scholars. These studies have noted that China's infrastructure financing in Africa has been declining in the latter half of the 2010s. This trend has been linked to the restructuring of China's economy from a raw materials-intensive manufacturing and export-driven economy towards a services-based economy. The decline also connects to the views by other analysts that Beijing's new development programme launched in late 2021, the GDI, which is somewhat similar to the BRI but still lacks clarity, signals China's readjustment of its priorities. This point to the potential uncertainty of the BRI's future and consequent setbacks for developing countries that have invested much of their development hopes in the project.

However, more importantly, Africa and China's divergent political principles directly affect the key aspirations of the AU, particularly political and security objectives. Since the era of independence, the African continent, under the aegis of the OAU/AU, has struggled to realise its goal of entrenching liberal principles and democratic governance. This is evident in African countries where some leaders often deviate from the ideal, but the aspiration continues to be pursued under the Agenda 2063. However, what the existing literature does not point out is that the success of China's development model in delivering economic growth and lifting hundreds of millions of its citizens out of poverty is proof to some African leaders that a non-democratic government is not a global pariah as it is often portrayed to be.

Accordingly, leaders of democratic and non-democratic African countries have publicly hailed Beijing's political system and development model, with some hinting that they want to replicate China's system in their countries. This lack of consistency in African leaders' views on democracy places the democratic and peace aspirations of the continent in limbo. The effects of this inconsistency on the political and security landscape of the continent have been witnessed in countries such as Uganda, Egypt, Zimbabwe and eSwatini (former Swaziland). This is evident from governments arresting opposition leaders, journalists and activists and using extreme force to crack down on protests and opposition gatherings.

8.2.4. Major obstacles for Agenda 2063

The last research objective sought to analyse the linkages between Africa and China's strategic development visions (the AU's Agenda 2063 and China's 2049 vision) in order to understand how the partnership affects the former’s. Thus, the SPM analysis pursued this aim by examining the effectiveness of the China-Africa strategic partnership, focusing on the progress towards achieving key goals.

Economically, Africa has provided the much-needed natural resources for the Asian power to maintain economic growth for its 2049 domestic development objectives, and African countries, through the BRI, have become key locations for China's planned global trade. The China-African political alliance has also seen Chinese and African officials occupying some of the key positions in UN agencies since the 2000s. This led to the adoption of some Chinese-initiated resolutions that

promoted non-interference and recognised China's state-led development model as an important approach to achieving social stability. In Africa, China has played a key role in the continent's quest to realise its Agenda 2063. Several African countries, such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Angola and Tanzania, have benefited massively in terms of infrastructure development projects funded by Chinese companies. Besides the AU headquarters that was financed and built by China as a free gift, Chinese companies have built numerous railways, roads, ports and energy facilities in many African countries. These projects are important milestones for the continent's infrastructure aspirations outlined in the AU's Agenda 2063. This is evident as some of the Chinese-funded railway projects cross borders between neighbouring countries and provide access to the sea for landlocked countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda and Zambia.

China has also played a critical role in Africa's peace and security aspirations since the FOCAC was established, starting with participating in UN-led peacekeeping operations in Africa. Notably, Beijing played a major role in conflict resolution on the African continent for the first time by persuading the Sudanese government to allow UN peacekeepers into its territory. However, China's contribution to peace and security operations in Africa became more comprehensive after the 2012 FOCAC conference that launched the ICACCPS. China became the largest UNSC P5 contributor of troops in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa by 2016, participating in most of the peacekeeping missions on the continent. China also channelled funds through the China-Africa Peace and Security Fund to assist the ASF and other regional structures such as the East African Standby Force and Southern African Standby Force.

However, the findings of this study suggest that these positive developments have been marred by significant setbacks, which increase the difficulty of addressing some of the major challenges on the continent that the AU's Agenda 2063 seek to solve. First, many analysts have hailed the BRI development project as a 'game-changer' that could be an opportunity for Africa to achieve its key infrastructure goals of Agenda 2063. There are, however, indications that the BRI have potential adverse implications for African countries. Some studies have documented that Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Africa are largely positioned to facilitate the extraction of the continent's natural resources and their transportation to China. While it appears that the infrastructure is self-evidently necessary to enhance the continent's productivity and exports of its natural resources, it

is a similar infrastructure formula employed by the colonial powers to plunder the continent's natural resources.

Secondly, the other main issue that remains a challenge for the African continent, as several studies have indicated, is the persistent trade deficit that African countries continue to incur in their trade with China due to an asymmetric trade relationship. This is a characteristic of North-South relations that China-Africa trade under the banner of South-South cooperation was anticipated to depart from. Furthermore, while coming with no political conditions and offering access to finance for states rejected by global financial institutions, China's loans in Africa are often characterised by a lack of transparency concerning the terms of agreements. These agreements, thus, deny citizens access to information, making it impossible to hold their governments accountable. Transparent and accountable governments are a key component of the democratic aspirations of the AU's Agenda 2063, and therefore, Chinese loans to Africa are serving as obstructions against this goal.

The third area in which China's activities on the continent raise the difficulty in addressing challenges is peace and security. Political instability and violent conflicts in Africa have continued well beyond the target year of ending them, which was 2020. The main reasons several studies cite as key challenges for resolving conflicts in Africa are the institutional challenges of the AU. Furthermore, external influences also add to the problem, including the AU's dependency on international donors, foreign military bases on the continent and foreign suppliers of arms in Africa. China plays a role in the external challenges that face the AU. For example, statistics by SIPRI (2021) show that Beijing is currently the third largest supplier of arms to the African continent, with 25% of all SALWs in Africa imported from China. As mentioned in the chapter, other studies also show that in most conflicts in Africa, SALWs are the main weapons used.

Furthermore, Beijing's first overseas military base in Djibouti, a small country that hosts several bases of major Western powers in close proximity, has led to potentially damaging regional security effects. A military base serves as an indispensable base for the lessee state to provide security for its citizens in the host country as well as easy assistance, such as military and humanitarian, to the host country itself. However, China's base in Djibouti has also caused geopolitical tensions in the Horn of Africa that have the potential to harm the continent's peace and security landscape due to its rivalry with the US. Moreover, installing the base against the

AU's concern about the existence of foreign military bases and building new ones on the continent indicate divergent interests between Beijing and the AU. It also shows how foreign actors in Africa use their bilateral relations with individual AU member states to pursue national interests, irrespective of how the AU's continental programmes or goals, such as Agenda 2063, are affected in the process.

Therefore, the findings of this indicate that, with the current trajectory of the China-Africa strategic partnership, some of the key aspirations of the AU's Agenda 2063 are highly unlikely to be achieved by the targeted year of 2063. The objective of ending violent conflicts in Africa did not materialise by the targeted year of 2020. The new target, 2030, appears unlikely to be met as one of the key obstacles for Africa to engage its strategic partners, such as China, on contentious issues that lie within the AU itself. Before adopting a common posture or overarching policy to tackle foreign interferences and influences that undermine economic development and the continent's security, African leaders need to address the internal challenges of the AU. While these are numerous, the AU's major limitation is member states' divergent national and regime interests. This affects the AU in a number of ways: for example, poor financial contributions of member states, disagreements on key issues, little interest from member states to ratify and domesticate key agreements, and therefore little agency of the AU.

8.3. Recommendations

8.3.1. Creation of a conducive institutional framework

This study maintains what many studies and analysts have highlighted, that the AU's lack of a collective foreign policy weakens Africa's negotiation position in its engagement with China. Thus, Africa could benefit more from not only its strategic partnership with China but also from the other partnerships if it acted as one bloc and adopted overarching policies (Apiko 2021; Development Reimagined 2021; Mthembu and Mabera 2021; Monyae 2018; Nantulya 2021b; Taylor 2019; Ukeje and Tariku 2018). Indeed, as Mthembu and Mabera (2021: 2) have pointed out, many African countries are still dependent on their relations with developed or Western powers for development assistance and investments and, therefore, have little room to choose which country to have relations with. Thus, a common African strategy of dealing with major

world powers can benefit many African countries. The AU has created a Partnership Management and Coordination Division (PMCD) and tried to develop a "Partnership Strategy and Policy Framework". This aimed to create a well-coordinated and coherent structure that will develop policies for the AU to adopt on behalf of its member states when engaging with its external partners (Apiko 2021: 11-12; AU 2020). This framework follows the AU's main goal of regional integration modelled on the EU.

However, resolving the AU's internal challenges will take considerable effort and time for member states to reach a common ground on how the continent should engage partner countries or other RIOs. The EU itself, as a perceived model of regional integration for other regions, has often struggled to maintain a united front due to the competing national interests of member states. Therefore, this study recommends that efforts to develop a common African policy should be amplified by establishing departments or agencies within AU member states. These departments should be dedicated to overseeing bilateral partnerships between their countries and non-African powers. The departments can have several directorates according to the number of partnerships a state has, with each directorate dedicated to affairs with one partner.

These departments can serve as structures to follow up on implementation stages of partnership agreements, keep engagements with their partners ongoing on issues of interest and concern, and set the agenda for upcoming statutory partnership meetings. This should be separate from the normal bilateral relations that African countries have with their external partners but can be coordinated to synchronise the implementation of agreements made at the multilateral level. For example, FOCAC commitments, as discussed in chapter six, are implemented at the bilateral level between China and individual countries, except for specific China-AU agreements.

Since most African countries have good and longstanding bilateral relations, their partnership departments, for those willing, can also engage among themselves to analyse common issues and areas of interest. These issues can then be brought to the AU level for discussions and to analyse how they affect the objectives of Agenda 2063 and for other countries on the continent that have not created such a mechanism to learn from the countries with dedicated partnership departments. Furthermore, African countries should engage in processes of consultations at national levels to involve various stakeholders such as civil society, individuals and the private sector, as taxpayers' money would certainly finance such a department.

For example, most citizens in African countries are not aware of FOCAC processes and how their governments collaborate with China to implement agreements. Consultation processes can serve as a method of attracting useful inputs from various sectors within a country. Encouraging each country to develop such specialised departments can be a more viable option for African countries to effectively monitor and record the implementation processes of agreements made at partnership conferences such as FOCAC. Such departments can also serve as a mechanism to assess issues of concern raised by some researchers. This can include, for example, fears that Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Africa are actually aimed at facilitating the plundering of the continent's mineral resources.

The study further recommends that individual African countries should work with China to learn from their FOCAC follow-up committee and replicate the Chinese formula, in accordance with their domestic circumstances, to create directorates or bureaus within specialised partnership departments, as discussed above. Working with Beijing on a bilateral basis to create such a mechanism is more likely to succeed as leaders within a state have more influence over government processes and procedures for developing new policies and structures.

8.3.2. Aligning political values

China and Africa's growing relationship, particularly since the end of the 1990s, has always been 'threatened' by divergent political systems and principles between the two sides. The 'triumph' of Western liberal democracy at the end of the Cold War saw increased democratisation movements sweeping across the world, and the African continent has not been an exception. In Africa, the OAU/AU spearheaded the goal of entrenching democratic governance and respect for human rights in African countries. Though there have been significant challenges in realising this ideal, AU Member States have endorsed democracy and liberal principles as the foundation of the continent's political and economic integration. Chinese leaders, on the other hand, especially after the 1989 Tiananmen Square crisis that saw Western countries condemning Beijing's actions, have strengthened their commitment to China's 'non-democratic' political system. However, through the principles of non-interference and "respect for each other's choice of development path" (as the Chinese put it), Africa and China have managed to build closer relations and continue to assert their commitment to this relationship.

Notwithstanding, there are concerns that China is, intentionally or unintentionally, persuading African countries to abandon the collective democratic ideals of the continent (Parkinson *et al* 2019; Taylor 2006; Tull 2006). However, an aspect that has compounded this debate is that most of the concerns and criticisms that China is pushing for authoritarianism in Africa emanate from Western countries, which themselves continue to push for liberal values and democracy in African countries. This has led to competition between the West and China for Africa to embrace political values that align with their interests. For example, as mentioned in chapter six, during the 2022 US-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington D.C, the US pledged to provide US$165 million to support democratic processes and US$75 million "to counter democratic backsliding" in Africa (Usman, Ovadia and Abayo 2022). This precisely illustrated the competition between the US and China for Africa to embrace particular values. In this way, African countries are presented with a challenge as both the US and China are important development partners for the continent. The situation creates a dilemma for Africa as, on the one hand, China supported African countries against Western colonialism and imperialism. On the other hand, Western powers are now criticising China's relationship with Africa and pressuring African countries to reject China's political principles and systems.

It would be naïve to assume that Chinese leaders are not trying to persuade African countries to embrace China's development model. Because were some African countries to successfully copy China's one-party political system, the Chinese leadership would certainly feel legitimated and vindicated, as Benabdallah (2020: 3) pointed out. However, Africa should not be pressured by its external development partners to follow a particular development path. Therefore, as strategic partners seeking to sustain their partnership, China, the AU and African countries should initiate dialogue on these issues to clarify and address concerns. In particular, African leaders should encourage China to cooperate and assist African countries in their efforts to improve governance, democratic processes and institutions. This would not only demonstrate that China and Africa adhere to the principle of non-interference but also enhance China's image across the world and refute speculations that Beijing is undermining democracy in Africa.

8.3.3. Aligning economic and security interests

As pointed out in chapter seven, an emerging challenge for Africa is China's transition from manufacturing to a more service-based economy, which could leave commodity-dependent African countries reeling. Therefore, African countries need to accelerate the diversification of their economies if they wish to be integrated into the global economy and remain relevant to China and other major economies. Here lies the issue of knowledge and technology transfer to African countries in order to enhance their production capacity and innovation. This subject has been pronounced in FOCAC Declarations, and Action Plans as one of the key areas of cooperation that must be prioritised to alleviate Africa's snail-paced economic growth and development (FOCAC 2018; 2021a).

However, Park and Tang's (2021) research on this topic indicated that real technology transfer is a complicated process that requires significant amounts of time and compelling incentive on the part of the transferor. Furthermore, effective technology transfer is often determined by the capability gap between the transferor and transferee— the smaller the gap, the higher the chances of success. The authors found that the majority of Chinese investments in Africa's agricultural and manufacturing sectors have been provided by private Chinese firms, which are motivated more by profit-making than by pursuing the political interests of Beijing. The researchers' findings indicate that Chinese investments in Africa have led to job creation, with more local employees being trained and placed in sophisticated technology-based positions. However, "the effectiveness and sustainability of China's knowledge and technology transfer vary across different sectors and countries" (Park and Tang 2021: 257).

Therefore, instead of merely depending on external partners such as China, the AU and its Member states should be proactive and establish a cooperation framework among African countries for intra-continental knowledge and technology sharing. The process of knowledge and technology sharing can involve research and academic institutions in Africa. There is already momentum in promoting technological advances and innovation in Africa through events such as the annual Africa Tech Week (3-4 May 2023, Cape Town). Further evidence of interest in technological advances and innovation is the Africa Tech Summit, which held its sixth gathering in February 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya. However, these events are mainly about exhibitions of products developed by leading and start-up technology companies in Africa, and promoting intra-continental trade and

investments. Notwithstanding, the events can serve as hubs for information on the continent's technological developments and stakeholders that can be involved in a continental knowledge-sharing mechanism. Therefore, an intra-continental mechanism for technology sharing can be a viable approach to accelerating technological cooperation between China and Africa at the multilateral level.

On the peace and security front, one of the major issues that fuel violent conflicts in Africa is the easy availability of SALWs and the difficulty in controlling their flow. Such weapons can be smuggled across borders and trafficked with relative ease to conflict zones on the African continent. As shown in chapter seven, China is Africa's third largest supplier of arms, accounting for 10% of the arms that Africa imports and 25% of the SALWs imported to Africa coming from Beijing. Again as mentioned in chapter seven, some studies have highlighted how Chinese-made small arms have been used in African conflicts.

Commitments to cooperate in stemming the flow of small arms on the continent have been mentioned in FOCAC Declarations and Action Plans (FOCAC 2021a). However, the transfer of these weapons is usually a matter of bilateral agreements between China and individual African countries, which is complicated by the lack of transparency on the arms trade. Therefore, African leaders should elevate this by negotiating with their Chinese counterparts for the temporary exclusion of SALWs on their sale of arms to African countries while collaborating on efforts to address the illicit trade of these arms. The exclusion of these weapons can then be replaced by, for example, increased capacity building and supplies of technological equipment that can be used to search and collect data on the problem. This should ensure that Chinese weapons are not contributing to an issue that the continent is endeavouring to address.

China and African countries should also engage openly and frankly about the establishment of foreign military bases in Africa within the FOCAC. As mentioned, the AU views the proliferation of foreign bases in Africa as an issue that not only potentially enables the flow of weapons on the continent but also fuels foreign interferences, rivalry among major powers and instability in some African countries. Therefore, the AU's Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) should establish a legally binding continental mechanism or framework for overseeing Africa's security cooperation with external partners. This mechanism or framework should be entrusted with the power to permit or block the establishment of foreign military bases in African countries.

African leaders, in the meantime, should negotiate with their Chinese counterparts to agree that any plans by Beijing to open more military bases in Africa in the future be aligned and coordinated with the programmes and policies of the AUPSC and RECs, particularly the Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP). The CADSP asserted that the defence of each African country "is inextricably linked to that of other African countries" and that African countries often face common internal and external threats (AU 2004). For example, a regional approach on this matter was used by the SADC in 2007 when the REC opposed the establishment of a US base in Southern Africa and, after that, launched its own military brigade (Nshimbi 2020). Therefore, external powers that seek to establish their military bases in African countries should collaborate with the AUPSC and RECs to ensure that foreign military presence on the continent does not undermine peace and security efforts.

8.3.4. Aligning national interests of China and African countries with the AU's collective goals

A recurring issue in the findings is the contradictions between the national interests of AU member states and the AU's continental aspirations. These contradictions often result from the bilateral agreements between China and African countries. China's relations with several African countries, such as Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Africa, have been upgraded to strategic partnerships or are designated as strategic cooperation. However, many other African countries are plagued by a myriad of socio-economic ills in conjunction with or as a consequence of national institutional inefficiencies. State leaders in such contexts can often be motivated more by the regime and personal interests than the interests of their country, let alone of the continent.

Consequently, such leaders can be susceptible to external influences through promises of investments by major powers. These promises provide opportunities for regime sustenance and self-preservation. Therefore, the AU leaders should robustly encourage African countries and China to prioritise the collective goals of the AU when engaging at the bilateral level. This will help avoid intensifying contradictions between the interests of the AU and those of its member states. China should be encouraged to work closely with the AUC and AU's PMCD when implementing FOCAC agreements with AU member states.

Furthermore, some African countries have historical disputes among themselves over issues such as borders and natural resources. One pertinent example of such disputes, as mentioned in chapter seven, is the conflict over Ethiopia's construction of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on its side of the Blue Nile for its hydropower ambitions. However, Egypt, in particular, has framed the development of the dam as a threat to its national security due to the country's total dependence on the Nile River. As a result, Egyptian leaders warned that a military response is an option their country may take to safeguard the survival of its nation. The Ethiopian Government has dismissed these criticisms and threats by insisting that the project will not severely affect water flow into downstream countries such as Sudan and Egypt.

Ethiopian leaders further reasoned that, upon completion, the dam would generate 5,500 megawatts of electricity, which is enough to benefit not only Ethiopia but can also serve as an indispensable source of reliable and affordable electricity for countries in East Africa and thereby enhance efforts toward regional integration. The Ethiopian government was forced to finance the project through domestic crowdfunding due to Egypt's diplomatic strategy of opposing international investments in the project. However, China's Exim Bank provided funds for purchasing the crucial equipment and turbines for the dam's hydropower plants, infuriating the Egyptians in the process (Mbaku 2020).

Therefore, in the case of the Nile River, the AU should seek the creation of a framework similar to the Senegal River Basin Development Organisation (OMVS) and the Gambia River Organization for Development (OMVG) that guarantee equitable use of shared critical resources among adjacent countries. The OMVS, for example, was formed in 1972 by Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal to jointly manage the Senegal River, as they all depend on this river for different reasons. Cooperation under the OMVS has seen these West African countries benefit through affordable hydroelectric generation (though not sufficient) and ensuring that downstream countries along the river continue to receive the much-needed water for agriculture and drinking.

The project has demonstrated that regional cooperation on shared resources such as rivers can be mutually beneficial and reduce the prospects of inter-state conflicts than the unilateral approach taken by Ethiopia. Therefore, African leaders should seek to create similar mechanisms to ensure that the GERD delivers the much-needed electricity for Ethiopians and does not threaten lives and livelihoods in Sudan and Egypt. However, more importantly, African leaders should engage China

concerning its bilateral agreements with African countries on development projects that are centred on resources shared by countries. China should be encouraged to involve the AU where there are contestations before committing funds for development projects to avoid being seen as taking sides between the affected countries and therefore fueling disputes.

8.4. Areas for future research

Before discussing suggestions that can be used for future research, this section begins by explaining how this study's findings add new insights to the literature.

8.4.1. Contributions of the study's findings on the literature.

a). On strategic partnerships

The conceptual and theoretical debates on the notion of strategic partnership, as mentioned in chapter 3, have been ongoing for more than two decades. However, a common definition or theoretical approach to studying the phenomenon continues to elude the field of IR as strategic partnerships deviate from common understandings in the field of international cooperation. Notwithstanding, strategic partnerships can be distinguished from other forms of collaboration, as discussed in Chapters two and three. This study also demonstrated that Wilkins' (2008) strategic partnership model could be used to study all types of strategic partnerships. This is regardless of whether these partnerships are between states or between states and regional intergovernmental organisations (RIOs). This model can help to answer important questions such as how and why these partnerships are established and their effectiveness in achieving their objectives. This is significant for IR as, while the discipline seeks to understand events and relations of political actors on the international stage, the main aim of the field is to understand the practical implications of these relations and events upon states and societies.

First, all strategic partnerships, especially formal ones, are formed for reasons that essentially relate to how the global environment affects the partnering actors, and these actors have opinions of how this environment should be structured. These environmental factors and opinions of how the environment should operate influence what the partners cooperate on and how they undertake their cooperation. Second, all formally declared strategic partnerships establish some institutional structure to manage the implementation of agreements made between the partners. The shape of

the institutional structure indicates what actors cooperate on and how they conduct their cooperation, as well as how each actor can exercise agency in the partnership. Thirdly, strategic partnerships have clearly pronounced goals that are important to the partners, and therefore, the implementation of agreements is aimed at eventually achieving those goals. The SPM's analysis of these factors demonstrated that the model is more suited to understand the practical implications of the phenomenon of strategic partnerships than theoretical syntheses.

b). On China-Africa relations

This study contributed to the literature on China-Africa relations in three ways. First, it is the first to analyse the strategic partnership between China and Africa using a framework developed on the concept of strategic partnership. The relevance of using this framework to study China and Africa's partnership, as mentioned above and briefly demonstrated in chapter three, is that it can be replicated to study other similar partnerships. Therefore, as in the other partnerships that the AU has with global powers such as the EU and Japan, the model can provide important answers on why Africa establishes these strategic partnerships, the relevance of these collaborations to Africa's important goals, and how they affect crucial collective goals of the AU.

Second, this study is the first to probe the alignment of China's 2049 vision (Chinese Dream) and the AU's Agenda 2063 and how the former affects the latter's main objectives. Other studies, such as Lammich (2021), Ndzendze and Monyae (2019), and Zhang and Niway (2018), that came closer to such a study focused only on challenges and prospects of aligning China's BRI with the developmental objectives of the AU's Agenda 2063. However, the BRI is only one of the strategies, including technological advances and innovation, economic restructuring, and military modernisation and expansion, which Beijing has employed to pursue its 2049 objectives. The current study did not provide a comprehensive assessment of the linkages between China's 2049 vision and the AU's Agenda 2063, as it would have exceeded the scope of the research. Nevertheless, the findings contribute to the literature by revealing valuable insights on how the alignment of the two visions broadly presents challenges to the achievement of Africa's strategic objectives.

Third, the study contributes to the literature by pointing out that China indirectly intensifies the difficulty of African countries in agreeing on a common strategy in two ways. The first, which

several studies have highlighted, is Beijing's bilateral economic relations with individual African countries. Due to tangible economic benefits, some African governments have prioritised their bilateral relations with China over continental agendas and signed some agreements with China that contradict the AU's aspirations. However, what is missing in the literature is that Beijing also indirectly influences African countries to focus on their bilateral relations for national interests through socialising African leaders into China's value system.

Beijing's emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference in its engagement with Africa has promoted the principles of mutual respect between states and engaging each other as equals, irrespective of differences in economic or military strengths. As mentioned in chapter seven, this has propagated among the major powers the value of engaging African countries as equals in global affairs and emboldened African leaders to be assertive. However, owing to China and Africa's historical friendship and common struggles, China influenced several African leaders to accept other principles and beliefs cherished by Beijing, such as prioritising the strengthening of the power of the state and collective security over entrenching civil liberties, which contradict the collective democratic aspirations of the AU.

The literature has largely focused on how China's political values and economic investments could bolster authoritarian governments in Africa, as found in the work of Taylor (2006) and Tull (2006). Furthermore, the literature has also concentrated on Beijing's use of soft power to attract political support from African countries on controversial issues against Western criticisms (Alden and Alves 2008; Konings 2007; Nantulya 2020; Olewe 2021; Shinn and Eisenman 2020). However, this study finds that China's influence on Africa's political values transcends the dichotomies of values among leaders and reaches perceived maturing democracies in Africa, such as Botswana, South Africa and Kenya. As pointed out in Chapters six and seven, leaders in these countries promote liberal values and democratic governance but openly endorse China's principles and non-democratic system.

This public approval, in turn, indirectly conveys a message of support to African leaders that Western observers often criticise as autocrats. This indirect support of undemocratic leaders was further demonstrated by the AU Assembly's election of Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Rwanda's Paul Kagame to the position of AU Chairperson in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Not only did el-Sisi orchestrate a coup d'état in Egypt, but also, under his and Kagame’s rule in Rwanda, their

countries have taken an outright authoritarian direction. This included constitutional changes to extend their terms in office, military crackdowns on dissenters, arrests of activists and journalists, and news censorship. Ultimately, the endorsement of China's values by African leaders supplements the divisions and conflicting views among AU member states on issues such as democracy and human rights.

8.4.2. Suggestions for future research

Researching the China-Africa strategic partnership uncovered and discussed numerous issues and related topics. An issue that emerged during this study that can be used for future research is the AU's inconsistent view on democracy and human rights. As discussed in the paper, the AU's Agenda 2063 promotes the entrenchment of democracy in African countries and seeks to build a single political unit in Africa where governance will be based on liberal democratic values. However, African leaders are deeply divided on these issues, and the AU has been inconsistent in the manner it promotes these values. An important example, as discussed above, is the election of el-Sisi to the position of AU Chairperson in 2019. Not only did el-Sisi lead a coup in Egypt, but also under his rule, the country has taken an outright authoritarian direction, with constitutional changes to extend his term, military crackdowns on dissenters, arrests of activists and journalists, and censorship of news.

Furthermore, el-Sisi at the AU succeeded Rwanda's Paul Kagame, another state leader who has suppressed opposition and amended the constitution to extend his term in office. The election of these leaders to the AU Chairperson position places the organisation's stance on human rights and democracy in a quagmire. For el-Sisi, in particular, his tenure at the AU is a serious contradiction of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. The Charter aims to "Prohibit, reject and condemn unconstitutional changes of government in any Member State as a serious threat to stability, peace, security and development" (AU 2007: 3). In addition, while a link is not necessarily suggested in this study, it is noteworthy that Africa experienced twelve coups (six successful and six failed attempts) between 2020 and 2022, just after el-Sisi's term at the AU ended.

Therefore, it is noted that the AU keeps declaring democracy and respect for human rights as its guiding principles for the political and economic integration of the continent. However, its

inconsistencies, as mentioned earlier, damage the credibility of the AU and its stance on such issues. The question that emerged during this research, thus, is how the AU's inconsistency on democracy and human rights affects Agenda 2063's objectives. By probing how African countries view the AU's position on these issues, important insight can be uncovered to understand other challenges that face the AU's Agenda 2063.

Another important development during this research emerged from the 2021 FOCAC conference held in Dakar, Senegal. The adopted Action Plan, for the first time, had a sub-section dedicated to cybersecurity cooperation, as China and Africa, according to the document, "share the vision of a community with a shared future in cyberspace put forward by China" (FOCAC 2021a). However, as discussed in chapter seven, critics have often accused China of using cyberspace as a tool for social control and that Beijing is exporting its "digital authoritarianism" to developing countries as those in Africa. Interestingly, the subject of cybersecurity cooperation in the document was placed under the section titled Social Development Cooperation instead of the Peace and Security Cooperation section. This clearly indicates how the subject is framed differently from Western literature that describes cyberspace as a new domain of warfare, using terms such as "cyberterrorism" and "cyberwar". This opens an opportunity for further research to understand the determinants of China's cyberspace policy as well as the aims and implementation of China-Africa cybersecurity cooperation.

8.5. Concluding remarks

It would be a superficial and inaccurate assessment to conclude that China's relations with African countries are exploitative. This is an argument that several studies in the scholarship continue to advance, depicting China as a malevolent plunderer of natural resources disguised as a benevolent investor. Such studies also maintain that Beijing uses slogans such as 'win-win' and 'mutually beneficial' and a sentimental language of the history between China and Africa to inveigle African countries into its "debt trap". On the contrary, the findings in this study show that the African continent has benefitted immensely through its strategic partnership with China. The improved economic performance of sub-Saharan African countries and the notion of 'Africa rising' in the 2000s and 2010s, for example, were driven by the booming trade relations between China and

Africa. It was not only the impressive trade but also the unparalleled Chinese investments in Africa that transformed cities in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Angola.

Africa, nevertheless, is far from achieving its Agenda 2063 aspirations, and the challenges in the AU/Africa-China partnership cannot be overlooked as they present some of the major obstacles against the Agenda's objectives. China's role in the uncontrollable flow of arms in Africa through its increasing arms sales to the continent is among the main impediments to resolving violent conflicts. While Beijing is not the chief supplier of arms to Africa, its sales to African countries have been increasing. Furthermore, Beijing's first overseas military base in the Horn of Africa has led to tensions with its rival, the US, which have threatened to destabilise the peace and security landscape in the region. The tensions may further escalate as reports by some US intelligence officials suggest that China is planning to install more military bases in Africa and regard it as a threat to US interests.

A foreign military base may enhance the ability of the foreign base owner to provide security for its citizens in the host country and easy collaboration with the host country on peace and security matters. However, the AU sees the proliferation of these bases in Africa as problematic. Therefore, the AU, as a collective representation of African countries, is likely to keep encountering challenges in finding solutions to these issues mainly due to the competing national interests of its member states. One of the challenges regarding this is that FOCAC agreements are implemented at the bilateral level between China and individual countries, which is compounded by the lack of transparency on the terms of these agreements.

While strategic partnerships, as the SPM indicate, are loose frameworks of cooperation that do not bind partners to their agreements, the China-Africa partnership is based on historical solidarity and shared struggles against common challenges and the pursuit of common interests. These historical, sentimental connections remain a central aspect of the discourse within the partnership and a strategy of othering relations between the West and developing countries from China-Africa relations as an example of South-South cooperation. The partnership between China and Africa has therefore seen adjustments be made to address emerging challenges, for example, in the wake of security crises in Darfur, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the trade imbalance.

Adjustments indicate that, while the relationship is asymmetric in favour of China, African leaders continue to engage their Chinese counterparts on numerous issues to find solutions and common

ground is frequently reached. China's willingness and pledge to work with African countries and the AU to address key issues affecting the continent indicate that their strategic partnership is more likely to continue into the foreseeable future. The partnership also has more potential to be mutually beneficial due to pressure against Beijing to prove that it is not following in the footsteps of the colonial powers in Africa. However, African countries should not put all their hopes of achieving Agenda 2063 objectives on China as Beijing is justifiably looking out for its national interests like all other states. If Beijing's assessment of the BRI's feasibility in the future, for instance, points out that it needs to readjust its strategy, which may require a revision of financial disbursements for certain projects in particular regions such as Africa, its leadership will be compelled to do so for their country's interests.

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APPENDIX

1. Permission to conduct interviews

Due to the COVID-19 regulations at the time of writing the research proposal, the researcher in this study could not obtain approval from organisations to interview participants affiliated to or working for them. Instead, the researcher contacted potential participants directly and obtained approval and consent to be interviewed from these individuals in their own capacity. As a result, the standard Letter Requesting Permission used in Department of Political Sciences to obtain approval and interview participants from organisations was not used in this study. Rather, the researcher communicated directly with the participants and used the following documents to obtain permission to conduct interviews and approval from the Research Ethics Committee: Letter Requesting Informed Consent, Letter of Informed Consent, and Individual Informed Consent.[4]

1.1. Copy of Letter Requesting Informed Consent

Department of Political Sciences
Faculty of Humanities
University of Pretoria
Pretoria 0002
Tel: 012 420 2464

Letter Requesting Informed Consent

Dear participant

Title of research project: **The African Union-China Strategic Partnership: Prospects and Challenges of Aligning Africa's Agenda 2063 With China's Vision 2049**

Researcher details: Edwin Papie Hlase | Department of Political Science | Faculty of Humanities | University of Pretoria | u96195577@tuks.co.za | Cell: 074 337 9595

[4] The signed forms are available on request

Supervisor details: Dr. Christopher Nshimbi, Senior Lecturer: Department of Political Sciences | Faculty of Humanities | University of Pretoria | christopher.nshimbi@up.ac.za, Chris.Nshimbi@governanceinnovation.org | Tel: +27 (0)12 420 4152

Enquiries: Ms Jane Mampane, Departmental Administrator: Department of Political Sciences | Faculty of Humanities | University of Pretoria | jane.mampane@up.ac.za | Tel: +27 12 420 2034

Research study description.

This study seeks to contribute to and broaden the literature on Sino-Africa and strategic partnerships. It aims to fill in a gap in the literature of using the concept of strategic partnership as an analytical framework to analyse the AU-China strategic partnership, and to understand the strategic partnership's impact on the AU's Agenda 2063 peace and security objectives. The term 'strategic partnership' is widely used in China-Africa academic and policy discussions. However, such discussions as well as academic studies on the subject fail to probe its meaning and applicability to China-Africa relations. This study will be a first and, consequently, provide corresponding groundbreaking information on the AU-China relationship based on that concept.

The interview/data

- The interviews will be in-depth, semi-structured and conducted face-to-face. Interviews will last for approximately an hour or less each.
- The purpose of the interviews will be to focus on views and understandings of experts and the AU and its member states' representatives on China-Africa relations, particularly on the strategic partnership between the two sides.
- The data generated from interviews will be documented through audio/video recording and field notes. As a participant, you are at liberty to state how the interview should be documented, and indicate at any point should you be uncomfortable with the recording of your interview, in which case your responses will be captured manually through note-taking.
- All the interview responses recorded will be treated as confidential.
- There are no benefits associated with participation in this research. Participation is on a voluntary basis. You can withdraw your participation at any time without any adverse consequences towards you.

- Participation in this research effort is generally not associated with any potential harm to you in any physical, psychological, legal or social manner.
- However, should you experience any emotional harm and require counselling as a result of your participation in the project, such services will be made available to you. In such a case, after the interview the researcher will facilitate your access to counselling services with LifeLine. The counselling will be done telephonically. The contact details of the counselling service provider are as follows:
  LifeLine Pretoria
  National Crisis Line: 081 322 322
  Email: reception.lifeline.pta@gmail.com
- All electronic data will be securely stored in a password protected pdf file. Data will be stored for 15 years as stipulated by the University of Pretoria's regulations. The results of the interview will be used for academic publication and further research efforts in future.

Please **complete and sign the attached form for individual informed consent** and return it to the researcher for record purposes.

Kind Regards,

Edwin Papie Hlase

1.2. Copy of Individual Informed Consent Form

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Political Sciences
Tel: +27-(0)12 420 2034

INTERVIEW: INDIVIDUAL INFORMED CONSENT

Papie Hlase, PhD International Relations

The African Union-China Strategic Partnership: Prospects And Challenges of Aligning Africa's Agenda 2063 With China's Vision 2049

I, the undersigned

TITLE: _____

INITIALS AND SURNAME:

_____

_____

INSTITUTION / COMPANY/INTEREST GROUP: _____

POSITION / APPOINTMENT:

_____

ADDRESS:

_____

I have been fully informed about the purpose of the research and understand the conditions of informed consent under which I shall be interviewed. I hereby grant permission for the interview on condition that:

- the interview will be electronically recorded and further documented in a written form for research purposes
- my name and affiliation to _____ may be used and cited for the purposes of the thesis and related articles.
- my name may not be used or cited, or my identity otherwise disclosed, in this research project, thesis or related articles, but that the interview can be used or cited on a basis of anonymity
- the interview maybe used or cited in this thesis or related articles for the purposes of further research.
- I understand my right to choose whether to participate in the project and that the information furnished will be handled confidentially. I am aware that the results of the investigation may be used for the purposes of publication and further research.

Interviewee signature: ---------- Date: ---------- Place:----------

Researcher signature: ---------- Date: ---------- Place:----------

Supervisor signature: ---------- Date: ---------- Place:----------

1.3. Copy of Letter of Informed Consent

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Political Sciences
Tel: +27-(0)12 420 2034

Letter of Informed Consent

I Edwin Papie Hlase, Student Number 96195577, am currently enrolled for Doctoral study in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria. I am conducting research entitled "THE AFRICAN UNION-CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF ALIGNING AFRICA'S AGENDA 2063 WITH CHINA'S VISION 2049". For the purposes of this study, I need to conduct field research which will take the form of open-ended interviews with individuals with first-hand knowledge of issues relevant to my thesis. This will form part of my primary research as oral evidence, and will comply with the accepted standards within the discipline of International Relations at the University of Pretoria. I hereby wish to obtain permission to interview individuals. Individual input will be acknowledged according to the footnoting system prescribed by the Department of Political Sciences. If specifically requested, respondents may request to remain anonymous. The interviews will be recorded with a tape recorder and will be stored in electronic format for a period of 15 years in compliance with the policy of the University Faculty of Humanities. This material may also be used for another research by the candidate. Participation is entirely voluntary and respondents may choose to withdraw from the interview at any stage. I also request permission to use the data for possible research in future.

Yours sincerely,

I _____ (the undersigned) agree to participate in the Doctoral research project of Mr. Edwin Papie Hlase, Student Number 96195577 of the University of Pretoria. I have read this letter of introduction and agree that my information may be acknowledged according to the prescribed Departmental footnote reference system.

	I give permission for my name to be used in this research.
	I wish to remain anonymous in this research.

Signed _____ Date _____

2. Interview schedule

First: Background questions:

- Confirm names of the interviewer and interviewees
- Address any concerns or questions from interviewees.

i.

1) What is your understanding of a strategic partnership between countries or between countries and international organisations?
2) What do you think the term 'strategic partnership' actually means for two or more actors that establish such a relationship?

ii.

1) How would you generally describe the relationship between China and Africa?
2) What is your view on FOCAC and what role do you think the AU should play in it?
3) What is your view on China and Africa's decision to enter into a strategic partnership?
4) Do you think China and Africa have converging or divergent views on the meaning of the term strategic partnership?
5) In other partnerships, for example, South Africa-EU strategic partnership, or China-EU strategic partnership, it is explicitly stated that the partnership is with the EU not 'Europe'. But In official FOCAC documents, the strategic partnership between China and Africa is officially written as 'China and Africa' and not explicitly with the AU; there's been some concerns that this has some implicit implications on African leadership when

it comes to the implementation of FOCAC agreements, and monitoring and evaluation processes.

- What is your view on this?

iii.

1) China's official view of strategic partnerships does not rule out competition between itself and its partners. In fact, potential conflicts due to diverging national interests or political ideologies are anticipated.
    - What do you think this actually means for the strategic partnership between Africa/AU and China?
    - Do you think it is sustainable to have a partnership that permits competition between the partners?
2) Do you think China and Africa/AU have converging or divergent global security interests?
3) What do you think about China and Africa's increasing security cooperation?
4) Some have said that China's increased involvement in issues of security in Africa indicate a shift in China's non-interference foreign policy principle. What is your view on this?
5) What implications do you think China's evolving foreign policy approach on issues of security might have on its relations with African countries, especially those that are most fond of its 'non-interference' approach?

iv.

1) What positive and negative outcomes have you noted in the China-Africa security cooperation?
2) What do you think about the reports that emerged in 2018 from some European media, which alleged that China has been spying on the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa for five years, which, of course, African and Chinese leaders denied?
3) There have been news reports about some African governments shutting down the internet during civil protests or in times of elections, and there has been allegations that China's Huawei have helped some African governments to monitor online activities of their citizens and particularly on opposition political parties. What is your view on this?

4) Many observers have talked about a new Cold War between the United States and China, and as we have seen, tensions escalated with the trade war between these countries during Donald Trump's presidency in the US, though it is not clear what direction US-China relations will take with Joe Biden as the US president.

    - What challenges do you think US-China rivalry pose to China-Africa relations in view of the fact that the US is also one of Africa's main partners?

5) China has bilateral strategic partnerships with several African countries, including the continent's largest economies such as Nigeria, Egypt, South Africa and Kenya. What challenges do you think this might pose to the multilateral strategic partnership the continent has with China?

v.

1) In 2014, African and Chinese leaders committed to reciprocal cooperation for the realisation of both of Africa's Agenda 2063 and China's Vision 2049 (the Chinese dream). This commitment was reiterated in the 2018 FOCAC action that "the two sides [China and Africa] share similar philosophies, compatible strategies and complementary strengths in terms of development". What is your view on this?

2) How do you think China-Africa security cooperation is contributing towards Africa's Agenda 2063's peace and security aspirations?

3) Critics say that China is only using Africa, as a source of natural resources to feed its growing economy and modernise its military and African countries as a territory for its military expansion and experiments, to pursue its ambitions of becoming an economic and military superpower, which will have negative security consequences for Africa as it competes against the USA. What is your view on this?

4) Overall, do you think relations between China and Africa are mutually beneficial or, as they say, a 'win-win' relationship?

5) Lastly, currently some Western countries and organisations have accused China of genocide of the Uighurs in its Xinjiang province; the AU as an advocate of human rights, however, has been silent on this. What is your view on this?

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotho

Humanities 100
Since 1919

12 November 2020

Dear Mr EP Hlase

Project Title:	THE AFRICAN UNION-CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF ALIGNING AFRICA'S AGENDA 2063 WITH CHINA'S VISION 2049
Researcher:	Mr EP Hlase
Supervisor(s):	Dr CC Nshimbi
Department:	Political Sciences
Reference number:	96195577 (HUM039/0820)
Degree:	Doctoral

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 12 November 2020. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely,

Prof Innocent Pikirayi
Deputy Dean: Postgraduate Studies and Research Ethics
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF
PRETORIA e-mail:
PGHumanities@up.az