

**TIES THAT BIND**

**China's Party-to-Party Diplomacy in Africa**

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**October 2021**

Commissioned by  
KAS Media Programme Subsahara Africa  
60 Hume Road  
Dunkeld,  
2196  
Johannesburg,  
South Africa



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## **Introduction**

On July 1 of 2021, the Communist Party of China (CPC) celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, marking the occasion with a series of celebrations, congratulatory messages from party leaders from across the globe, and hopeful declarations about the next hundred years, as well as several consultation meetings. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary served as an opportunity to accomplish at least three important goals for the CPC: first; taking advantage of the opportunity to display the CPC's leadership in fighting poverty and success in achieving high levels of development in a short time; second, to showcase that the CPC has many friends and admirers from all around the globe, with political party leaders stating their willingness to learn from China's experience; and third, to expand the CPC's outreach by inviting more party leaders to engage with, learn from, and dialogue with the CPC on various fronts.

Related to this third goal, on July 8 of 2021, the CPC hosted the "World Political Parties Summit" with leaders of over 500 political parties from around the globe. During the summit's keynote speech, President Xi Jinping was explicit about an outward focus going forward, stating that the CPC would be "pressing ahead with the Chinese-style modernisation to make new contributions to humanity's search for ways to modernise.

In that same speech, Xi Jinping put a premium on the party's role (the CPC) in leading the path in charting these "new contributions" that China would make to global development and prosperity. In that way, he pledged that "CPC will work with political parties of all countries to promote state-to-state coordination and cooperation through party-to-party consultation and cooperation, and bring into better play the dual role of political parties in global governance."<sup>1</sup> Not only in this speech but across the gamut of foreign policy, party-to-party diplomacy has become an increasingly important tool for Xi Jinping's government to increase

global awareness of China's development path, its governance model, and its aspiration for building a "community with a shared future for mankind".

Africa has, since Mao's era, been an important player in China's party-to-party diplomacy. Today, Africa is even more important for the aspirations laid out by President Xi Jinping than it has been in the past. Africa remains the continent where China is more positively viewed than anywhere else in the world, which constitutes an opportunity for Chinese diplomatic efforts. African party leaders and elites, as well as citizens in different walks of life, often express their aspirations to model their policies after China's development success, and to learn from China's experiences of eradicating extreme poverty, achieving economic growth, social stability, and political prestige. Africa is viewed by Chinese leadership as a prospect for China's development and governance models to introduce and implement a viable alternative to Western-centric models. Therefore, making sure that the CPC maintains close consultation mechanisms with as many political parties in Africa as possible occupies a key position in Chinese diplomatic strategy.

To further these aims, the CPC organises various kinds of exchange with party leaders and cadres. These party exchanges can be grouped into three broad categories: in the first category are multilateral exchanges organised by the CPC and involving party representatives from all across the world. Examples of this sort of exchange include the world summit mentioned earlier or occasions such as the International Theory Seminar on "Eliminating Poverty and the Responsibilities of Political Parties", co-organised by the International Department of the CPC Central Committee and the CPC Fujian Provincial Committee, held on October 12, 2020, in Fujian and attended by over 400 guests from 100 countries.<sup>2</sup> Holding multilateral meetings allows China to share positive messages about the CPC's friendliness and hospitality with parties from all over the world, providing them with a sense of Chinese-led community and support.

In addition to regular multilateral meetings using traditional diplomatic channels, the CPC's International Department also organises separate events for young political leaders. For example, on March 30 2021, the CPC hosted the China-Arab Young Leaders Forum, emphasising carrying forward traditional friendships and building further cooperation.<sup>3</sup>

The second category of party exchanges is regional party dialogue exchanges. These regional talks are typically organised ahead of meetings of regional organisations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). At these dialogue exchanges, the CPC arranges meetings with party leaders and cadres from countries' regional groups to open up opportunities to discuss the relationship of the CPC with the various regional organisations. China acts as a potential adviser and resource provider. Examples of this kind of exchange are the routine dialogues between the CPC and ASEAN countries, the latest of which took place in November 2020 with 40 party representatives.<sup>4</sup> In this meeting, the CPC and its interlocutors discussed the current and potential future role of political parties in China-ASEAN cooperation.<sup>5</sup>

The third category of exchanges is bilateral party exchanges: The CPC leadership either invites a delegation from a particular country to come to China or is invited to exchange with a party or multiple parties from a single country in that country. When these bilateral exchanges occur between the CPC and a particular party from the target country, they are typically more focused than the more general agendas of multilateral and regional meetings. Bilateral exchanges with one party tend to have a strong consultation or training component to them. However, sometimes the CPC also organises bilateral exchanges with multiple parties within the same country. These exchanges can have a broader agenda with more direct policy implications. One such exchange occurred in June 2021, when the CPC invited representatives of Tunisia's nine main political parties

to a meeting via video conference where they jointly established the “Belt and Road exchange mechanism for political parties of China and Tunisia.”<sup>6</sup> In order to better understand the dynamics, patterns, and characteristics of these exchanges and their implications for China-Africa relations, this paper explores the broad trends of China-Africa party-to-party ties and examines the strengths and weaknesses of China’s party-to-party diplomacy in Africa. It begins with an overview of China-Africa party-to-party relations, including party diplomacy during Africa’s anti-colonial struggles, Xi Jinping’s thoughts, and the Chinese governance model. It continues by explicating the drivers, characteristics, and contents of China-Africa party exchanges before discussing some of the challenges China’s party diplomacy has faced in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. It then uses case studies and examples to illustrate China’s party diplomacy in Africa and discusses the implications and potential future dynamics of party-to-party diplomacy for China-Africa diplomatic relationships.

### **Overview of China-Africa Party-to-Party Relations**

Two channels within the Chinese governance structure are typically associated with developing and maintaining China’s influence abroad. The smaller of the two is the United Front Work Department (UFWD hereafter) which comprises “a network of civic and business associations, student groups, Chinese-language media, academic institutions, and politicians, which is used to intimidate, surveil, and co-opt the overseas Chinese community.”<sup>7</sup> The UFWD has recently also acquired its own publication outlet, the “Journal of United Front Science”, which was founded in 2017, two years after Xi Jinping declared that the “United Front Work is a branch of science.” The current UFWD mission statement, which addresses overseas work, is explained in a recent document stating that the UFWD should devote itself and its resources “to maintaining and promoting China’s reunification, realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,

enhancing the friendly cooperation and exchanges between the Chinese people and the people of the world, and promoting the building of a community of human destiny.”<sup>8</sup> Here, we see that the UFWD has a broad enough scope that it can include engaging with elites from all different ranks, but it does not officially conduct China’s party-to-party diplomacy. As such, most of the party-to-party work that UFWD does is informal. On top of this, the UFWD has very little relevance to examining China’s influence in Africa, given that it is mostly active in Europe, the US, and Australia.

The main government channel that is typically associated with the exercise of China’s party diplomacy is the International Department of the Communist Party of China (中共中央對外聯絡部, Zhonggong zhongyang duiwai lianluobu, ID-CPC hereafter) which was formed in 1951 and evolved from the third section of the UFWD.<sup>9</sup> The ID-CPC’s original goal was strictly to work with foreign communist parties and national liberation movements from Africa.<sup>10</sup> Its mission, then, was limited by both politics and geography. However, over the years, the ID-CPC’s engagements have expanded, and it has built a network “to maintain contact with 400 parties in over 160 countries.” In working with this network, the ID-CPC “holds regular meetings with its foreign counterparts, provides training for foreign cadres, and sponsors party schools abroad.”<sup>11</sup> The International Department has been headed by Minister Song Tao since 2015, working alongside four vice-Ministers and two assistant-Ministers.<sup>12</sup> Speaking about the importance of the work done by the ID-CPC to legitimate and expand China’s central government’s influence, Minister Song Tao explained that “the fundamental task of the Party’s external work is to solidify the Party’s position as the ruling party and safeguard the security of socialism with Chinese characteristics.” The external work of the ID-CPC, then, is closely related to its internal work and the CPC’s overarching goals. One of the key advantages of the ID-CPC over other government channels is that it “not only provides access to

high-level decision-makers in formal government functions, but it also allows for engagement with influential political actors outside the realm of regular foreign affairs diplomacy, such as power-brokers operating behind the scenes or future political leaders.”<sup>13</sup> The ID-CPC, therefore, not only plays a vital role in providing necessary connections to external party officials for the CPC but has also become an unsurpassable vehicle for the CPC to share success stories, practical experience, and expert knowledge from its own governance model with elites across the globe.

### ***Party Diplomacy During Africa's Anti-colonial Struggles***

China-Africa party-to-party exchanges date back to Mao's era, perhaps most notably at the 1955 Bandung Conference. Attended by twenty-nine African and Asian countries, the conference at Bandung can be understood as a “watershed in CPC political relations in Africa”<sup>14</sup> because Premier Zhou Enlai, who led the Chinese delegation, was able to interact with delegations from Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, and soon-to-be-independent Sudan and Ghana. Over the intervening decades, what started mostly as the CPC's providing rhetorical support for fellow Bandung attendees became more tangible, including equipment support, medical team visits, and military training. These early party-to-party diplomatic relations were not as regular or substantial as they are today but were still both materially and symbolically meaningful.

Early CPC interactions with African political elites and revolutionary leaders served several ideological purposes, including, most importantly, obtaining official recognition of the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government of China and limiting the Soviet Union's influence in the Cold War in the 'third world'. Initial efforts at elite capture were successful for Beijing. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, “the CPC's political outreach in Africa achieved impressive results. Beijing sent 144 missions to African countries and received 405 African delegations ... By 1964, political outreach and host diplomacy had

paid dividends, with fifteen of thirty-five independent African countries choosing to recognize Beijing, rather than Taipei – up from only seven in 1960.”<sup>15</sup>

The expansion of Beijing’s party-to-party diplomacy was more than just reaching more countries – it also reached more parties. The ID-CPC went beyond its initial engagement with only leftist or left-leaning parties to engage with parties across the political spectrum. In a move that stands uneasily next to Beijing’s typical position of engaging only in state-to-state diplomatic relations, the ID-CPC’s mandate is to work with *all* political parties, including opposition parties to governments that the CPC recognises. Along these lines, to build a new sort of inter-party relations with as many partners worldwide as possible, a 1982 policy coming from the CPC’s 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress identified four guiding principles for the ID-CPC’s party diplomacy.<sup>16</sup> Those four principles are mutual respect, independence, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, and complete equality.<sup>17</sup>

Chinese diplomacy has seen a significant payoff coming from this strategy. As a result of the ID-CPC’s expanded mandate, “by 1988, over 40 political parties from Sub-Saharan Africa had established relations with the CPC.”<sup>18</sup> The expansion was successful all over the continent. In recent years, the “CPC has established relations with 81 African parties both in and out of power.”<sup>19</sup> Still, the early 1990s saw a retraction of the number and frequency of party-to-party interactions between China and Africa, owing to democratisation movements across Africa and a related ambivalence about China.<sup>20</sup> However, this retraction was short-lived, reversing in the early 2000s with renewed energy around China-Africa party-to-party exchanges by both Chinese and African officials.

The “new” party-to-party exchanges that are common this millennium have moved away from the sort of legitimacy-seeking that featured heavily in early Chinese engagements in Africa. Earlier engagements were mostly concerned with the legitimacy and stability of the CPC and its image abroad,<sup>21</sup>



but the face of Chinese party-to-party interactions is very different now. The CPC that is leading China-Africa party-to-party exchanges now exhibits a more confident, stronger voice, and is more interested in leadership, mentoring, and sharing the China governance model than looking for approval. This has practical implications as well: the 'old' CPC looked to support the parties that were in power at the time to obtain and maintain their support for Mao, and the 'new' CPC is involved with as many parties as possible, looking to establish positive relationships with any party that happens to come to power.

This forward-looking strategy motivates the ID-CPC to engage with more parties and have a stronger view of how to interact with the leaders of the future. The Chinese government has been developing programmes to interact with, and build good working relationships with, the next generation of political elites across the continent. These programmes combine educational scholarships for hundreds of young African elites and professionalisation training courses in the CPC's Beijing-based party school. These exchanges build and strengthen ties between African party officials and their Chinese counterparts. Although there are too many examples to discuss in the scope of this paper, the remainder of this section includes a few highlights. In the time since Beijing's 2011 recognition of the independence of South Sudan, China has extended more than four thousand short-term training courses and educational scholarships to party members in the new country.<sup>22</sup> Many South Sudanese party members attended the CPC's party school for lessons on cadre management, tax collection, media relations, organisational structure for parties, and relations between national and local level civil services. Similarly, China's ambassador to Uganda related that around five hundred people from Uganda attend training courses in China each year.<sup>23</sup> These efforts in South Sudan and Uganda mirror many across the continent. For example, since 2007, the Ningbo Polytechnic's campus (in Zhejiang Province, China) has hosted over a thousand trainees from forty-eight countries

in the African continent. After African party members attend these training courses in China, they often exhibit “a willingness to work with China and view China’s internal policies favourably in the future.”<sup>24</sup>

### ***Xi Jinping’s Thought and China’s Governance Model***

In October 2017, the 19<sup>th</sup> CPC party congress added “Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” by Xi Jinping to the constitution of the People’s Republic of China. This move signalled a new level of consolidation of Xi Jinping’s power and a strong commitment to his vision for the rejuvenation and growth of China. Speaking to that party congress, Xi Jinping discussed his ambitions for China going forward.<sup>25</sup> For party-to-party diplomacy, he planned that “over the next five years, the CPC will invite political parties from around the world to send to China exchange visitors totalling 15,000 for more interactions”, and that “going forward, the CPC will enhance exchanges with political parties of other countries to share practices of party-building and enhancing state governance and conduct more exchanges and dialogue among civilizations so as to improve our strategic mutual trust.”<sup>26</sup>

These commitments came from a place of transformation in China’s positioning in party-to-party relationships because this party congress marked a turning point for the CPC’s foreign relations with political party leaderships abroad. Chinese authorities had just declared poverty eliminated, making China the first country to cross that United Nations-designated Sustainable Development Goal. With this fuel behind their engagements with partners across the globe, the CPC leadership gained much self-confidence in its expertise and know-how in eradicating poverty and improving citizens’ living conditions. This self-confidence is translated through Xi Jinping’s Thought and his command to share the CPC’s expertise with political parties from across the globe as a “new option” for developing countries. The CPC would, of course, be sharing best practices, leadership recommendations, and tips for overcoming poverty,

creating development opportunities, and achieving unprecedented levels of economic growth. All of this can be easily summarised as China's governance model, which Xi Jinping and various Chinese officials insist is not shared as a blueprint for success. Instead, it is meant to provide an alternative way for (mostly Global South) states for whom Western development blueprints have not been successful. The sharing is at once modest and certain.

Related to this agenda, the mission of the ID-CPC in its party-to-party diplomacy has, since 2017, involved fulfilling Xi Jinping's call to invite tens of thousands of political party officials to China to enhance interaction, dialogue, and understanding of China's governance and development model. The next section explores the dynamics of those training courses, invitations, and exchanges.

### ***Drivers, Characteristics, and Contents of China-Africa Party Exchanges***

#### ***1. Drivers***

As mentioned in Xi Jinping's speech, engaging political party leaders from Africa and the Global South more generally can be seen as an opportunity for the CCP to market its governance model as an alternative that African governments can source their inspiration from, rather than Western models, which may have failed them in the past. Party-to-party diplomacy, especially through exchanges organised by the ID-CPC, is a particularly strong tool to achieve these global outreach goals for the CCP. One can group the motivations behind enhancing party-to-party relations into three main drivers: ideological, commercial, and guanxi/network-building.

##### ***(a) Ideological drivers***

Convening training workshops, seminars, and delegation visits with African political party representatives and senior cadres can provide appropriate spaces for Chinese government officials to share CCP norms and values regarding

governance, party leadership structure, and the party's relations to the army, to the public, to surveillance technology, or social media, and so on. In this way, party diplomacy can be more efficient than public diplomacy (typically carried out via state-owned media messaging or through events hosted by Confucius Institutes).<sup>27</sup> Getting access to senior cadres of ruling (and non-ruling) political parties opens up chances for one-on-one, focused consultations and discussions of China's success story. Among the success stories that the ID-CPC has been boasting about during its exchanges with foreign party representatives are China's development, poverty eradication, and economic growth over the last few decades.

Building off and expanding on this approach, party-to-party diplomacy events have recently framed China's development success as an alternative to the development frameworks that have long been pushed by international institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The "right to development" has now pretty much become a signature aspect of China's discourse around global human rights where, instead of staying silent about human rights as it did for a long time, China is now redefining human rights along the lines of economic development rather than the mainstream liberal way of understanding human rights. Therefore, party-to-party diplomacy is an appropriate and even optimal tool to communicate China's interpretations (or characteristics) of concepts, such as the right to development as a human right and the equality of all countries. Because the right to development stands in direct contrast to a Western/liberal notion of rights based on individual freedoms, its promotion underscores an ideological drive to engage in exchanges that allow the CCP to introduce its values and norms as an alternative to what are often viewed as dominating liberal values.

**(b) Commercial drivers**

In addition to the ideological drivers for enhancing party-to-party diplomacy as a tool of China's foreign policy conduct towards African states, there is also a practical and commercial component to the delegation visits and exchanges. When delegations of senior political parties are invited to China for exchanges or training, there is typically a show-and-tell component to the visits, with tours of various facilities, offices, and production plants. Political party training courses that touch on topics such as the use of technology in safe-city and smart-city projects also typically present opportunities for Chinese tech companies to market their products to African elites during their visits. Of course, there is no denying that the ideological and commercial drivers bleed into each other because the distinctions between the two are rather arbitrary and used only to enhance our understanding of what is at stake.

We can see across media reports that many African party members who travel to China return to their home countries impressed with the ways China utilises surveillance equipment to improve the government's ability to control the internet and track and reduce crime. For example, Anthony Kpandu of South Sudan, who reports reading parts of the "Concise History of the Chinese Communist Party" daily, led a group of Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) members to China. When he returned from the trip, he reported being impressed by how drones were used in China to address crime. He was interested in acquiring the technology that he saw in China and mimicking its use and, when he got home, immediately ordered the surveillance drones he had seen in China for use in South Sudan.<sup>28</sup> Like Kpandu, other governments or party members have either ordered or are in the process of ordering facial recognition technology from China to enhance their policing and security operations.<sup>29</sup> While it is hard to hold Beijing responsible for any misuse of Chinese technology after it is purchased, it is also difficult to ignore the wide variety of political parties that

find China's governance techniques attractive. That said, the example of African politicians acquiring surveillance technology from China after seeing it during party-to-party exchanges highlights both a high level of power and influence on China's part, and a willingness on the part of African elites, to follow and advocate the Chinese model. In this way, we can see that party-to-party exchanges can be an effective method for marketing equipment from China to potential buyers in Africa. Similarly, according to a report on China's foundations for an alternative governance regime in Africa, "Beijing has provided a blueprint on internet governance for African governments, trained African police and cybersecurity personnel on advanced surveillance technology—including through helping suppress political opposition—and sold digitally enabled surveillance technologies for African countries."<sup>30</sup> Such sweeping collaborations are usually facilitated and discussed during bilateral talks with African (ruling) party elites and senior officials. China's dominance in Africa's telecommunications market, coupled with the packages of training courses for political party officials on how to deploy the technology into practice using the safe and smart city platforms, has attracted a fair amount of speculation about Chinese motivation and criticism of Chinese intentions. One well-known such critique came from Freedom House research director for technology and democracy, Adrian Shahbaz, who warned that "Chinese authorities are selling to local politicians not only products for 'controlling' their societies, but also a vision of how to build a prosperous and stable state without having to devolve power to the citizenry,"<sup>31</sup> and encouraged people to notice and resist.

**(c) *Guanxi and network-building***

The expansive nature of CPC's menu of party-to-party training workshops for African political leaders provides a variety of chances for networking between elite members of political parties on both sides and between youth and junior party cadres. Party delegations that visit China for training courses usually stay in

China for one to two weeks, though some training courses have more extended timelines. When they are in China, party members from Africa are offered seminars on a wide variety of topics. These seminars provide information about the history of China, the CPC party structure, China's development model, internet governance, and other topics that the CPC can share their knowledge and experience to address. These training courses serve the purpose of building strong diplomatic ties with both current and future leaders of diverse political parties, which in turn serves as a near-guarantee that the CPC's makers of foreign policy will find a warm reception with future African leaders, regardless of their political party or ideological leanings.

The effectiveness of this strategy can be seen in the fact that several current or former heads of African states led party-to-party delegations to visit China before they became president of their home states. These leaders include former presidents of three African countries: Mozambique's Guebuza, Namibia's Pohamba, and South Africa's Zuma.<sup>32</sup> Not only did these leaders attend Chinese training, if they are anything like the median attendees, but they likely also had a good experience. African attendees of Chinese training courses typically report a highly positive experience of the training specifically and their experience getting to know China generally. Training participants frequently speak of their gratitude to the CPC for the opportunity and note that they learned a significant amount about managing parties from the CPC officials who led the training. For example, in his role as ANC General Secretary, Cyril Ramaphosa, the current president of South Africa, led a delegation to visit Beijing in 2009. During that visit, Ramaphosa conveyed a willingness to learn what the CPC would be training party members about. He noted that:

It is not long since the ANC was founded and became a ruling party, but the CPC has been a ruling party for six decades and has accumulated rich experiences. We would like to learn from each other. Every participant studied hard and had deep discussions and they admitted they gained a lot.<sup>33</sup>

Positive reactions like this from African counterparts signal the success of these training workshops, both in their own right and in terms of furthering Chinese influence. These results have caused politburo officers and CPC officials to increase the number and length of exchanges with party members from Africa.

During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, we saw various expressions of solidarity by African political elites towards China, at a time when the Chinese government was dealing both with the impacts of the outbreak domestically and with accusations from European governments and the US Trump administration concerning China's role in the origination of the virus. Those expressions of solidarity included letters of solidarity, equipment donations, decisions not to interrupt flights (such as those conducted by Ethiopian Airlines to China), or even visits such as the one made by Egypt's health minister to China. These are a few examples of how building and nurturing guanxi through party-to-party exchanges enhances trust-building and strengthens bonds between Chinese and African political elites.

Relational networks enhance trust-building and promote mutual understanding between China and developing states across the Global South. Networks introduce state elites and government officials to new and common sets of values and norms when professionalisation training courses are organised. Understanding the centrality of relationality and the processes of expert knowledge production through people-to-people exchanges and social network-building programmes is key to unpacking China's rising power status in Africa (and elsewhere in the Global South). Relational networks are manifested in the case of Chinese foreign policy in steadily increasing quotas for scholarships to international students, people-to-people exchange programmes under the Belt and Road Initiative, joint workshops and professionalisation training programmes offered for elites, civil servants, military officers, and citizens of



various developing countries. Chinese government-sponsored professionalisation training courses serve different speciality areas, but they all produce expert knowledge, whether through seminars, workshops, or joint-navy drills. Across the spectrum, they set up relational networks of goodwill and shared values.

## **2. Characteristics**

As mentioned above, the CPC invites parties across the political and ideological spectrum to participate in party-to-party exchanges. Although the CPC establishes stronger relationships with parties that fall closer to it ideologically, its strategy has been to engage even with parties that have significant differences with its core ideologies, including democratic-leaning parties and left, right, and centre-leaning politicians. This flexibility is a manifestation of the CPC's interest in making sure that it has a good political relationship with any party that is either elected or rises to power across the continent, regardless of its political affinity.<sup>34</sup> This also motivates the ID-CPC's practice of engaging with opposition parties in party-to-party exchanges, making a functional exception to China's norm of only pursuing state-to-state diplomacy. Strategically, this helps to protect the stability of China's political and economic interests and the strength of its diplomatic ties, promoting China's strategic interests in the case of both anticipated and unanticipated political transitions. Highlighting this makes it possible to understand the key role that party-to-party exchanges play in Chinese diplomacy, as well as the wide reach of party-to-party exchange invitations.

## **3. Course/training contents**

While many party-to-party seminars, workshops, and training courses have different components and speak to different audiences, some key themes are common across these exchanges. Those key themes include poverty alleviation, party structure and organisational leadership, bureaucracy

management, Marxist thought, and civil-military relations. Other topics in party-to-party training courses include relationships between government and media, opposition monitoring on social media, internet censorship, and China's history with Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Across these training courses and seminars, the CPC's use of surveillance technology (especially facial recognition) to monitor political opponents and provide political stability has appealed to authoritarian-leaning governments on the African continent. Historically, the Chinese government has been both thorough and efficient in blocking a number of different forms of opposition – from online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or WeChat to in-person protests. This efficiency requires a combination of tactical know-how and technical knowledge, which the Chinese government can share through training courses with other party cadres. Particularly, the CPC shares its techniques for limiting social media-based critiques or challenges to its government. There have been a number of reports that Chinese strategies have been applied in places as diverse as Ethiopia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, resulting in internet shutdowns and social media blackouts.

Whether utilised for building party infrastructure or controlling opposition, or anything in between, party-to-party exchanges, particularly courses and training, provide unique outlets for norm diffusion, socialisation of elites into existing norms, and knowledge production.<sup>35</sup> Some results of such socialisation can be found in expressions of solidarity and support by several African political party elites of the CPC. For example, in response to the July 2020 national security law adopted by the Chinese government and aimed at Hong Kong, twenty-seven states endorsed a statement read at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) criticising the law. At the same meeting of UNCHR, fifty-seven countries endorsed a statement read in support of China's decision to pass that law. Almost half of those countries were from the African

continent.<sup>36</sup> Rather than trying to think about how party-to-party exchanges *cause* support for Chinese policy in international organisations, it is helpful to think about how influence and power have a synergistic and circular relationship in producing and maintaining networks between CPC officials and their counterparts in Africa.

### **Challenges: China's Party Diplomacy During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Given how China's party-to-party exchanges often involve significant travel to meet in person and are intimately built on a relational/network approach that fosters personal bonding among party elites, one might be tempted to assume that the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic would present the ID-CPC with unique challenges and lead to an inevitable decline in activity because its traditional activities were infeasible. To some extent, this did happen at the beginning of the pandemic, as the form of party-to-party exchanges it had sponsored would not work during the pandemic. As explained by Yao Wen, during the early stages of the outbreak, "normal activities of the ID-CPC were completely halted; explaining the situation and sustaining international support were its paramount task."<sup>37</sup> While it is a fact that the pandemic has disrupted the CPC's ability to continue to interact directly and physically with senior cadres and elites from various African political parties rather than stop its activities altogether, the ID-CPC adapted its programming. The ID-CPC was quick to readjust its role to match what China was going through domestically with the different phases of the health pandemic. In the early months of the pandemic, the ID-CPC slowed down its direct party-to-party engagements to consolidate the party's domestic legitimacy and solicit support from abroad. During the later phases of the outbreak, the ID-CPC reached out to parties to serve as a diffusion mechanism for a new norm of Chinese governance, sharing the CPC's pandemic management with party officials abroad. By the close of pandemic emergency in

China, the ID-CPC emerged busier than during pre-pandemic times. The numbers of virtual workshops, consultation meetings, and training classes organised by the ID-CPC for engagement with political parties around the world have multiplied. As shown through this sample of interactions I collected, the ID-CPC remained extremely active, hosting, if virtually, delegations from various regions of the African continent throughout 2020 and 2021.

**Table 1. CID-CPC Party-to-Party Exchanges on the African Continent during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Country/Party</b>	<b>Type of exchange</b>	<b>Key themes</b>
2021-07-15	Zimbabwe/ ZANU-PF	Webinar for senior cadres	Anti-epidemic cooperation, governance, anti-poverty alleviation, ways to enhance exchanges and cooperation between both parties, and make new contributions to building a community with a shared future
2021-06-28	Eritrea/ PFDJ	Webinar for cadres	Exchange of experience in state governance, practical cooperation in various fields, maintain international fairness and justice, and promote the building of a community with a shared future for humankind
2021-06-11	Mozambique/ FRELIMO	Webinar for senior cadres	Exchange of experience in state governance, practical cooperation in various fields, support each other in safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests
2021-06-03	Benin/various party leaders	Video call with Bruno Amoussou	Party construction, poverty alleviation, development of youth and women, and further step up the development of relations and anti-pandemic cooperation
2021-05-31	Egypt/ leaders of 10 political parties	Building community with shared future	Deepen inter-party exchanges, and jointly build a China-Egypt community with a shared future and promote the building of a community with a shared future for humankind
2021-04-27	South Sudan/ SPLM	Call with Secretary for External Affairs	Briefed on the CPC's governance achievements and experience since its founding 100 years ago

<b>Date</b>	<b>Country/Party</b>	<b>Type of exchange</b>	<b>Key themes</b>
2021-04-27	Madagascar coalition	Webinar for cadres	New type of politically inert-party relationship featuring seeking common ground while reserving differences, mutual respect and mutual learning, high-level exchanges and strategic communication, exchanges of experience in state governance and administration
2021-04-15	Gambia/ National People's Party	Call with Dembo Bojang	Establish intra-party relations with the National People's Party, strengthen exchanges on state governance and administration, and promote the stable and healthy development of relations between the two countries
2021-04-13	Morocco/ various political parties	Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exchange mechanism	Strengthen friendly exchanges with all parties, consolidate political mutual trust, promote pragmatic cooperation, and make people-to-people ties closer, contribute wisdom of political parties to the joint construction of the BRI
2021-04-12	Angola/ Movement for the Liberation of Angola	Webinar for cadres	State governance and administration, practical cooperation in various areas, jointly safeguard international fairness and justice
2021-03-31	DRC/ Union for Democracy and Social Progress	Video call with Secretary-General Jean-Marc Kabund	Strengthen party-to-party exchanges and experience exchanges in governance to promote bilateral political trust and pragmatic cooperation
2021-03-29	Namibia/ SWAPO	Webinar for cadres	Party governance and state administration
2021-03-17	Kenya/ Jubilee Party	Video call with Secretary-General Raphael Tuju	Party leadership, people-centred development philosophy
2021-02-02	South Africa/ SACP	Webinar with nearly 70 senior officers	Celebrating 100 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of both parties' launches, party-building, and poverty alleviation
2021-01-26	Burkina Faso/People's Movement for Progress	Video call with Simon Compaoré	Xi Jinping's "Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," state governance and administration, cadre training with the CPC
2021-01-14	Mauritania/ Union pour la République	Webinar for senior cadres	Achievements and experience of the CPC since its founding 100 years ago, agricultural development, rural revitalisation, health and coping with climate change

<b>Date</b>	<b>Country/Party</b>	<b>Type of exchange</b>	<b>Key themes</b>
2020-12-21	Egypt/ various political parties	BRI communication mechanisms video conference	Establish communication mechanisms for the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative
2020-11-24	Malawi/ Malawi Congress Party	Webinar for senior cadres	Strategic communication, anti-corruption, poverty alleviation, and party-building at the primary level, advance the high-quality development of the Belt and Road cooperation, strengthen solidarity and cooperation in international and multilateral affairs, jointly safeguard legitimate rights of developing countries and world fairness and justice, and work together to build a closer community with a shared future for China and Malawi
2020-11-10	Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF	Webinar for senior cadres	Party-building and economic and social development amid the ongoing efforts to contain the COVID-19 epidemic
2020-10-19	Liberia / Coalition for Democratic Change	Webinar for mid-level and senior <a href="#">cadres</a>	Epidemic prevention and control, economic and social development, poverty alleviation
2020-09-21	Mozambique/ FRELIMO	Webinar for mid-level and senior cadres	Epidemic control, state governance, social and economic development
2020-09-15	Ghana/ NPP	Webinar for mid-level and senior cadres	Epidemic prevention and control, economic and social development, party building, and China-Africa relations in the new era
2020-09-01	Congo/ Party of Labour	Webinar for cadres	Xi Jinping's "The Governance of China", vol. 3, playing the leading role of the ruling party in fighting the epidemic, coordinating epidemic prevention and control with economic and social development
2020-08-26	Mauritania/ Union pour la Republique	Webinar for cadres	Xi Jinping's "The Governance of China," vol. 3, leading role of the ruling party in containing the COVID-19, promoting economic and social development in a coordinated way, building the ruling party, and poverty alleviation
2020-08-19	Angola/ MPLA	Webinar for middle and high-ranking cadres	Xi Jinping's "The Governance of China," vol. 3, the Angolan side of the South China Sea issue, epidemic prevention and control, and poverty alleviation

<b>Date</b>	<b>Country/Party</b>	<b>Type of exchange</b>	<b>Key themes</b>
2020-07-23	Burkina Faso/ MPP	Cadre training class	Epidemic prevention and control, economic and social development, poverty alleviation, and China-Africa poverty reduction
2020-07-06	Sierra Leone/ SLPP	Senior cadre training class	Fighting the virus and promoting economic and social development
2020-06-15	Senegal/ APR	Webinar for senior and middle-level cadres	Ruling parties' role in fighting the pandemic, economic and social development, poverty alleviation
2020-06-10	South Africa/ ANC	Webinar for senior cadres	Anti-pandemic cooperation, bilateral intra-party exchanges
2020-05-18	Gabon/ PDG	Cadre training class	Epidemic prevention, joint opposition of politicising, labelling and stigmatising the virus, poverty alleviation
2020-05-06	Ethiopia / Prosperity Party	Cadre training class	In-depth understanding of China's experience and practices in combating the epidemic, coordinating epidemic control and economic and social development, and combating poverty
2020-04-23	South Africa/ SACP	Senior cadre training	Epidemic prevention and control, China- Africa friendship, poverty alleviation

As seen from the table above, the “normal” activities of the ID-CPC were halted in the early months of the outbreak as there were no training sessions or active seminars reported in the first quarter of the year 2020. During this time, the ID-CPC coordinated with foreign party representatives, mostly through letters expressing solidarity, soliciting friendly responses from its global network to China’s anti-Coronavirus measures. As of March 5, 2020, over “300 political parties and organizations from 120 countries had sent more than 500 letters, as well as short videos and medical aid, to the Party to express support and solidarity.”<sup>38</sup>

In the months that followed and as China got a better grip on pandemic crisis management, the ID-CPC turned its main operations towards diffusing messages about how the CPC was a source of inspiration and a force of global good in its commitment to provide an alternative way of governance and crisis

management during the pandemic. The multitude of meetings hosted by the ID-CPC ensured continuous interaction on behalf of the CPC, and global outreach, often resulting in political party cadres from African countries expressing thanks. The ID-CPC continued its global outreach on behalf of the government and, by mid-April 2020, the institution sent letters to “over 310 parties in 128 countries, reaffirming the CCP’s commitment to joint efforts against COVID-19 and to the building a ‘community with a shared future for mankind.’”<sup>39</sup> During the pandemic, in addition to the ID-CPC’s intensive liaising between the CPC and external parties, the International Department also provided programming for the Chinese domestic audience, looking to convey messages about the CCP’s reputation abroad.<sup>40</sup>

All in all, despite the challenge that travel restrictions put on the important soft-power aspect of China’s party diplomacy, especially in light of the success of curated tours for political elites in China, the pandemic actually opened up opportunities for institutions like the ID-CPC to grow, particularly in their party-to-party efforts. The ID-CPC remained highly active and visible in its global outreach during the pandemic and even took on a broader mandate, expanding its training courses and the audience towards whom they were targeted.

## **Case Studies**

China has a complex ranking system for its closeness with its international partners, with categories that range from the highest status (comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership) to lesser included status such as strategic partnership and comprehensive strategic partnership. The higher the category a partner falls into (and therefore the higher the status of relations), the more intense the party-to-party relations. Parties in higher categories receive more regular party-to-party exchanges and more robust programmes for elite exchanges.<sup>41</sup> In recent years, scholars have demonstrated that China has been



consistently building stronger elite networks and expanding its organisational partnerships across the globe.<sup>42</sup> The ID-CPC hosts several delegations per month from African countries.<sup>43</sup> These delegations often overlap, and the ID-CPC's hosting duties are both expansive and complex.<sup>44</sup>

As shown in the table above, Beijing's party diplomacy in Africa is wide in scope and deep in breadth. The parties that are invited for training, seminars, and exchanges hail from a variety of backgrounds, from ruling to non-ruling, and representing African governments from all over the continent, including francophone and anglophone African countries, small and big, rich in natural resources and not. While the table above gives a snapshot of the variety of engagements the ID-CPC organises, this section provides more details on a few case studies to better grasp what is at stake in China's party diplomacy in Africa.

### ***South Africa***

On August 1, 2021, Li Mingxiang, Assistant Minister of the ID-CPC, attended and addressed the online celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the South African Communist Party (SACP).<sup>45</sup> Just a month before, both SACP and the African National Congress (ANC) leadership exchanged messages with the CPC leadership celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the party.

China's ties with the ANC in South Africa are among its strongest on the African continent today.<sup>46</sup> Relations between the CPC and South Africa got off to a slow start, as South Africa did not recognise the People's Republic of China as the official government of China until 1998, following the South African government's long recognition of the Republic of China (ROC). In the early years of the Cold War, the CPC put its support behind the SACP rather than the ANC.<sup>47</sup> The ANC, then, had closer ties to Moscow than to Beijing.<sup>48</sup>

These days, this difficult history between the CPC and the ANC seems to be ancient history. Now, the ANC and the CPC are quite close. Exchanges between the two include plans to intensify cooperation between the China

Executive Leadership Academy Pudong (CELAP) in Shanghai and the ANC leadership, CPC and ANC Youth party member exchanges, Chinese-hosted training seminars for ANC members, and multiple visits by party delegations.<sup>49</sup> These exchanges foster positive ties. For example, fifty-six senior leaders of the ANC went to training courses at CELAP, grouped as four different cohorts.<sup>50</sup> Across those cohorts, the ANC leaders reported that the training courses positively influenced their views on how parties should be structured and organised, and how cadres should be trained.<sup>51</sup> In advance of South Africa's 2019 election cycle, the ANC turned to the CPC, looking for professionalisation training courses on managing public relations and engaging in effective campaign messaging. As a part of this effort, the ANC's Secretary-General Ace Magashule announced an ANC initiative, "sending 300 of its cadres to the CPC's training academy to learn about party discipline and loyalty."<sup>52</sup> This exchange targeted public relations and campaign messaging skills and looked to build the ANC's capacities in the areas of propaganda diffusion and communication machinery.<sup>53</sup> The CPC responded both to the ANC's desire for party-to-party training courses and to the subject matters that the ANC was interested in learning about, treating the request as an opening for officials of the CPC to "educate fraternal African political parties on China's experience in economic development and political governance."<sup>54</sup>

This shows the exponential growth in interactions between, and a significant increase in the closeness of, CPC-ANC relations, and China-South Africa relations more generally. In addition to engaging in meetings, providing training, and hosting delegations, the CPC has supported the development of the ANC's party school just outside Johannesburg. The ANC political leadership school located in the town of Venterskroon was built in 2014, both financed by and inspired by the CPC.<sup>55</sup> The school was intended to take Shanghai's CELAP as a model, seeing CELAP as a place where Chinese "party members and foreign

guests attend classes on 'revolutionary traditions,' learning everything from Marxist theory to media management."<sup>56</sup>

Despite the closeness of the ANC and the CPC, China does not reserve its party-to-party interactions in South Africa for the ANC. Instead, the ID-CPC continues to have a strong relationship with the SACP, as evidenced by a CPC official's presence at the SACP's anniversary celebration. The ID-CPC continues to hold training courses for, and interact with, the members of the SACP. For example, in April of 2020, the ID-CPC organised and hosted a virtual training workshop for the SACP.<sup>57</sup> The training reached out to twenty senior SACP cadres and Solly Mapaila, the SACP's First Deputy General Secretary.<sup>58</sup> While the CPC is closer to the ANC than the SACP, it makes sure to maintain ties with the SACP.

### ***Uganda***

In June 2021, Uganda's President Museveni appointed the new Party Secretary for the country's ruling party, the NRM (National Resistance Movement), Richard Todwong. A few moments after the announcement, the NRM's party website shared that China congratulated the new Party Secretary for his appointment.<sup>59</sup> As it turns out, in 2019, Todwong had participated in a three-month training course at Peking University, sponsored by the Chinese government, for elites to learn about governance from CPC experts. In an interview with *Xinhua* about the training, Todwong highlighted how "African leaders could learn governance philosophy of the CPC, as the party is committed to a people-centred philosophy of development."<sup>60</sup> Similarly, at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CPC in July 2021, Todwong filmed a video message congratulating China and thanking the CPC for its mentorship, resources, and friendship with African political parties. In the video, Todwong proclaims that the NRM will continue to "walk in the footsteps of the Communist Party" to achieve development and wellbeing for the Ugandan people.<sup>61</sup> The CPC celebrated Todwong, who in turn celebrated the CPC.

By contrast, even though Todwong had also trained in the US before going to China, the news of Todwong's accession as the head of NRM did not make it to US news outlets. Such variance might suggest a difference in China's relational approach that puts a premium on training African elites and setting up mechanisms to follow (celebrate, for example) the political achievements of African elites trained in China. This might establish stronger ties than training that does not feature such a relational approach.

This one example shows the importance that Chinese foreign policy makers give to investing in human/social capital and network-building with not only high-level but also middle and low-level officers and civil servants from across Africa. China's presence (its influence and power) in Africa comes from Chinese investments in physical infrastructure buildings (as seen in the construction of ports, parliaments, and presidential palaces) and is produced and manufactured through the creation of platforms for exchanging expertise, which also serves as elite capture mechanisms. China's network approach goes beyond hosting delegations, training, and elite capture programmes and activates those personal and professional bonds to build a more expansive network of close ties.

### ***Other examples***

The busyness and variety of the ID-CPC's programming can be seen just by looking at a few events offered for African political elites over a short time. The ID-CPC hosted delegations from both Niger and Ethiopia twice in the same month in 2017. Between April 10 and 15, 2017, responding to an invitation from the CPC, representatives of the Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme (PNDS), including the party's then-President Mohamed Bazoum (now President of Niger), were hosted in China by the ID-CPC.<sup>62</sup> Between April 19 and 29, 2017, also responding to an invitation from the CPC, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) mayor study group, visited China under the leadership of EPRDF Head of Urban Politics and the Organisational Division of the

Secretariat of the Central Committee, Fetlework Gebregziaber.<sup>63</sup> Two months later, another delegation from the EPRDF, led by its Minister of Rural Politics, Tefera Deribew, was hosted in China by the ID-CPC between June 9 and June 19.<sup>64</sup> This delegation from Ethiopia's EPDRF overlapped in its visit to China with a group from the Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme (NPDS), headed by Communications Director Sani Iro, which visited China from June 8 to 13 at the invitation of the CPC.<sup>65</sup>

Over and above these high-level exchanges and cadre training courses targeted at African political parties' senior members, the ID-CPC is actively organising activities for youth delegations and youth party members across the African continent. These activities focus on visits and exchanges. For example, in May of 2017, the ID-CPC invited young leaders from many parties to visit China for ten days, including members of the Union for the Republic of Togo, the Rally for Mali, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, the Rally of the Guinean People, and the Forces for Defence of Democracy in Burundi.<sup>66</sup> Once in China, the youth delegations attended training that focused on six principles of the youth affairs of political parties.

The number of invitations issued, delegations exchanges arranged, and training events put on by the ID-CPC is almost unfathomable. At the same time, it is important to note that exchanges between the CPC and its African counterparts are not one-sided: They are not solely initiated or hosted by Beijing. Rather than simply being invited to China, the CPC's African counterparts also issue invitations to the CPC for visits and exchange trips. CPC officials travel to African countries just as African officials travel to China. One example is the March 2019 delegation, led by ID-CPC Central Committee Vice Minister Guo Yezhou, which attended a conference commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People's Rally for Progress (PRP) in Djibouti on official invitation, and also had an official visit with the Burkina Faso People's Movement

for Progress (MPP).<sup>67</sup> A CPC delegation led by Chen Min'er, Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, accepted invitations from the governments of Egypt and Tunisia and the Patriotic Salvation Movement in Chad, and visited the three countries between June 24 and July 2, 2018.<sup>68</sup> Another Chinese delegation, led by Song Tao, Minister of the ID-CPC's Central Committee, visited the Seychelles and Tanzania between July 12 and July 19, 2018, responding to official invitations from Tanzania's Revolutionary Party and Seychelles' People's Party.<sup>69</sup>

### ***1. FOCAC 8 and elite network-building outside of formal party-to-party exchanges***

Another important platform for elite network-building in China-Africa relations is the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) launched in 2000, which takes place every three years.<sup>70</sup> It is a forum for Chinese and African officials to discuss the agenda of investments, exchanges, and priorities for the next three years. The eighth edition of the Forum is scheduled to take place in September of 2021. It is expected to cement the strong ties between Chinese and African elites as they are still struggling with post-pandemic recovery.

Forum diplomacy is an ideal platform for boosting relations between high-level elites from China and their African counterparts outside of or in addition to the work organised by the ID-CPC. At FOCAC forums, African officials have opportunities to experience China as a serious partner that also takes them seriously, building both interdependence and trust. One of this forum's advantages is precisely this direct contact and the art of social relations (informal gatherings such as socials augment trust-building). In its early years, FOCAC's focus was almost exclusively commercial and market-related. China's strategic goals were to boost economic relations with African states and, with that, to secure access to previously unavailable or underutilised markets and natural

resources. The Forum has since expanded its scope to various areas of diplomacy, including media, culture, agriculture, and security.

FOCAC has also, since its launch, been expanded into a number of other sub-forum diplomacy avenues. For instance, in July 2018, Beijing hosted defence ministers and high-ranking military officials from fifty African states under the auspices of the China-Africa Defence and Security Forum.<sup>71</sup> The Forum lasted two weeks, during which African delegations attended seminars, visited Chinese facilities, were introduced to Chinese-made military equipment, and toured several cities in China. But, perhaps most importantly, the two weeks afforded Chinese military officials a unique networking opportunity with their African counterparts, where exchanges about common visions for peace and stability, challenges, and aspirations for the future took place.

Moreover, in 2019, Beijing hosted another iteration of the security forum, dubbed the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, and invited African defence ministers and high-ranking officials to China for a week. Like the previous Forum, this was an opportunity to showcase China's military equipment and technological know-how, as well as to exchange views on and visions for regional and global peace and security. For example, during the Forum, African military officials were invited to visit the Special Police College in Beijing, which trains anti-terrorism personnel for China's elite armed police force. During the visit, the two sides (African and Chinese) discussed military cooperation and combat-oriented training opportunities for African delegations at the Special Police College.<sup>72</sup> From such examples, it is evident that the strong element of networking between Chinese and African counterparts is built on, and builds from, the firm bonds of forum diplomacy.

Due in large part to the social dynamics and networking opportunities provided by hosting such high-profile gatherings, both FOCAC and its complements have so far been extremely successful.<sup>73</sup> During the seventh

edition of FOCAC in September 2018, fifty-one heads of state arrived in Beijing for the summit.<sup>74</sup> This was a record high for the number of African heads of state at FOCAC summits.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, there has lately been an upward trend in the proliferation of sub-forums held under the umbrella of FOCAC, so now we see regular FOCAC-sponsored mini forum meetings on media, security, agriculture, and think tank relations between China and African countries. These sub-forums are an opportunity to bring African civil servants and government officials of various ranks (from high-ranking to middle or low-level officials) to China for several-day visits. The visits serve multiple purposes, including showing African officials around, taking them to various Chinese facilities and enterprises in big cities around the country.<sup>76</sup> Chinese foreign-policy makers rely on interagency communication (embassies communicate with relevant actors in various ministries, as well as with media agencies, about training courses, for instance) in order to activate their *guanxi* connections and keep a growing network of party-to-party elites. Thus, a *guanxi* approach to power building is relatively low-cost and potentially high-reward, especially when previously trained officers climb leadership ladders.

## **2. What this means for Africa's Western Partners**

While the CCP remains one of the world's top ruling parties in terms of the amount of attention dedicated to party diplomacy, most African political elites have adopted a pragmatic approach to the rivalries between China and the US or, more broadly, between China and other Western powers. The advantages the CCP has over its European counterparts with African political parties include three unique and very important contexts: On the one hand, the CCP has a history of supporting African revolutionary parties against colonial powers, and that support keeps being used today to remind the parties that China has always been on the right side of history when it comes to Western powers' involvement in the continent. Second, there are affinities between the CCP's authoritarian



governance style and several African political parties, which are more willing to learn from the CCP ways of managing, monitoring, and shaping public opinion than to learn how to democratise their political system. Third, CCP's governance training courses include components on the use of technology in monitoring government public relations, which often also come with marketing typically affordable technology packages that can put into practice what the training courses show at a relatively low cost. By contrast, acquiring technology from Europe or the US is often prohibitive. This opens up opportunities for the CCP to take the extra step of linking technology sales to governance and leadership training. In addition, issues of migration and counterterrorism have preoccupied European and US agendas for Africa to the detriment of building strong connections with African party elites.

Investing in young leaders, such as through the Obama-backed Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), is one way for US and European governments to expand their outreach and influence.<sup>77</sup> YALI, which was launched in 2010, is a very successful programme that targets African leaders between ages 18 and 35 to support them "as they spur growth and prosperity, strengthen democratic governance, and enhance peace and security across sub-Saharan Africa."<sup>78</sup> YALI is very popular among African youth as it is viewed as a programme that takes African perspectives and agency seriously and engages African youth as equal partners, instead of tutees or learners who are talked down to. Another notable example of activities and programmes that foster a network of cooperation, engagement, and support for young leaders in Africa, is the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)-supported Democrat Union of Africa (DUA), which was established in Dakar in 1997. DUA held its first Youth Forum in August 2019 in Cote D'Ivoire, where young politicians from fifteen African political parties met for three days to discuss various aspects of democratic governance, development, and political ideology.<sup>79</sup> Programmes like YALI and DUA's Youth Forum could expand to engage

all African countries (including in North Africa) and be more involved in providing education opportunities for young leaders. Over 60% of Africa's population is under age 25, and the continent is the world's youngest. This makes opportunities to invest in African youth a very valuable way of investing in the future of African governance, development, and peace.

Another important point to highlight is that party-to-party ties and investment in young leaders are groundwork initiatives that take a long time to achieve. They are not the kind of investments that necessarily yield fast turnaround dividends. It may take a generation or more for the results to show. This is yet another area where the CCP has an advantage: The International Department has been consistent in its outreach programmes. A programme like YALI, however popular it is in the eyes of the African youth, is subject to partisan administration politics in the US, mostly because interest in African governance is usually viewed through the prism of counterterrorism and other military, instead of civic leadership programmes. In other words, streamlining long-term views and agendas (with budgets) that have a much wider horizon of engagement with African leaders (young and otherwise) will provide a sense of stability and serious commitment to African partners and will send a strong signal about rich and long-term exchanges to Africa's various non-Western partners.

## **Conclusion**

The CPC has so far established relations with over 600 political parties and organisations from all corners of the globe and is working to increase the breadth and depth of those networks. Every year, the ID-CPC and other relevant agencies engage in hundreds of activities and events aimed at nurturing, strengthening, and expanding these party-to-party connections. From symbolic calls to secretary-generals/presidents of parties, to invitations to senior cadres, training classes for other cadres, and various consultation seminars and

summits, the CPC's global outreach to political parties around the world is a unique and unmatched diplomacy tool. Indeed, it is hard to think of another government with as much capacity to interact with as many political parties.

Chinese government-sponsored professionalisation training courses and people-to-people exchanges are meant to build connections among high-ranking officers, create an affective bonding and a sense of gratitude towards the Chinese government for covering all expenses, and provide mentorship and the opportunity to work side-by-side with Chinese elites. Additionally, and perhaps even more interestingly, some of these professionalisation training courses (especially those for party officials, government elites, and military personnel) provide opportunities to align ways of thinking and reacting to real security, governance, or development issues. They serve as platforms for challenging African attendees to think from the perspective of their hosts' model of governance, security, and development.

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- <sup>27</sup> Confucius Institutes are sponsored by the Chinese government and typically offer Chinese language and cultural programs. To date, there are Confucius Institutes in 45 African countries.
- <sup>28</sup> Kuo, 2017, Beijing is Cultivating the Next Generation of African Elites by Training Them in China
- <sup>29</sup> Hawkins, Amy. 2018, July 24. "Beijing's Big Brother Tech Needs African Faces". *Foreign Policy* <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/24/beijings-big-brother-tech-needs-african-faces/>; Prasso, Sheridan. 2019. "China's Digital Silk Road Is Looking More Like an Iron Curtain". *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2019-01-10/china-s-digital-silk-road-is-looking-more-like-an-iron-curtain>
- <sup>30</sup> US.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. 2020. [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Chinas\\_Engagement\\_Africa.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Chinas_Engagement_Africa.pdf), p. 9.

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<sup>31</sup> Woodhams, Samuel. 2019. "Huawei, Africa and the Global Reach of Surveillance Technology." *Deutsche Welle*, September 12. <https://www.dw.com/en/huawei-africa-and-the-global-reach-of-surveillance-technology/a-50398869>

<sup>32</sup> "Inter-party Relations Promote Sino-African Strategic Partnership."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> The ID-CPC does not only invite ruling political parties but diversifies its exchanges with various parties with different ideological leanings. For instance, the CPC holds exchanges with the Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) of Côte d'Ivoire (see ID-CPC 2019b), Senegal's Alliance for the Republic (APR)

<sup>35</sup> For studies on norm diffusion and socialization processes in military exchanges in and beyond the case of China, see Atkinson, Carole. 2006 "Constructivist Implications of Material Power: Military Engagement and the Socialization of States, 1972–2000." *International Studies Quarterly* (50): 509–537; Benabdallah, Lina. 2019. "Contesting the International Order by Integrating It: The Case of China's Belt and Road Initiative," *Third World Quarterly*, Volume 40 (1): 92–108; Alden and Large. 2015. "On Becoming a Norm Maker: Chinese Foreign Policy, Norms Evolution and the Challenges of Security in Africa." *China Quarterly*, 221: 123–42.

<sup>36</sup> For a full list of the African countries that signed the letter backing China's security law in Hong Kong, see Lawler, Dave. 2020. "The 53 Countries Supporting China's Crackdown on Hong Kong." *Axios*. <https://www.axios.com/countries-supporting-china-hong-kong-law-0ec9bc6c-3aeb-4af0-8031-aa0f01a46a7c.html>

<sup>37</sup> Yao Wen. 2021. "Branding and Legitimation: China's Party Diplomacy amid the COVID-19 Pandemic." *The China Review*, 21 (1): 55 – 89. p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>41</sup> South Africa, Egypt, the Republic of Congo, and Algeria enjoy the highest forms of cooperation China maintains on the continent, i.e., comprehensive strategic partnership. They are all very close partners of China and ruling parties in these countries keep very close ties with the CPC.

<sup>42</sup> For more on China's partnership building, see Li, Quan and Ye, Min. 2019, "China's Emerging Partnership Network: What, Who, Where When and Why", *International Trade, Politics and Development*, 3 (2): 66-81, figure 2.

<sup>43</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ID-CPC kept on holding party-to-party training and exchanges with its African counterparts, virtually.

<sup>44</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ID-CPC kept on holding party-to-party trainings and exchanges with African counterparts, virtually.

<sup>45</sup> ID-CPC. 2021. [https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/news/202108/t20210804\\_146551.html](https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/news/202108/t20210804_146551.html)

<sup>46</sup> For more on the history of the CCP and ANC relations, see Alden, Chris and Yu-Shan Wu. 2014. "South Africa and China: The Making of a Partnership," *SALIA Occasional Paper* 199: 1-39. For a recount on the CCP's relations with Pretoria during Apartheid, see Taylor 2018.

<sup>47</sup> See Alden, Chris and Yu-Shan Wu. 2014. "South Africa and China: The Making of a Partnership," *SALIA Occasional Paper* 199: 1-39.

<sup>48</sup> See Alden, Chris and Yu-Shan Wu. 2014. "South Africa and China: The Making of a Partnership," *SALIA Occasional Paper* 199: 1-39.

<sup>49</sup> From the website of CELAP, it was announced that the academy had so far organized "training sessions for more than 3,700 participants from over 120 counties. Contents of these training programs include theory and practice of CPC's party building, China's reform and opening-up history, government reform, latest social management practice, business surroundings, and leadership education."

<sup>50</sup> For more on this, see Plaut, Martin. 2015. "Why Is the ANC Following the Example of the Chinese Communist Party?" *Newstatesman* <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/01/why-anc-following-example-chinese-communist-party>

<sup>51</sup> For more on this, see Plaut, Martin. 2015. "Why Is the ANC Following the Example of the Chinese Communist Party?" *Newstatesman* <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/01/why-anc-following-example-chinese-communist-party>

<sup>52</sup> Kgosana, Caiphus. 2018. "ANC Looks to China for Election Strategy and Tactics." *TimesLIVE* <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/2018-07-28-anc-looks-to-china-for-election-strategy-and-tactics/>

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>55</sup> Findlay 2014.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> ID-CPC. 2020, April 23. [https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/news/202004/t20200428\\_138415.html](https://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/news/202004/t20200428_138415.html)
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> [https://www.nrm.ug/news/get-know-your-nrm-secretary-general?fbclid=IwAR3zUGvhQj-BLKp3Gp\\_MrtL7tRm1WaPyLzl7UOTBhPbfh6OaKbayVClctQ](https://www.nrm.ug/news/get-know-your-nrm-secretary-general?fbclid=IwAR3zUGvhQj-BLKp3Gp_MrtL7tRm1WaPyLzl7UOTBhPbfh6OaKbayVClctQ)
- <sup>60</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/northamerica/2021-04/11/c\\_139872705.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/northamerica/2021-04/11/c_139872705.htm)
- <sup>61</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6RE6nWLuVE>
- <sup>62</sup> ID-CPC. 2017. [http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201706/t20170609\\_90432.html](http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201706/t20170609_90432.html)
- <sup>63</sup> ID-CPC. 2017. [http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201706/t20170609\\_90433.html](http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201706/t20170609_90433.html)
- <sup>64</sup> ID-CPC. 2017. [http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201704/t20170420\\_89396.html](http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201704/t20170420_89396.html)
- <sup>65</sup> ID-CPC. 2017. [http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201704/t20170407\\_89303.html](http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201704/t20170407_89303.html)
- <sup>66</sup> ID-CPC. 2017. [http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201705/t20170509\\_89628.html](http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201705/t20170509_89628.html)
- <sup>67</sup> ID-CPC. 2019. [http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201903/t20190305\\_99597.html](http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/forenotice/201903/t20190305_99597.html)
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>70</sup> Benabdallah, Lina, and Robertson, W. 2018. "Xi Jinping Pledged \$60 Billion for Africa. Where Will the Money Go?" [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/09/17/xi-jinping-pledged-60-billion-for-africa-where-will-the-money-go/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.ff71653fba18](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/09/17/xi-jinping-pledged-60-billion-for-africa-where-will-the-money-go/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ff71653fba18)
- <sup>71</sup> Benabdallah, Lina. 2018. "China-Africa Military Ties Have Deepened. Here Are 4 Things To Know." <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/07/06/china-africa-military-ties-have-deepened-here-are-4-things-to-know/>
- <sup>72</sup> CGTN. 2019. "China-Africa Security Cooperation: African Military Officials Visit Special Police College in Beijing." <https://news.cgtn.com/news/794d444e784d4464776c6d636a4e6e62684a4856/index.html>
- <sup>73</sup> Benabdallah, Lina. 2020. *Shaping the Future of Power: Knowledge Production and Network-Building in China-Africa Relations*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- <sup>74</sup> 2018. *Quartz Africa*.
- <sup>75</sup> 2018. *Quartz Africa*.
- <sup>76</sup> Carrozza, Ilaria. 2019. "China's Multilateral Diplomacy in Africa: Constructing the Security-Development Nexus," in Johanson, Daniel; Jie Li; & Tsunghan Wu, eds, *New Perspectives on China's Relations with the World*. Bristol, England: E-International Relations Publishing (142–158).
- <sup>77</sup> USAID. *Young African Leaders Initiative* [Info sheet]. [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2.21\\_FINAL\\_RLC\\_One-Pager.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2.21_FINAL_RLC_One-Pager.pdf)
- <sup>78</sup> <https://yali.state.gov>