

## From Bandung spirit to Africa-China Dar es Salaam consensus: pooling the strength of the Global South to jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind

LIU Hongwu <sup>1</sup>

Institute of African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University, China

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### Introduction

The seminar commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, held in Lomé, carries unique significance. It is a great honor to return to this beautiful city. Lomé is a vital diplomatic hub in West Africa and a key venue for international conferences, where numerous landmark international agreements, such as the Lomé Convention, have been signed.

I am deeply grateful to the organizers for their trust in arranging for me to deliver an opening lecturer. The Bandung Conference, held in Indonesia in 1955, marked the beginning of Global South cooperation. The “China-Africa Dar es Salaam Consensus,” released in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 2024, is “the first international consensus born in the South rather than imposed by the North, expressing the collective voice of the ‘Global South’ and reflecting the growing awareness among Global South nations of their own development paths and future.”

For me personally, this year is particularly significant. From 1955 to now, exactly 70 years have passed, marking two 35-year periods. These two periods have profoundly influenced both my personal journey and my academic research on Asia-Africa studies. In 1990, I set out from Kunming in China's frontier province of Yunnan, stepping onto the African continent for the first time to study at the University of Lagos. This year marks the 35th anniversary of that journey. Back then, the travel was extremely challenging. It took me nearly a week, starting from Beijing, China, to reach Lagos, Nigeria. On my way, I transferred in Paris, then in Niamey, the capital of Niger, and flew to Lomé, the capital of Togo, where I stayed for two days in this beautiful coastal city at the Peace Hotel. Finally, I arrived

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<sup>1</sup> LIU Hongwu is a Ph.D. supervisor, founding Director of the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University, a Changjiang Scholar appointed by the Ministry of Education of China, and the founder of the China-Africa Think Tank Forum.

in Lagos, Nigeria. I could never have imagined that, 35 years later, I would return to Togo. By a remarkable coincidence, after attending this conference in Lomé, I will travel back to Nigeria to participate in a series of significant academic activities.

The 35 years since my studies in Lagos have been a period of traveling across Africa, observing Africa, and dedicating myself to the study and advancement of China-Africa relations. In the following, I will divide these two 35-year periods into stages, using my personal academic growth as a thread and the evolution of Asia-Africa relations as the content to illustrate the collective rise of Asian and African nations and the Global South.

### **I. The Bandung Conference Initiates the Historical Process of Asia-Africa Cooperation**

At the Bandung Conference held in 1955, Chinese and African leaders engaged in direct contact for the first time. Exactly 70 years ago today (April 24, 1955), the Declaration on the Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation was issued, outlining ten principles to guide relations between nations. The year following the Bandung Conference, China established diplomatic relations with Egypt, marking the beginning of the historical process of China-Africa diplomacy. Last year marked the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and this year is the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference. Today's seminar, which reflects on the Bandung Conference from an African perspective, is particularly significant. In the past, discussions about the Asia-Africa Conference and Asia-Africa cooperation were often dominated by Asian perspectives. However, this time, the seminar is co-hosted by African and Chinese research institutions, approaching the topic from an African viewpoint, thus truly realizing interaction between Asians and Africans. This also demonstrates the enhanced agency and prominence of Africa as a whole.

The modern cooperative relationship between the People's Republic of China and African countries took root in the early 1950s, against the backdrop of broader diplomatic initiatives among Asian, African, and Latin American nations—many of which shared a history of marginalization—to achieve national rejuvenation and self-determination. In fact, China turned its attention to supporting African national liberation struggles shortly after its own founding. The Bandung Conference in April 1955 later provided a pivotal platform for direct diplomatic engagement between China and African nations. During the conference, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Chen Yi hosted a banquet for Egyptian Prime Minister Nasser and held discussions with representatives from Ghana, Libya, Sudan, Liberia, Ethiopia, and other countries. These efforts quickly bore fruit: on May 30th, 1956, Egypt became the first African nation to establish diplomatic relations with China, marking the beginning of modern China-Africa diplomatic relations. In October 1959, Guinea became the first sub-Saharan African country to establish diplomatic ties with China. In their shared struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and hegemonism, China and Africa stood closely united.

From December 1963 to February 1964, Premier Zhou Enlai embarked on his first visit to Africa, covering ten countries in what was a pioneering “trailblazing journey” for Chinese leaders. During this visit, guided by the spirit of the Bandung Conference and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Premier Zhou announced five principles for developing relations with African countries and eight principles for China's foreign economic aid. The essence of these eight principles lay in equality, mutual benefit, non-interference in internal affairs, and no political strings attached. Premier Zhou's visit to ten African countries is regarded as a foundational milestone in forging a new type of

China-Africa relationship. The five principles for developing relations with African countries and the eight principles for foreign aid established a solid foundation for long-term friendly cooperation between China and Africa.

Times has been changing, and African continent has been developing as well. What remains constant is the frequent high-level interactions between China and Africa and the ever-deepening, evolving bonds of affection at the grassroots level. In the 1960s and 1970s, the relationship between China and African countries developed in a distinctly new way. In 1971, with the support of developing countries, particularly African nations, China regained its rightful seat in the United Nations (UN), becoming a voice for Asian and African countries, developing nations, and the Global South. In 1974, during a meeting with Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda, Chairman Mao Zedong articulated his famous “Three Worlds” theory, emphasizing China’s solidarity with the vast number of developing countries.

Entering the 1980s, as China embarked on its reform and opening-up, it built upon the eight principles of foreign aid by introducing four principles for economic and technical cooperation with African countries. These principles further advanced the adjustment and development of China-Africa relations, laying the groundwork for the subsequent growth of China-Africa cooperation.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, coupled with the end of the Cold War, led to a surge in Western Cold War mentality. The United States emerged as the world’s hegemon, and its perspective on the world underwent significant shifts. Some Western intellectual elites widely believed that history had culminated in the triumph of Western civilization, with the remaining task being to transform other nations into societies resembling the West. They viewed major historical changes as complete, anticipating that the world would endure under the perfect model of Western-led civilization. At that time, Western nations were at the peak of their influence.

The 1980s and 1990s were also the most challenging, chaotic, and perplexing times for both China and African countries. African nations were further marginalized in the global system, a period often referred to as “Africa’s lost decade” or “Africa’s lost two decades.” Under the intervention of Western-dominated economic structural adjustment programs, African economies stagnated, societies experienced turmoil, and development regressed, compounded by political instability and ethnic conflicts. The lingering consequences of Western colonial rule erupted during this time. Meanwhile, China’s diplomacy faced severe challenges, including sanctions and containment by the United States and the West. To some extent, both China and Africa had hit a historical low point.

## **2. China-Africa Cooperation Contributes to the Rejuvenation of Civilizations in Asia and Africa**

Today, as we gather to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, the situation has completely transformed. The Global South is now experiencing a collective rise. Since 1990, Western countries, led by the United States, have repeatedly introduced China-related proposals at UN human rights conferences, attempting to tarnish China’s international image. These similar external pressures prompted China and African countries to strengthen their solidarity, creating conditions for deepening bilateral relations. In 2000, through the joint efforts of both sides, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was successfully established, marking a new era of comprehensive development in China-Africa cooperation. In 2013, China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which once again provided an idealistic impetus for China-Africa cooperation.

In 2013, during his first visit to Africa as China's head of state, President Xi Jinping proposed the principle of "sincerity, real results, amity, and good faith" in China's relations with African countries, along with the principle of pursuing the greater good and shared interests. This succinctly encapsulates contemporary China's philosophy of cooperation with Africa. Guided by this principle and propelled by platforms such as the FOCAC and the BRI, a multitude of landmark China-Africa cooperation projects have been implemented across the continent. Additionally, numerous smaller yet impactful projects have benefited local communities, deepening mutual understanding and fostering a favorable public opinion environment as well as a solid foundation of popular support for China-Africa collaboration.

Over the past 35 years, Asian and African countries, along with the broader developing world, have progressed to varying degrees, following their own historical logic and structures. A development path distinct from that of the West has been advancing, with momentum stemming not only from the East but also from the accelerating revival and development processes of Asian and African nations. This new development has not entirely followed the trajectory predetermined by the West, nor does it resemble the less successful attempts during the Cold War, when Asian and African countries, amidst intense global political and economic conflicts and East-West confrontations, were led by ideologically driven superpowers prescribing solutions. As the new development processes in Asia and Africa gain momentum, human development experiences and models are writing a new chapter, and explorations of new development paths or theories for Asia and Africa have become topics of in-depth discussion.

We are now facing a new and challenging era, where tariff wars imposed by a superpower hegemony have been forced upon every nation in the world, and we developing countries will bear the brunt of it. However, after 70 years (two periods of 35 years) of cooperation and practice, China and Africa have learned to remain composed and respond adeptly to such intimidation and threats. Indeed, development and cooperation play a crucial role in addressing the challenges we face—and China-Africa development cooperation holds both of these keys.

The year 2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the proposal of the principle of sincerity, real results, affinity, and good faith toward Africa, and the principle of pursuing the greater good and shared interests, as well as the 10th anniversary of the proposal of the BRI. And 2024 marks the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the 60th anniversary of Premier Zhou's visit to Africa, and the 50th anniversary of Chairman Mao's proposal of the "Three Worlds" thought. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference. Last March, I led an academic team from the IASZNU to Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, to hold the 13th China-Africa Think Tank Forum, and at the meeting, I jointly released the "China-Africa Dar es Salaam Consensus" in five languages with scholars from 50 African countries.

This consensus transformed African Union's Agenda 2063 and China's Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative into a shared vision between China and African nations, rearticulating China's development knowledge and experience through African narratives and aspirations. It represents not only a significant achievement in the exchange of governance experiences between China and Africa but also creates new opportunities for the localization of Chinese governance knowledge in Africa. The formulation process fully incorporated the opinions and suggestions of African scholars, breaking the rigid tradition of Western unidirectional export of governance knowledge. The consensus achieved widespread dissemination and garnered significant

attention from leaders across China and African countries. Notably, it was incorporated into the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027).

At present, human society, particularly the vast number of developing countries, including China and African nations, faces severe challenges. As a scholar and a member of the academic community, I believe we should take a more proactive role in serving Asia-Africa cooperation, collaboration among developing countries, and Global South partnerships. We must contribute to promoting mutual learning and exchange between Chinese and African civilizations while providing intellectual support.

I say this because it reflects my own actions. Since returning to China in the early 1990s after studying in Africa, I established African Studies as a discipline at Yunnan University, where I trained undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students. Due to limited conditions in China's southwestern frontier, I moved to Zhejiang Province in 2007—a forefront of China's reform and opening-up—and founded IASZNU, the first comprehensive institute for African Studies established in Chinese high-learning institutions. Over the past two decades, our institute has focused on two core themes: "Contemporary African Development" and "China-Africa Development Cooperation." We have conducted academic research, trained talent, facilitated international exchanges, and provided think tank services. We have also proposed a theoretical framework for building a Chinese model of African Area and Country Studies, characterized by a "six-in-one" approach: "disciplinary construction as the foundation, think tank services as the function, media communication as the tool, deep engagement in Africa as the prerequisite, China-Africa cooperation as the means, and collaborative innovation for empowerment." The Dar es Salaam Consensus is a quintessential example of this approach.

## Conclusion

Today, China is forging a new type of interdependent relationship with the outside world, characterized by shared interests and a collective stake in the future. By promoting its own development, China drives the progress of other nations and peoples, while viewing their development as an opportunity for its own. This creates a new international relations structure with the outside world, one that is mutually beneficial, dynamically interdependent, and balanced between self-interest and altruism. In an increasingly interconnected modern world, China must strive to make its necessary and unique contributions to addressing global development challenges, particularly those faced by developing countries. Only through such efforts can China's own development challenges be fully resolved. Without the development of the world, especially the vast number of developing countries, China cannot achieve development in isolation.

The evolution of history is never-ending. The current era is undergoing rapid transformation, providing new opportunities for innovation in China-Africa knowledge and intellectual frameworks. The prospects for co-building and co-sharing a knowledge system for a China-Africa community with a shared future are boundless. Moving forward, Chinese and African scholars must walk the world together, using our dual perspectives to observe ourselves, each other, and the world today, while jointly advancing modernization and the collective development of the Global South. To achieve this goal, Chinese scholars must first join hands with scholars from Asian, African, Latin American, and other Global South countries. With confidence in our academic theories and humility to learn from the outside world, we can together pioneer new goals, directions, and visions for human modernization.

### **Biographical note**

**LIU Hongwu** is a Ph.D. supervisor, founding Director of the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University, a Changjiang Scholar appointed by the Ministry of Education of China, and the founder of the China-Africa Think Tank Forum. He used to study at the University of Lagos, Nigeria (1991) and the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (2003). His research focuses on African studies, China-Africa cooperation, and international relations. He led two major research projects funded by the National Social Science Fund and one key project under the Ministry of Education's Humanities and Social Sciences Fund. Additionally, he has completed multiple national-level research initiatives, published hundreds of academic papers, and authored more than 20 monographs. He has accompanied national leaders on many trips to Africa, and many of his recommendations have been adopted by national leaders.

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