

# China's Historical Relations with West Africa, 1960-65: An Analysis of Ideology, Economic Aid, and Foreign Policy Practices

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines China's foreign relations with West Africa during the period from 1960 to 1965, focusing on the ideological, economic, and diplomatic strategies employed by China to strengthen its influence in the region. During a time of global Cold War tensions and the Sino-Soviet split, China sought to form alliances with newly independent African nations such as Ghana, Mali, and Guinea. By promoting anti-imperialist and socialist ideologies, China positioned itself as a supporter of national liberation movements in Africa. The paper analyzes the role of economic aid as a tool for political leverage, examining specific aid projects that fostered economic development in these countries while aligning them ideologically with China. The study also explores the diplomatic interactions between Chinese and African leaders, emphasizing how these relationships were instrumental in gaining support for China on the international stage, particularly in the United Nations. The research provides insights into the broader implications of China's early foreign policy strategies in the Third World and its long-lasting impact on Sino-African relations.

## KEYWORDS

China; Africa; Cold War; Ideology; Economic Aid; Third World.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, at the height of the Cold War, relations between China and the West were tense, and the Soviet Union exerted pressure on China after the Sino-Soviet split. Therefore, China needs to find new Allies in the international community, especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America, to break its isolation and expand its international influence. China has always been committed to supporting the independence and development of Third World countries. In the 1960s, through cooperation with newly independent African countries such as Mali, Ghana, and Guinea, China promoted anti-imperialist and anti-colonial ideas, demonstrated its support and solidarity with third world countries, and enhanced its international reputation. China has established various forms of economic and technical cooperation with these African countries, including infrastructure construction, agricultural technical support and medical assistance. These forms of cooperation not only promoted the economic development of African countries, but also improved China's reputation in the world and demonstrated China's attitude of peaceful development and cooperation. Through exchanges with African countries, China has spread its own culture and values and enhanced mutual understanding and recognition. Cultural exchanges are part of a country's soft power, and through cultural cooperation, China has built a positive national image in Africa. Through its relationships with Mali, Ghana and Guinea, China has been able to gain more support in international organizations such as the United Nations. The 1960s was an important period for China to seek international recognition

and a legitimate seat, and good relations with African countries provided important support for China's voice in the international political arena. There are also several concept need to be interpreted.

First of all, ideology refers to a system of ideas, beliefs, values, and principles that guide an individual, group, or society. It shapes how people perceive and interpret the world, influences their behaviors, and provides a framework for understanding social, political, and economic issues. In the field of political science and diplomacy, ideologies such as liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, and fascism offer distinct perspectives on government, individual rights, and the economy. Economic aid is also crucial to this study. It refers to the financial or material assistance provided by one country (or group of countries) to another country. This type of aid is intended to promote economic development, stability, and welfare in the recipient country, and it often serves strategic, political, and humanitarian objectives. This paper also centers around the concept of foreign policy position, by which, I mean the stance or approach that a country adopts regarding its interactions and relationships with other countries and international organizations. This position is shaped by the country's national interests, values, and goals, and it guides how the country conducts its diplomatic activities, negotiations, and international engagements.

The period from 1960 to 1965 marked significant strides in China's foreign policy, particularly in West Africa. During this time, China established and deepened its diplomatic and economic relationships with newly independent African states such as Ghana, Mali, and Guinea. The intersection of ideology, economic aid, and foreign policy practices defined these relationships, offering a unique insight into China's strategic interests and the dynamics of Cold War geopolitics. The ideological underpinnings of China's engagement with West African countries were rooted in anti-imperialism and the promotion of socialist solidarity. China's support for national liberation movements in Africa was both a reflection of its revolutionary ideals and a strategic maneuver to counter Western and Soviet influence. The shared history of colonial oppression provided a common ground for solidarity between China and African nations, as evidenced in the dialogues between Chinese and African leaders. In Ghana, China's relationship was significantly influenced by the ideologies of its leader, Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah, a proponent of Pan-Africanism, found an ally in China which was eager to support his vision for a united and independent Africa. The record of Premier Zhou Enlai's talks with Nkrumah on March 8, 1964[1], highlights discussions on the national liberation movement, Ghana's foreign policy, and broader geopolitical issues such as the Congo crisis and China's position in the United Nations. This dialogue underscores the ideological alignment and mutual support between the two nations. Similarly, in Mali, ideological solidarity played a crucial role. China's aid and political support were directed towards fostering Mali's socialist path under President Modibo Keita. The collaboration extended beyond mere political discourse to include substantial economic and technical assistance, which was framed as a partnership between fellow socialist states striving for development and independence from neocolonial influence.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Guinea, under the leadership of Ahmed Sékou Touré, was another focal point of China's ideological outreach. Touré's resistance to French colonial control and subsequent alignment with socialist principles resonated with China's revolutionary ideology. The Sino-Guinean relationship was marked by significant Chinese investment in infrastructure and agriculture, aimed at demonstrating the viability of socialist development models. Economic aid was a central component of China's foreign policy in West Africa during this period. The provision of aid was not merely altruistic but strategically designed to foster dependency, gain political allies, and create a sphere of influence that could counteract Western and Soviet dominance. For example, Donovan Chau mentioned that "China's engagement in Africa from 1955 to 1976 provides a rich account of China's diplomatic and political relations with Ghana and China's political, military, economic, and development assistance to the three countries. It illustrates that China exported revolutions to these countries with different

degrees of success due to ethnic, social, religious, political, and economic differences and divergent colonial pasts. It also gives a detailed account of the agencies and tools used by China in its diplomacy with African countries and provides useful examples of China's economic statecraft. China's aid has had a huge impact on Ghana's development. After the aid ended, the factories and infrastructure brought by the Chinese laid a solid foundation for Ghana's future development. Chinese leaders were cast as mentors and supporters of African liberation movements. Through ideological exports and substantive assistance, the Chinese leadership was seen by the Ghanaian people and leaders as a staunch ally in the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle."[2]

In Ghana, Mali, and Guinea, Chinese aid manifested in various forms including infrastructure projects, agricultural development, and technical assistance. These projects were intended to stimulate economic self-sufficiency and showcase the benefits of socialist cooperation. For instance, China's construction of roads, bridges, and public buildings in these countries helped to enhance connectivity and foster economic activities. Another crucial aspect of economic aid was the transfer of knowledge and expertise. China facilitated the training of African professionals and technicians in various fields, thereby creating a cadre of individuals who were not only skilled but also ideologically aligned with China. This strategy was particularly evident in the technical aid programs in Mali and Guinea, where Chinese experts worked closely with local counterparts to implement development projects.

### **3. CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY PRACTICES IN WEST AFRICA (1960-1964)**

China's foreign policy practices in West Africa during the early 1960s were characterized by a combination of diplomacy, economic engagement, and ideological propagation. The primary objective was to build a bloc of supportive states that could bolster China's position in international forums and counteract the isolation imposed by Western powers. China's diplomatic efforts were geared towards establishing formal relations with African countries and securing their support on key international issues. The emphasis on diplomatic recognition was crucial for China's quest to reclaim its seat in the United Nations. The discussions between Chinese leaders and their African counterparts often included appeals for political support in international platforms, highlighting the interconnected nature of their bilateral relationships. China's advocacy for non-alignment and the independence of African states from both Western and Soviet blocs resonated well with the leadership in Ghana, Mali, and Guinea. [3-4] This stance reinforced the perception of China as a genuine partner in the struggle for true independence and development. The emphasis on mutual respect and non-interference further solidified China's image as an ally rather than a neo-colonial power. The period from 1960 to 1965 was pivotal in shaping China's relations with West Africa. Through a combination of ideological solidarity, economic aid, and strategic foreign policy practices, China was able to establish and strengthen its presence in Ghana, Mali, and Guinea. These relationships not only provided China with political allies and economic partners but also contributed to the broader goal of promoting a socialist alternative in the post-colonial world. The legacy of this period continues to influence China's engagement with Africa, reflecting the enduring importance of these early interactions.

During the period of 1960-1964, the inner condition of China is complex. The Great Leap Forward movement, which began in 1958, was too focused on high-yield goals, leading to serious agricultural and industrial imbalances. Over-reporting of output and reckless construction plunged the economy into chaos. Due to policy mistakes and natural disasters, China suffered a severe famine between 1959 and 1961 that killed tens of millions of people. This period is known as the "Three years of natural disasters", but in reality, the main cause was man-made. This included reducing the degree of collectivization, allowing farmers to keep their own land, and the development of agricultural and sideline industries. Because of economic difficulties, China was not able to provide large amounts of money or loans to Africa like the United States or the Soviet Union.

After 1960, Sino-Soviet relations gradually deteriorated, and the Soviet Union withdrew its experts from China and stopped providing aid. China began to emphasize the path of self-reliance and independent development. China has actively developed diplomatic relations with third world countries, especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America, to win international support and break the international isolation. The United States and the Soviet Union engaged in an intense competition in nuclear weapons, continually expanding and improving their nuclear arsenals. The growing nuclear capabilities of both sides heightened global tensions. Both superpowers developed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), enhancing their mutual deterrence capabilities. In October 1962, the United States discovered the Soviet Union's deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba, leading to an extremely tense standoff. A fierce diplomatic battle ensued between President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev.

During the 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split had a significant impact on China's relations with West African countries. Ideological differences between the two countries were severe, with Mao Zedong criticizing Soviet leader Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policies, viewing them as a betrayal of orthodox Marxism-Leninism. Additionally, their foreign policies diverged greatly, as the Soviet Union preferred peaceful coexistence with Western countries, while China emphasized supporting anti-imperialist and anti-colonial revolutionary movements. These ideological and policy conflicts led China to seek influence in the Third World, including West Africa. China provided economic aid, technical support, and political backing to West African nations to strengthen these relationships. This period saw China establish formal diplomatic ties and enhance cooperation with countries like Guinea and Ghana. China's efforts in West Africa during this time laid the foundation for long-term friendly relations.

In the early 1960s, many former colonial countries in Africa and Asia gained independence. These emerging nations became significant factors in the Cold War, with both sides vying for their support. In 1955 the first Afro-Asian Conference, held in Bandung, Indonesia, marked the first large-scale gathering of Asian and African nations to discuss common political and economic issues. It was initiated by Indonesia, India, Burma, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka with the aim of promoting solidarity and cooperation among Asian and African countries and opposing colonialism and the emerging Cold War powers. The conference emphasized mutual respect for sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and peaceful coexistence. It laid the groundwork for the Non-Aligned Movement that emerged in the 1960s. The Bandung Conference is considered a significant milestone in the history of international relations, representing the voice and unity of newly independent countries. In 1961, the first Non-Aligned Movement summit was held in Belgrade. Leaders like India's Nehru, Egypt's Nasser, and Yugoslavia's Tito promoted the movement, seeking an independent diplomatic route outside the US-Soviet confrontation. The US and the Soviet Union provided economic and military aid to gain allies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The Soviet Union supported countries like Cuba, Vietnam, and Egypt, while the US backed anti-communist regimes such as South Vietnam and South Korea.

China developed diplomatic relations with Ghana, Mali, and Guinea respectively since their national independence in 1957, 1960, and 1958. In Ghana, Premier Zhou Enlai and Nkrumah talked about Sub-Saharan Africa's national liberation movement and Ghana's foreign Policy; the East African Federation and the Union of African and Malagasy States; the situation in the Congo; the issue of China resuming its legitimate seat in the United Nations and the plotting of the United States to create two Chinas; relations between China and the United States; and the Sino-Indian border issue.[1] Mao wrote to President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana after he escaped an attempted assassination. He promised to support the Ghanaian people and their anti-imperialist struggle.[3] In Mali, The Chinese Embassy proposes the terms of sending Chinese experts to assist with agricultural development and production in Mali. This included the cost and conditions of the expert's life in Mali, and the cost of the return trip. [4]

In Guinea, Premier Zhou praised Guinea's role in the Africa national liberation movement and national democratic struggle. Premier Zhou introduced China's experience of revolution and emphasized that if we combined Marxism-Leninism and Chinese practice and did not comply with this principle, the revolution would fail. Toure basically agreed with the substance of the Premier's remarks but emphasized that Guinea's nationalist democratic system did not exclusively rely on the working class but had to rely on all the people. He also said that Guinea had class struggle, but that the manner of struggle was non-confrontational. Premier Zhou commented on Guinea's revolution, indicating: Guinea must follow the non-capitalist road; other than having united-front leadership, one also must have a strong leadership core; and ideology must be that of the working class, it cannot be that of the peasant class. Toure stressed that in Africa it was the peasants, not the workers, who were the most oppressed and the most advanced. The Premier reminded Toure about his personal security.[5] From the perspective of summarizing experience, he outlined the characteristics of our country's three periods of construction. Relating the Vietnam issue and that of Sino-Soviet differences, he elaborated on our positions on several issues relating to the Asian-African Conference.[6]

China's assistance to Ghana mainly included economic and technical assistance. For example, China has helped Ghana build textile and sugar factories and sent technicians for technical support and training. These aid projects have boosted Ghana's industrialization process and strengthened diplomatic relations between the two countries. Ghana has supported China's position on many international occasions, such as supporting the legitimate seat of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations General Assembly. China's assistance to Mali is mainly focused on infrastructure construction and agriculture. For example, China has helped build hospitals, roads and bridges, and sent agricultural experts to help Mali increase crop yields. These aid projects have improved Mali's infrastructure and agricultural production capacity and strengthened political and economic ties with China. As a result, Mali is more inclined to support China diplomatically. China's assistance to Guinea mainly includes economic assistance, technical assistance and medical assistance. For example, China has helped build cement factories, textile factories and roads, and sent medical teams to provide medical care. These aid projects have improved Guinea's industrial and medical standards and strengthened relations between the two countries. Guinea has actively supported China in African affairs, such as supporting China's position in the Organization of African Unity.

In general, China's assistance to Ghana, Mali and Guinea during 1960-1964 had the following common characteristics: through economic and technical assistance, it strengthened diplomatic relations with these newly independent countries and won their support on international occasions. Economic and technical assistance is mainly focused on infrastructure, agricultural and industrial projects to help these countries improve their economic conditions and technological level. Medical teams have been dispatched to provide medical services and improve local medical conditions.

China's relationship with Ghana was heavily influenced by the shared ideological foundation of anti-imperialism. Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, was a staunch advocate of Pan-Africanism and sought to rid Africa of all forms of colonialism and neocolonialism. China, under Mao Zedong, aligned itself with these principles, viewing them as complementary to its own revolutionary ideals. The official communications between Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Nkrumah highlight this ideological synergy. Zhou emphasized the importance of national liberation movements and the solidarity between oppressed nations in their struggle against imperialism. This ideological alignment facilitated a strong bilateral relationship based on mutual support for anti-colonial efforts. In addition to anti-imperialism, China actively promoted its socialist principles in Ghana. The discussions between Chinese and Ghanaian leaders often included references to the successes of China's socialist policies and the potential benefits for Ghana. This was part of China's broader strategy to present itself as a model for development distinct from Western capitalist and Soviet socialist paradigms.[7] Nkrumah's vision of a socialist Ghana was supported by Chinese ideological and technical guidance, which was seen as an alternative to Western economic models. The Chinese government provided

ideological education and training to Ghanaian officials and students, fostering a generation of leaders sympathetic to socialist ideals.

Mali, under President Modibo Keita, pursued a socialist path that resonated with China's ideological stance. The ideological bond between China and Mali was strengthened by their common goal of building socialism in a post-colonial context. Keita's policies aimed at transforming Mali into a socialist state found a natural ally in China. China's ideological influence in Mali was evident in the emphasis on self-reliance and collective agricultural practices, which mirrored China's own development strategies. The ideological solidarity between the two nations was reinforced through frequent exchanges and discussions on socialist theories and practices. Both China and Mali shared a vehement opposition to neocolonialism. Chinese leaders, in their communications with Malian counterparts, underscored the importance of resisting Western economic and political influence. This ideological stance was critical in shaping the nature of Chinese aid, which was often framed as support for Mali's struggle against neocolonial exploitation.

The ideological partnership between China and Mali was also reflected in their mutual support in international forums. Mali consistently supported China's cause for recognition in the United Nations, illustrating the deep ideological and political alignment between the two countries. Guinea, under President Ahmed Sékou Touré, was another focal point of China's ideological outreach. Touré's revolutionary ideology and his rejection of French colonial rule aligned closely with China's anti-imperialist rhetoric. The ideological solidarity between China and Guinea was a cornerstone of their relationship. Chinese aid to Guinea was often justified in terms of revolutionary solidarity. China positioned itself as a fellow revolutionary state supporting Guinea's efforts to build a socialist society. This ideological bond was reflected in the extensive political and cultural exchanges between the two nations. China's engagement with Guinea was also influenced by the broader context of the Non-Aligned Movement. Both nations were key proponents of non-alignment, advocating for an independent path free from the influence of both Western and Soviet blocs. This ideological stance was crucial in defining the nature of Chinese aid to Guinea, which was aimed at bolstering Guinea's independence and sovereignty. The ideological emphasis on anti-colonialism and non-alignment was evident in the rhetoric of Chinese leaders during visits and official communications.

These ideological commitments helped to forge a strong political alliance between China and Guinea, reinforcing their mutual support in international diplomacy. The ideological factors underpinning China's aid to Ghana, Mali, and Guinea during 1960-1964 were instrumental in shaping the nature of these relationships. China's promotion of anti-imperialism, socialism, and non-alignment not only facilitated the provision of economic and technical assistance but also helped to establish a strong ideological bond with these West African nations. This ideological solidarity was a key component of China's foreign policy strategy, aimed at expanding its influence and countering Western and Soviet dominance in the developing world. Through these ideological connections, China was able to build enduring relationships that extended beyond mere economic transactions, fostering a sense of revolutionary camaraderie and mutual support.[8]

In Ghana, China's economic aid helped solidify the government's position domestically by enhancing its governance capabilities. This aid included infrastructure projects and technical assistance, which bolstered President Kwame Nkrumah's political standing. The personal friendship between Premier Zhou Enlai and Nkrumah, fostered through mutual visits and dialogue, reinforced this political alliance and positioned China as a reliable and friendly nation in the eyes of the Ghanaian people. In Mali, the economic aid, particularly in the agricultural sector, not only improved Mali's agricultural productivity but also underscored China's commitment to Mali's development. This support reinforced President Modibo Keita's socialist policies and strengthened the political bond between the two nations, demonstrating China's non-conditional assistance spirit. In Guinea, China's economic aid in the form of infrastructure projects and technical support significantly enhanced the country's economic development and solidified President Ahmed Sékou Touré's leadership. This aid elevated Guinea's international status and reinforced the political alliance with China, highlighting

mutual support and cooperation. China's economic aid to Ghana promoted industrialization and infrastructure development, laying a solid foundation for future economic growth. These projects not only enhanced economic efficiency but also elevated Ghana's status in regional economic cooperation. In Mali, agricultural assistance improved productivity and fostered rural economic development, enhancing farmers' living conditions. This aid deepened the economic ties between China and Mali, promoting a cooperative relationship that benefited both nations. In Guinea, the extensive infrastructure projects improved transportation, communication, and energy sectors, boosting economic development and competitiveness. This economic aid facilitated Guinea's active participation in regional economic cooperation and strengthened the economic partnership with China. China's aid to Ghana included the construction of social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, which improved living conditions and promoted cultural exchange and friendship between the two peoples. These projects elevated Ghana's educational and healthcare standards, fostering a positive image of China among the Ghanaian populace. In Mali, agricultural aid not only improved production capabilities and living standards for farmers but also facilitated mutual understanding and friendship. This aid promoted social stability and enhanced the social bonds between China and Mali. In Guinea, the infrastructure projects and cultural exchange activities improved living conditions and deepened cultural ties. These initiatives strengthened the friendly relations between the Chinese and Guinean people, enhancing mutual appreciation and support. In Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, economic aid supported the country's independent policies and anti-colonial struggle, increasing its influence in African affairs. This alignment in international politics fostered a strong mechanism for policy coordination between China and Ghana.[9]

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of China's engagements with three West African countries during the early 1960s provides valuable insights into China's broader relationship with the Third World. China's engagement with Africa from 1960 to 1965 was marked by a combination of ideological, economic, and strategic motives. While ostensibly supporting African nations in their anti-imperialist struggles, China's aid was strategically designed to foster dependency, secure political allies, and expand its sphere of influence, counteracting Western and Soviet dominance. Despite challenges posed by ethnic, social, religious, and political differences, China's efforts laid a foundation for future economic and political engagement.

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