

GAME CHANGE IN THE GULF OF GUINEA: THREE INTERTWINED PERSPECTIVES ON SINO-EQUATOGUINEAN COOPERATION

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Abstract

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea (EG) joined the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Forum Macao) in 2022, becoming the tenth member-state. This occurred during the 2022 Extraordinary Ministerial Conference, after it acceded to the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) in 2014. Since 2015, China and EG have been intensifying their bilateral cooperation after establishing a comprehensive cooperative partnership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2015). In 2019, the two countries signed a Belt and Road Initiative (B&RI) MoU during the second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, and initiated a strategic approach for bilateral cooperation. Consequently, considering the uniqueness of EG as a Portuguese-speaking Country (PSC) and as the newest member of Forum Macao, this paper poses and answers the following research question: What will be the impact of Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation in light of EG's recent accession to FM? Methodologically, the research uses qualitative data supported by triangular referencing, including official and non-official sources, namely official statistics, academic papers, and media reports, to look into the bilateral Sino-Equatoguinean relations under the B&RI Lusophone framework, as well as the fact that EG is a CPLP member-



state. Accordingly, the methodologic rationale focuses on the uniqueness of EG as one of the Lusophone countries and relates it to the Chinese B&RI at three levels: domestic, regional and global. This paper is organized as follows: (1) Introduction; (2) The uniqueness of EG as a PSC; (3) The B&RI and the Lusophone Countries; (4) Cooperation between Equatorial Guinea and China; (5) Conclusion – The Future of Sino-Equatoguinean Cooperation.

Keywords

Republic of Equatorial Guinea; People's Republic of China; Belt and Road Initiative; Portuguese-Speaking Countries; Forum Macao

Resumo

A República da Guiné Equatorial (GE) tornou-se membro do Fórum para a Cooperação Económica e Comercial entre a China e os Países de Língua Portuguesa (Fórum de Macau, doravante designado por FM) em 2022, tornando-se o décimo estado a fazê-lo. A integração oficial da GE, decorreu à margem da Reunião Extraordinária Ministerial do Fórum de Macau em 2022, após o país ter aderido à Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP) em 2014. Desde 2015, a China e a GE têm vindo a intensificar a cooperação bilateral desde o estabelecimento das relações de parceria de cooperação abrangente (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros da República Popular da China, 2015). Em 2019, os dois países assinaram o Memorando de Entendimento sobre a Iniciativa Uma Faixa Uma Rota (B&RI, em sigla inglesa) durante a segunda edição do Fórum Faixa e Rota em Pequim e iniciaram desde já uma abordagem estratégica na cooperação bilateral. Por conseguinte, tendo em consideração a singularidade da GE como País de Língua Portuguesa e o facto de ser o mais recente membro do FM, este artigo coloca e responde à seguinte questão central de investigação: Qual será o impacto da cooperação Sino-Equatoguineense à luz da recente adesão da GE ao FM? Metodologicamente, a investigação utiliza dados qualitativos sustentados por referências triangulares, incluindo relatórios oficiais e não oficiais, estatísticas oficiais, documentos académicos e notícias dos meios de comunicação social, para analisar as relações bilaterais Sino-Equatoguineenses no âmbito da B&RI nos países lusófonos. Desse modo, a fundamentação qualitativa metodológica centra-se na singularidade da GE como um dos países lusófonos que se envolve na B&RI Chinesa em três níveis: doméstico, regional e global. O presente artigo apresenta a seguinte estrutura: (1) Introdução; (2) A singularidade da GE como um dos PLP; (3) B&RI e os Países Lusófonos; (4) Cooperação entre a Guiné Equatorial e a China; (5) Conclusão - o Futuro da Cooperação Sino-Equatoguineense.

Palavras-chave

República da Guiné Equatorial, República Popular da China, Iniciativa "Uma Faixa Uma Rota", Países de Língua Portuguesa, Fórum de Macau

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GAME CHANGE IN THE GULF OF GUINEA: THREE INTERTWINED PERSPECTIVES ON SINO-EQUATOGUINEAN COOPERATION

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Introduction

As an emerging regional and perhaps also a global power in the 21st century, People's Republic of China (hereafter China) has enhanced its comprehensive national strength considerably since its reform and opening-up policy dating back to the late 1970s. During the past decade, one of China's most prominent approaches to "national rejuvenation" and to strengthening its presence in the international community has been the Belt and Road Initiative (hereafter B&RI). The 2013 B&RI is a Chinese foreign affairs flagship multi-layered initiative, designed to intensify its global presence, and an access policy with a global reach, connecting not only markets in Asia and Europe, but also in Africa, the South Pacific, and South America.

Since 2013, we have noticed an increasing number of academic papers discussing the geopolitical and geo-economic implications of the B&RI on a global scale. The B&RI is a comprehensive development strategy covering all areas that contribute to development. It is also a comprehensive security strategy that spans all decisive and secondary engagement areas at different levels, and is in line with long-term, systematic strategic planning (Leandro, 2018: 344). However, there is a gap in studies associated with China-Lusophone countries relations, particularly pertaining to Equatorial Guinea (hereafter EG). Although all of the Portuguese-speaking Countries (PSC) (with the exception of Brazil), including EG, have joined the B&RI (2022), the number of academic publications focusing on EG in the English language is scarce, and there has been even less discussion on B&RI cooperation between China and EG. This is especially important in the context of the fact that EG joined the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), as well as China's economic and commercial cooperation platform with the PSCs — the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Forum Macao).

The framework mentioned above shapes this paper, which intends to shed light on the cooperation between China and Equatorial Guinea (EG) as a new member of the CPLP and Forum Macao based on the B&RI framework. Beginning with an introduction on EG,



the paper then draws attention to the country's unique geopolitics, economy, and identity in the second section. The third section reviews the B&RI and its implementation in the past decade, with a special focus on the PSCs; the lens shifts in Section 4 onto EG's cooperation with China before and after the launch of the B&RI. Finally, in the Conclusion, the paper presents three major impacts of B&RI cooperation between China and EG, focusing the discussion on the South Atlantic on a basis of the multiple challenges in the context of the B&RI framework.

1. Equatorial Guinea as a Portuguese-Speaking Country

Equatorial Guinea is a small African state in the Gulf of Guinea between two larger states — Gabon to the south, and Cameroon to the north, and bordered to the west by the South Atlantic Ocean. Interestingly, the coat-of-arms displayed by the Equatorial Guinea national flag, contains two very interesting elements. On the one hand, a silk-cotton tree, which represents the location where the first treaty between Portugal and the local rules was signed. On another hand, the six-pointed yellow stars, representing the fact that EG is made up of a mainland territory (River Muni) and five islands: Elobey-grande, Elobay-pequeno, Corisco, Annobón, and Bioko - the last being the largest and is where the capital Malabo is located (Map 1). Annobón, the country's only island located in the Southern Hemisphere, gives EG a significant maritime dimension as it significantly extends EG's exclusive economic zone. Indeed, EG is the only country in the world that sets its capital not on its mainland but on the main island. In fact, the islands of Annobón (Ilha do Anobom) and Bioko were first colonized by Portugal in 1474. Perhaps because of the Portuguese's desire to create a large Brazil while pursuing and maintaining an African coastal presence (Gulf of Guinea) to facilitate trade, in 1778, Queen Maria I of Portugal and King Charles III of Spain signed the Treaty of El Pardo, thereby settling the two kingdoms' dispute caused by alleged violations of the Treaty of Tordesillas in today's Brazil. As a consequence, Queen Maria agreed to cede the islands of Annobón and Bioko (named Fernão Pó during Portuguese rule) to King Charles, as well as the Guinea coast between the Niger and Ogoue Rivers. The islands were officially renamed and recognized as Fernando Poo, and came to be included in the possession of the Spanish Crown, with the aim to develop a substantial presence in the West African slave trade network.

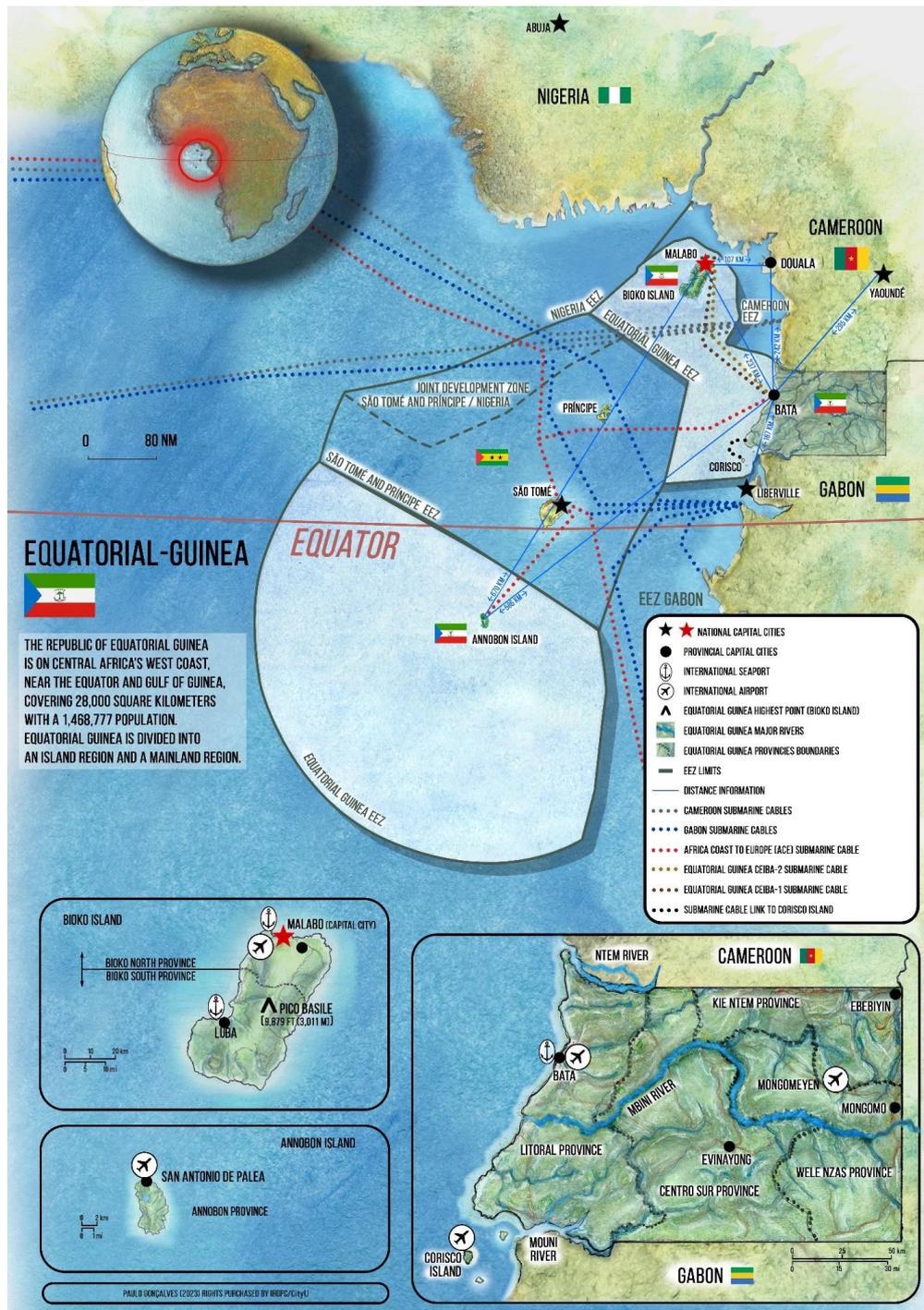
From 1778 to 1810, affairs of EG were conducted by the vice-royalty of Rio de la Plata in Argentina. From 1926 to 1959, EG was known as Spanish Guinea, and became a province in 1959. From 1960 to 1968, the decolonization of EG commenced, with EG becoming an independent republic in 1968, and in 1970 establishing diplomatic relations with China as well as joining the Non-aligned Movement (hereafter NAM). Since its independence, EG has had only two presidents: Francisco Macías Nguema, and his nephew, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has ruled since 1979. Indeed, Teodoro Obiang has been president of EG for more than 40 years. In 2022, he was re-elected for a sixth term with 94.9 percent of the votes (GEGW, 2022), and became the longest-serving national leader in the world.

The Map 1 shows the geopolitical features of EG in the Gulf of Guinea, namely a triangular area approximately 69,369 km² in size, located at the heart of the Gulf of Guinea. With EG's city Bata and islands of Bioko and Annobón as vertices, we can trace out a triangular



area that also encompasses the two main islands of São Tomé and Príncipe. One of the sides of the triangle links Malabo with Bata, a second side connects Bata and Annobón, and the third side joins Malabo with Annobón.

Map 1 – General Geographical Features of Equatorial Guinea



Sources: Paulo Gonçalves (2023) Rights Purchased World Atlas, <https://www.distance.to/> and <https://www.submarinecablemap.com/>



This last edge is also where Santo António (capital on the island of Príncipe) and São Tomé, along with Malabo and San Antonio de Palé (Capital of Annobón), are located. Together with other countries located around the Gulf of Guinea, EG has since the 15th century been tenuously inserted into the emerging South Atlantic network — an important portal to West and Central Africa. Vessels and people carry raw materials and resources (especially petroleum) in and out of the Gulf of Guinea, connecting between Europe and the Americas. EG therefore has a geopolitically important location — it dominates the access to the Gulf of Guinea (especially in conjunction with São Tomé and Príncipe), provides easy access to Central Africa as it sits between Gabon and Cameroons, and facilitates access to the South Atlantic. In the PSC context, EG, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Angola are all situated in the same general area

Therefore, as a PSC, EG has been perceived by China as a potential partner to facilitate access to Central Africa and to support maritime operations. This is the leading reason why China is considering building a second naval base in Africa (its first in the Atlantic). According to The Maritime Executive (2022):

"In Equatorial Guinea, the Chinese likely have an eye on Bata. Bata already has a Chinese-built deep-water commercial port on the Gulf of Guinea, and excellent highways link the city to Gabon and the interior of Central Africa (...) Bata is the largest city and Bata port is one of the largest seaports in the mainland of Equatorial Guinea (...). With modern facilities and two long commercial piers (530 meters and 550 meters), it can easily handle any People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) combat vessels. Additionally, the Port is situated adjacent to an oil facility, making it favourable for refuelling operations. It also has an extensive warehouse area and intermodal yard, which would be useful for re-supply operations."

Table 1 – Port of Bata (EG)



Source: Adapted from Arete Africa (2022)



Several news outlets such as Dialogo Americas (2023), Poder Naval Brazil (2023), and Wion News (2023) are reporting Chinese interest in building not only a Chinese naval base in Bata (EG) but also a second one in Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego (Argentina). If both of these projects move forward, China will have established four overseas naval bases — namely, in addition to Bata and Ushuaia, the Ream naval base in Cambodia, and the Djibouti international naval base — which will give China a significant presence in the South Atlantic, allowing it a permanent presence in the Atlantic-Pacific passage, bringing it closer to Antarctica. China selected Djibouti to establish its first major overseas military base, as its location is sitting on one of the world’s most important chokepoints for maritime trade. In the same line of reasoning, Bata location facilitates access to South Atlantic, Gulf of Guinea and central Africa. Indeed, the strategic position of EG also gives vital access to the markets of both West and Central Africa, as EG connects the two. The Luba Freeport of Bioko Island is one of the most important logistics centers for the growing oil and gas industries in the Gulf of Guinea, with more competitive customs duties and expansion potential than other congested land ports in the region. Meanwhile, Bata’s seaport facilitates land access to northern Gabon and Congo, as well as to south Cameroon. Therefore, we believe that Bata deep seaport, the largest in EG, will be the most likely location of the new China overseas naval base. In fact, China engineers have already made significant improvements to the port facilities. Bata seaport currently has surplus capacity and has a dedicated basin for the Equatoguinean Navy. Thus, in line of this reasoning, it is probable that China will extend and improve the existing naval facilities or even build brand new facilities adjacent to the existing port (Table 1).

In the 1980s, the discovery and exploitation of petroleum and natural gas drastically changed EG's economic structure. In 2016, EG had the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in all of Africa. According to IMF’s world economic outlook data, it was € 8,618 in 2017 and € 8,590 in 2018, and was strongly influenced by the evolution of the price of a barrel of oil and national production (Embassy of Equatorial Guinea in Brussels, 2016). The main oil producers of the Gulf of Guinea, namely Angola, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Nigeria account for 4.2% of the world’s production and 2.9% of the world’s proved reserve in 2020 (BP, 2021). In 2017, about 59% of EG's GDP, 96% of its exports, and 80% of its government revenue pertained to petroleum (World Bank, 2019). The importance of the oil sector led the country to accede to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 2017.

Table 2 — Parity between Oil and Cocoa Production of Equatorial Guinea

Year	2004	2006	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Oil Production (Mbbbl)	139,904	125,367 \downarrow	104,548 \downarrow	109,611 \uparrow	95,419 \downarrow	96,933 \uparrow	88,451 \downarrow	74,547 \downarrow	63,539 \downarrow	57,376 \downarrow	52,585 \downarrow	52,451 \downarrow	43,397 \downarrow
Cocoa Production (tonnes)	2,542	1,905 \downarrow	747.5 \downarrow	621.5 \downarrow	677.7 \uparrow	660.2 \downarrow	587.9 \downarrow	745.9 \uparrow	726.7 \downarrow	761.2 \uparrow	538.7 \downarrow	629.5 \uparrow	413 \downarrow

Mbbbl - One Thousand Barrels
Sources: INEGE, 2022 & IMF, 2005 & World Population Review, 2023



As depicted in Table 2, oil and cocoa productions have fluctuated with a general decreasing trend, even if excluding the 2020–2021 pandemic period. As EG is blessed with rich and high-quality natural resources, the backbone of its economy has historically been formed out of three commodities — cocoa, coffee, and timber. In 1967, the production of cocoa was 46,200 tons, reaching the highest point in EG history (Embassy of Equatorial Guinea in New Delhi, 2020). Unfortunately, EG's 2021 cocoa production was weak and there was an overall declining production trend.

In relation to oil and natural gas, according to statistics from OPEC and the Ghanaian Government¹, EG currently ranks sixth among the largest producers of crude oil in Sub-Saharan Africa, after Angola, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Ghana, with a production of 43,397 thousand barrels per day (mmbbl) (CEIC, 2022). In 2021, EG oil reserves were estimated to hold approximately 1,100 million barrels, and 39 billion cubic meters of natural gas (OPEC, 2022). In EG, the oil industry is dominated by a number of players such as Exxon Mobil, Marathon Oil Corp, Kosmos Energy, and Noble Energy, all of which being The United States of America (U.S.) oil companies, although European and Chinese players such as Total of France and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) also participate in the industry, but with relatively marginal roles (Estaban, 2010a). Guinea Ecuatorial de Petróleos (GEPetrol), EG's national oil company, owns small shares in key fields and manages the state's participation as a shareholder in production-sharing agreements and in joint ventures with other international oil companies. GEPetrol is also responsible for oil licensing, marketing, as well as hydrocarbon policy and its implementation.

Apart from hydrocarbons and cocoa, EG also has abundant mineral, timber, and fishery resources. Compared to its relatively small land territory, EG's exclusive economic zone has a vast area of 312,000 km² (Map 1), 11 times larger than its land area and representing considerable potential for developing a blue economy. In addition, the fishery resources are also top ranked in the global scale in terms of both quality and quantity.

The history and geopolitics giving it a unique profile, EG has been building up its identity in both domestic and external relations. In addition to Portuguese, the country has other languages as well as Spanish as its official languages². Like the majority of the African countries, EG is home to multiple ethnic groups — such as the Fernandinos, the Fang, and the Bubi — each of which has its own language (Lipski, 2004: 116–117). The principal ethnic group in Rio Muni is the Fang, and the dominant indigenous group on Bioko is the Bubi. In Fernando Poo (Bioko), pidgin English has generally been preferred by the Bubi and Fernandinos, but in Rio Muni, the principal language for inter-ethnic communication is, in theory, Spanish, though, given the political and social hegemony of the Fang group, the Fang language is also vying for that lingua franca status (Lipski, 2004, p. 117). Malabo is also home of the Fernandinos — descendants of pidgin English-speaking freed slaves from Sierra Leone and Liberia who arrived in Fernando Poo in the 19th century, as well as a handful of natives of São Tomé and Príncipe, Cabo Verde, and other African

¹ Ghana is not an OPEC member state, but is one of the leading producers in the Gulf of Guinea.

² Equatorial Guinea is the only African nation with Spanish as an official language.



nations. "This pidgin language, known as pichi, pichinglis or broken inglis, constitutes the true lingua franca of Fernando Poo/Bioko (Lipski "Pidgin English")" (Lipski, 2004, p. 117).

According to Fajardo (1993), the high proportion of Spanish speakers in EG is largely attributable to the efforts of the Spanish educational system, through which the Spanish government imposed an exclusive use of Spanish as the colonial language from 1778 to 1810 and from 1844 to 1968. Unlike the Portuguese language in Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe, Spanish did not become a creole language in EG. Lipski (2004) argued that the most important factor of the non-creole status of Equatoguinean Spanish is that in the African territories, "there never occurred the massive linguistic and ethnic fragmentation that resulted from the Atlantic slave trade", because "contact with Spain was never broken off", resulting in an insufficient time for any significant linguistic changes to take place. Nowadays, more than 85% of Equatoguineans speak Spanish, and not only is Spanish the medium of instruction but it is also a compulsory subject for students (Gomashie, 2019).

For the Portuguese language, since 2010, it has become EG's third official language (the legislature amended Article 4 of the Constitution of Equatorial Guinea in a bid to become a member of Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, CPLP), and the government of Equatorial Guinea (EG) has made an effort to increase its usage in day-to-day communication, though with little success. In practice, Portuguese is still rarely spoken or used, as Cristina Abeso Mangué, the national coordinator for Lusophony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and currently the first delegate of Equatorial Guinea to Forum Macao, concedes, "The coordination is defined, but Portuguese still needs to be introduced into the education system" (DN, 2018). However, this does not mean that the Portuguese language has little relevance to the country. EG first encountered the Portuguese in 1472–1474, long before the colony was given to Spain in 1778. Interestingly, on Ano Bom Island (Annobón), about 6,000 residents speak Fa d'ambu, a Portuguese-derived creole similar to the dialects spoken in São Tomé and Príncipe (Agostinho, 2021).

As explained, despite being a PSC and having Portuguese as one of its official languages, EG is still dominated by Spanish speakers, and Portuguese is seldom used, which is a unique case among the PSCs. Considering the historical relations with Spain, Portugal, and the British colonies in West Africa, EG has successfully implemented the strategy to connect as many regional political and economic blocks and language communities as possible to reach more markets not only in West Africa but also in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Apart from joining the OPEC (2017) as a main oil producer of Africa, the country also managed to become a member of a number of international organizations such as the Organization of African Unity — today's African Union (1968), the International Monetary Fund (1969), the Non-Aligned Movement (1970), the Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific Group (APC Group) (1975), the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) (1979), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) (1983), the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZOPACAS) (1986), Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) (1989), the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) (2001), the CPLP (2014), and the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (2019). EG joined Forum Macao in 2022 as its tenth member (Table 3) but has yet to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). In fact, EG has requested to enter the WTO since 2007, with a working party and the terms of reference already established in 2008, but the



process of acceding to the WTO is far from complete. As of 2022, the latest development on EG's accession to the WTO was a memorandum on the foreign trade regime, prepared by the working party (WTO, 2022). These accessions show a political push for regional and global integration as well as a particular interest for the Gulf of Guinea, the PSC and China.

Table 3 - Equatorial Guinea International Affiliations

AU	IMF	NAM	ACP-Group	OEI	ECCAS	ZOPACAS	OIF	GGC	CPLP	OPEC	AfCFTA	FM	WTO
1968	1969	1970	1975	1979	1983	1986	1989	2001	2014	2017	2019	2022	X

Note: The Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) Group formally became the Organization of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (OACPS) in 2020 based on the endorsement of the revised Georgetown Agreement (2019).
Sources: The Authors

Founded in 1996, the CPLP had only seven initial full members, namely, Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, and São Tomé and Príncipe. Timor-Leste, once gaining independence in 2002, became the CPLP's eighth member state. EG's entrance to CPLP took a long course and its admission was quite controversial, mainly because of the partial and limited fulfilment of its commitment to reaching the requirements and sharing the values of CPLP (Sá, 2015). The first step of EG's accession took place in 2004, when the President of São Tomé and Príncipe, Fradique de Menezes invited President Teodoro Obiang Nguema to participate in the CPLP's 5th Summit in São Tomé (Seibert, 2009). In that summit, member states of the CPLP discussed the possibility of EG's integration as an observer, and adopted a resolution to firstly create an observer status within the institution. In 2005, the CPLP created the status of an associated observer, which was granted to EG in 2006. However, to become a full member of the Lusophone community, EG had to make Portuguese its official language. As mentioned, historically EG was once colonized by the Portugal, and the Fa d'ambu is a Portuguese-derived creole widely spoken today on the island of Annobon. Considering this inherent condition, in 2007, the Equatoguinean government began to adopt the Portuguese language, which was later approved in 2010 via a presidential order. In November of 2011, Portuguese's status as EG's third official language went into effect.

Apart from the language perquisite, EG also had to demonstrate goodwill in terms of democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as values shared by every member state of the CPLP. Hence, the country joined a growing abolition of death penalty movement on the African continent and carried out its last judicially sanctioned execution in 2014 (DPIC, 2022). In July 2014, EG was admitted as a full member of the CPLP during the 10th summit in Dili, and, finally in 2022, EG abolished capital punishment.

The accession of Equatorial Guinea to CPLP is considered reciprocal for both sides. The integration had underlying political and legal challenges, and was driven by the potential for market advantages. On one hand, the challenges could be associated with the Portuguese language's status in EG and EG's democratic standards. On the other hand,



both CPLP and EG wished to expand their market access (including the oil market), international influence, and regional engagement. Indeed, it “seems to have been fundamental for the entry of the Spanish-Speaking country and for strengthening the CPLP as an oil producing bloc” (Sá, 2015). After EG’s accession, the country made some effort to play an active role in the CPLP. In 2021, Malabo organized the first business summit promoted by the Business Confederation of the Community of Portuguese-language countries (CE-CPLP), which “consolidated [EG’s] integration” into the CPLP (CE-CPLP, 2021).

2. B&RI and Lusophone Countries

In 2013, China launched the B&RI, which is composed of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road. The B&RI is broader in scope than the ancient Silk Road and the “Going out” policy of China (Escobar, 2015). It focuses on Asia, Europe, and Africa, but is also open to other partners; it sets up six economic corridors on the Eurasian continent, but expects to establish stronger links with Africa through, namely, the China–Indian Ocean–Africa–Mediterranean Blue Economic passage and its extension to Lusophone countries. The B&RI can be interpreted as a global and consecutive strategy of China to use strengths that it has accumulated through over 40 years of reforms and opening-up to gain access to worldwide markets and resources.

	Goals	Results example	Observations
1	Policy coordination	The B&RI forum for International Cooperation (2017). The second B&RI Forum (2019).	As of January 2023, 151 countries and 32 international organizations signed B&RI cooperation document (MoU) with China.
2	Infrastructure connectivity	Construction of six economic corridors in Eurasia. China Railway Express has set 82 operational routes, reaching 200 cities in 24 European countries, delivering 60,000 operations with a total value of nearly US\$300 billion.	The infrastructure projects are divided into the following categories: railway, highway, seaport, air transportation, energy and telecommunication
3	Trade facilitation	China’s trade in goods with countries along the B&RI has accumulated about US\$12 trillion, and its non-financial direct investment in countries involved has exceeded US\$140 billion.	China has signed 7 agreements of free trade with 13 B&RI cooperation countries, and has signed Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) agreements with customs authorities in 48 countries and regions in the world.
4	Financial cooperation	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was created in 2016. By the end of July 2022, China had established bilateral currency swap arrangements with more than 20 B&RI cooperation countries and RMB clearing arrangements with more than 10 B&RI cooperation countries.	As of 2022, AIIB had 105 members, 181 approved projects and US\$35.7 billion in financing. The China-EU joint investment fund had invested in nearly 20 countries, involving more than 80 SMEs.
5	People-to-people exchanges	China launched the B&RI vaccine partnership initiative with 31 partners, provided more than 2.2 billion doses of vaccines to more than 120 countries and international organizations.	Apart from healthcare cooperation, the B&RI also made progress in education and assistance projects.

Source: Belt and Road Portal (2022 & 2023)



It not only plays a vital role in China’s integration into the world economy, but also acts as the country’s most important instrument to advance its geopolitical and geo-strategic interests and reshape its position in the international community. The proposal and implementation of B&RI signal a significant shift in China’s foreign policy from “keeping a low profile” (from 1978 to 2012) to “striving for achievement” (since 2013), as Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the ideas of realizing China’s renaissance and “Chinese dream”. Despite being considered a vague concept initially, the B&RI has been continuously implemented through creating a series of fundamental instruments in the past ten years. It sets a five-pillar — namely, policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, trade facilitation, financial cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges — objective of regional multilateral cooperation, covering political, economic, and cultural areas (Zhang, 2018: 328). Table 4 depicts some of the results related to the five intertwined goals.

Table 5 — Implementation of B&RI in Portuguese-speaking Countries			
	Goal	Main results example	Observations
1	Policy coordination	By the end of July 2022, 8 PSCs have signed B&RI MoUs with China.	Timor-Leste (2017); Portugal (2018); Cabo Verde (2018); Angola (2018); Mozambique (2018); Equatorial-Guinea (2019); Guinea-Bissau (2021); and São Tomé and Príncipe (2022).
2	Infrastructure connectivity	The infrastructure sector is the key area and has the most results in the B&RI cooperation with the PSCs.	China-PSC infrastructure cooperation projects mainly include energy and construction of roads, bridges, airports and seaports, electricity grids, dams, water supply factories, social housing and telecommunication networks.
3	Trade facilitation	In 2021, trade between China and PSCs reached US\$200.948 billion, representing a 38.41% increase year-on-year. In the first 11 months of 2022, the trade came to US\$198.937 billion, an increase of 6.75% year-on-year.	In 2021, the PSCs sold goods worth US\$136.134 billion to China, up 33.53 % year-on-year. China’s merchandise exports to the PSCs reached US\$64.814 billion, an increase of 49.91 % year-on-year. From January to November 2022, the PSCs sold goods worth US\$128.447 billion to China, up 0.44 % year-on-year. China’s merchandise exports to the PSCs reached 70.49 billion in the same period, up 20.55 % year-on-year.
4	Financial cooperation	The China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Cooperation and Development Fund was created in 2013.	The China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Cooperation and Development Fund has US\$1 billion to finance projects and plans to further expand its capital. It has financed several large-scale projects in Brazil, Angola, and Mozambique.
5	People-to-people exchanges	The Training Centre of Forum Macao opened in 2011. By the end of 2022, 52 workshops had been held, with 1,600 participants from 8 PSCs.	Training programs include public administration, tax policy, intellectual property, customs, environmental protection, infrastructure, finance, tourism, conventions and exhibitions, trade and investment facilitation, traditional Chinese medicine, epidemic response, and SME development.
Sources: Belt and Road Portal (2023) & Forum Macao (2023)			

With regard to the Portuguese-speaking countries, which spread over four continents, they all occupy geo-strategic positions in the context of the maritime component of the



B&RI, as they facilitate market access and regional engagement. Remarkably, with the exception of Brazil, until July 2022, all PSCs, including EG, have signed a cooperation document (MoU) of the B&RI. Brazil, though not having signed a B&RI MoU, holds a positive view on the initiative and continues to deepen existing cooperation with China. Indeed, the former Ambassador of Brazil to China, Paulo Estivallet de Mesquita asserts:

"We don't see the necessity to sign a memorandum of understanding. Probably due to cultural differences, our understanding is that it is a rather general document based on which we will take some actions in the future. However, given that there is already such good, intensive and concrete cooperation between Brazil and China in investment, trade and other businesses, we do not see the need for such a document between the two countries, nor do we see it as a prerequisite for Brazil's participation in the "Belt and Road" initiative" (Global Times, 2019).

Regarding the implementation of the B&RI in the PSCs, Table 5 depicts the results of the five pillars of the initiative, showing a poor level of contribution from EG, as the country has only initiated its participation in Forum Macao in April 2022, and its full CPLP membership only dates back to 2014.

However, this does not mean that the cooperation between China and EG is limited or is not worth mentioning. Quite the contrary, we shall see in the next section that the two countries' cooperation has been considered strategic and fruitful, particularly after the launch of the B&RI.

3. Cooperation between Equatorial Guinea and China

The cooperation between EG and China has been ongoing since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1970. In this section, we observe the bilateral cooperation before and after the launch of the B&RI, introducing its privileged areas and key projects organized into two stages.

a) Before the launch of the B&RI: Initially, bilateral cooperation between EG and China had been dominated by Chinese aid in several sectors, namely infrastructure, health, and training. Enhanced by the establishment of the Mixed Commission for Economy and Trade Cooperation between the two countries in 1996, various projects were carried out. China committed itself to the following projects: (1) to build 2,000 km of roads; (2) to build 10,000 social houses; (3) to build the largest hydroelectric plant in Djiblo with an installed power of 120 MW, which would be responsible for 90% of the power supply of EG's mainland; (4) to build Bioko Island's public electric grid; and (5) to build the Malabo Gas Power Plant.

In 2007, the larger Chinese aid project — the new Central Office of Equatoguinean Television — was inaugurated. A number of other diplomatic and symbolic projects were also completed, such as the construction of the new headquarters of the Ministry of Energy, the Presidential building, Parliament, Treasury, the Ministry of Labour, the new Bata football stadium, the Mongomo stadium, and the Vocational Formation Centre Nana Mangué. According to the Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office



of China's Embassy in Equatorial Guinea (2013), there were 23 Chinese enterprises carrying out and following up on projects in Equatorial Guinea. These enterprises included 17 engineering contractors, three foreign investment enterprises, and three labour service companies. More than 40 projects were under construction or had signed contracts. These contracts brought into EG a number of Chinese operators, such as China Dalian International Economic & Technical Cooperation Group, China Road & Bridge Corp, China National Machinery IMP. & EXP. Corp, Sinohydro Corporation, ZTE Corporation, and China Overseas Engineering Group.

Apart from infrastructure, health and training have also been key areas of the bilateral cooperation. According to the Embassy of China in Equatorial Guinea (2012), China has sent 26 medical teams to EG, and Chinese doctors worked in the Malabo Regional Hospital and Bata Regional Hospital. In addition, the Chinese government has granted eight five-year undergraduate scholarships and four postgraduate scholarships per annum to Equatoguinean students since 1977.

- b) After the launch of B&RI: Recently, bilateral cooperation has expanded into energy, infrastructure, trade and investment, culture, Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and healthcare (vaccination). After 2017, with the creation of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, bilateral interchange has been extended to security-coordination. According to the General Administration of Customs of China, bilateral trade between EG and China has seen a significant growth since 2016. The trade doubled in 2017 compared to the level of 2016, and culminated in 2018 in a 38.18% year-on-year growth, then dropped 19.3% in 2019 and plunged 30.98% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak, finally recovering in 2021 with a growth of 5%. Nevertheless, the volume in 2021 is still 92.06% higher than the level of 2016. Imports from China kept pace with the evolution of the total trade volume, whereas exports to China remained steady at 0.13 billion U.S. dollars (GACC, 2022). Table 6 shows the dynamics in bilateral trade between 2017 and 2022, and the year 2022 can be interpreted as "encouraging" in terms of future perspectives.

Table 6 - Equatorial Guinea's Imports from and Exports to China (2017-2022)						
(USD \$ billion)						
Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (Jan. to Nov.)
Imports	1.48	2.14↗	1.72↘	1.15↘	1.21↗	1.45↗
Exports	0.17	0.14↘	0.12↘	0.12	0.12	0.21↗
Total	1.65	2.28↗	1.84↘	1.27↘	1.34↗	1.66↗

Source: GACC: <http://stats.customs.gov.cn/indexEn>

Since 2017, energy cooperation has played a key role in the bilateral trade between the two countries, as China's participation in the Equatoguinean oil industry began to get results by production share, representing more than 60% of EG's export to China. Crude oil imports from China rose steadily from 2017 to 2020, peaking at more than 3 million tons, then falling drastically by 47.97% in 2021 mainly due to the reduction of production and declining oil prices. In 2022, two Chinese companies signed a framework agreement to build a modular refinery in EG with the capacity to process 20,000 barrels per day to



produce asphalt, plastic, and other petroleum derivatives. The project is expected to attract an investment of 450 million U.S. dollars (GACC, 2022).

Table 7 — Crude oil trade volume between Equatorial Guinea and China 2017-2022 (in thousand tons and US\$ million)						
Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (Jan. to Nov.)
Tonnage	2,427,654	2,479,521	2,492,177	3,148,295	1,637,996	1,281,680
USD	1,029	1,349	1,258	1,076	868	1,061
Source: GACC: http://stats.customs.gov.cn/indexEn						

Table 7 depicts the evolution of oil exports from EG to China. If we do not consider the period between 2020 and 2021³ or new investments in this sector, then oil exports from EG to China are expected to increase substantially within the next five to ten years. After 2013, China continued to build infrastructure, power plants, new government buildings, and a new hospital. The headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs project was completed in 2015 by the TOP International Engineering Corporation of China. In the same year, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China signed an infrastructure agreement worth \$2 billion with EG to provide financial support to the Equatoguinean government and Chinese companies operating in the country. Commencing in 2016 and concluding its first phase in 2018, the Bicom hydro power station renovation project has been conducted by China Railway's 14th Bureau with a total investment of RMB 43 million. The project aims to replace four units of the hydro power station to ensure local power supply. Finally, the new Niefang Hospital of EG was completed in December 2022 and was renamed the "China–Equatorial Guinea Friendship Hospital".

New areas of cooperation in culture, ICT and health also achieved varying results. In 2014, the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation of China signed a cooperation agreement with the National University of Equatorial Guinea to establish a Confucius Institute, which was inaugurated later in 2015. In 2015, during his official visit to China, President Teodoro Mbasogo donated a primary school to Jinping County of Yunnan Province to be named the "China–Equatorial Guinea Friendship Primary School". The school was completed in 2016, the same year that China began to develop a large-scale training program called the "Thousand Talents Training Program". The program lasted for five years and trained 200 technicians per year. In 2018, a new fibre-optic connection (Ceiba-2) (Map 1) was implemented by Huawei. This project used Huawei Marine's leading-edge Wavelength Division Multiplex (WDM) and Optical Transport Network (OTN) technologies, and the 290 km system featured a design capacity of 8 Tbps and linked the capital of Malabo to Bata. "The system enables EG to connect to larger submarine cable systems including WACS, SAT-3, and MainOne via Kribi (Cameroon), eventually providing access to a vast European network. It will also provide restoration and redundancy routes

³ The two years are considered atypical due to COVID-19 pandemic.



for existing traffic on Ceiba-1⁴ and the African Coast to Europe (ACE) submarine cable branch to Bata” (Huawei, 2015). It is important to highlight that in the area of technology and communications, EG can have a significant regional role, as it hosts the headquarters of the South-South Triangular cooperation office, and is a member of the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS). Both organizations are very interested in promoting digital sovereignty in Central Africa.

The mission of sending Chinese medical teams to EG remains active. By the end of 2022, China had sent 32 medical teams with a total of 586 doctors to work in hospitals in Malabo and Bata. At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, Equatorial Guinea donated two million U.S. dollars to China in February 2020, to support the country’s fight against the pandemic. China reciprocated by sending two batches of vaccines to EG in 2021.

Besides the areas mentioned above, institutional cooperation between EG and China has begun to draw more attention from the rest of the world. As mentioned previously, EG signed a B&RI MoU in 2019. In that same year, the 5th Mixed Commission for Economy and Trade Cooperation between China and EG was held in Beijing, while EG also participated actively in the first edition of China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo (CAETE) held in Changsha in Hunan Province of China. EG was also at the Coordinators’ Meeting on the Implementation of the Follow-up Actions of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. In 2020, the two countries celebrated the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. In 2021, Equatoguinean President Obiang sent a congratulatory letter to President Xi Jinping on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. In 2022, EG became the 10th member of Forum Macao, and is expected to play an increasingly active role in cooperation between China and other PSCs by leveraging the multilateral cooperation mechanism. On 30 November 2022, the Delegate of Equatorial Guinea to the Permanent Secretariat of Forum Macao (Cristina Mangué Abeso), began her duties, being the first representative, after the accession of EG to the Forum Macao, which took place at the Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of 10 April 2022.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to economic and institutional cooperation, in recent years, the two countries have also begun to discuss the potential of developing a regional coordination cooperation, particularly on maritime security. It has been reported that China plans to establish a permanent military installation in EG. If the project is implemented, EG will be the second African strategic country after Djibouti where China has established a naval base, a fact that will have strong and profound geopolitical implications on South Atlantic security particularly in the Gulf of Guinea. All these results show that bilateral cooperation between the two countries remains overwhelmingly positive. As President Obiang asserted in a message to China in 2021:

“Equatorial Guinea has always regarded China as its most important strategic partner, and sincerely appreciates China’s offering of valuable assistance, including COVID-19 vaccines. Equatorial Guinea will continue to firmly adhere to the One-China policy, firmly support China’s positions on issues concerning China’s core interests, and firmly uphold multilateralism. Equatorial Guinea

⁴ The Ceiba-1 cable system is a 287 km submarine cable, which directly connects Malabo and Bata in Equatorial Guinea.



supports and will actively participate in the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative, and is ready to work with China to enhance bilateral cooperation in various areas as well as cooperation within the FOCAC framework.” (Embajada de la República Popular China en la República de Guinea Ecuatorial, 2021)

In 2022, China Central Television (CCTV) — China’s “mouthpieces of the Party, the government and the people” — broadcast an interview with Equatoguinean President Obiang in “Leaders Talk”, in which he highlighted the relevance of cooperation with China as follows:

“I think that the development of Africa should start with the Africans themselves, the African leaders should think first of all about the transformation of their own states... that is why Equatorial Guinea approved the road map for cooperation with China, it was precisely because China is the first partner that is helping Equatorial Guinea in particular and African countries in general. Therefore, between China's cooperation and the internal development of African states, this (B&RI) is the remedy that can bring Africa out of underdevelopment, out of the misery of poverty that African states are experiencing today. In this sense, we recognise the enormous support that China is giving financially to help the development of African countries.” (CCTV, 2022)

Based on these observations from their bilateral engagement before and after the launch of B&RI, we perceive that cooperation between China and EG has been transformed into more intensive partnership. Indeed, after the launch of the B&RI, cooperation between China and EG has become strategic to both parties, and is expected to continue to grow in the future.

Conclusion: The Future of Sino-Equatoguinean Cooperation

This paper has posed and answered the following research question: What will be the impact of Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation in light of EG’s recent accession to FM?

It is believed that the strategic cooperation between EG and China will deepen and existing areas of trade and development will further expand to capitalize on the trust between them built over the long term. In addition, more new cooperation in areas such as maritime security, major infrastructure, sovereign digital cooperation, education, health, tourism, and blue economy will likely be identified and developed. The U.S. and European Union’s (EU) cooperation models put a strong emphasis on “good governance and anticorruption initiatives”. On the contrary, “Chinese policy is very flexible to the rules of the game preferred by its interlocutor” (Estaban, 2010a) — such is believed to be the essence of China’s “non-interference” principle and has been recognized and welcomed by EG authorities. As President Xi Jinping emphasized during his telephone call with President Obiang in 2021: “China will, as always, firmly support Equatorial Guinea in safeguarding its national sovereignty, exploring its own development path and



promoting more fruitful friendship and cooperation between the two countries in various fields" (Embajada de la República Popular China en la República de Guinea Ecuatorial, 2021). The Chinese cooperation policy which deviates from the EU's conditional cooperation is particularly appealing for the current government of EG. Therefore, the main impact of future Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation can be categorized into three intertwining perspectives: (1) domestically; (2) regionally; and (3) globally.

(1) Domestically, the three-year-old pandemic has had a profound impact on the global economy, the escalating geopolitical tension between Ukraine and Russia, and climate disasters, energy crisis, and a potential food safety concern, resulting in a fundamental economic shift and unstable situation that will be more severe than expected, i.e., a "darkening outlook". The World Bank's Global Economic Prospects (2023) has said that "Global growth is expected to decelerate sharply to 1.7 percent in 2023 — the third weakest pace of growth in nearly three decades, overshadowed only by the global recession caused by the pandemic and the global financial crisis". In this difficult downward scenario, trade and investment between EG and China have been severely affected. Hit by COVID-19, both China and EG are experiencing a strenuous recovery. According to the World Bank, China's GDP growth in 2022 is expected to be only 2.7%, while EG is estimated to have a 3.2% growth (Word Bank, 2022a and c). Moreover, though EG is among the richest countries in Africa with a per capita GDP of US\$8,462 in 2021 due to its oil industry (Word Bank, 2022b), the majority of the people's standard of living has not considerably increased, and farming is still the most common occupation. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Country Report No. 22/267 (2022), EG is facing a series of development risks, such as an expected decrease in economy starting in 2023 due to a decline in hydrocarbon output, a stalled structural reform plan, inadequate governance, considerable corruption risks, low business confidence, a fragile banking system, domestic inflation, and risks of food insecurity caused by the Ukraine crisis of 2022. As for China, the country's growth outlook in 2023 is subjected to significant risks, and deeper structural reform is needed to achieve a more balanced, inclusive, and sustainable growth (Word Bank, 2022c).

As pointed in the 2021 Foreign Investment Cooperation Country (Region) Guide — Equatorial Guinea, a Chinese investor guide made by the Ministry of China, apart from projects under construction, "the flow of Chinese FDI in Equatorial Guinea in 2020 was - \$49.12 million; by of the end of 2020, the stock of Chinese FDI in Equatorial Guinea was \$340 million. Currently, China has no large-scale investment projects in Equatorial Guinea" (Ministry of Commerce of PRC, 2022), but the political alignment between Malabo and Beijing looks promising. However, it is important to bear in mind that Teodoro Obiang has been in power since 1979. Obiang's 40-year regime and his Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE) with absolute advantage in Equatoguinean politics have been severely criticized for corruption, authoritarianism, and human rights violations (Williams, 2011). Since Teodoro Obiang became 80 years old in 2022, his sixth re-election will likely be his last, which will raise the question of political transition in the coming years, and that can be a turning point in Sino-Equatoguinean relations, depending on the outcome of that transition of power. Consequently, there are four expected domestic impacts resulting from Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation: (1) support of economic recovery in the post-pandemic era; (2) support of developing the oil and gas industries; (3) a positive image of China-EG association based on the social impact of



representative projects and the economic contribution from major infrastructure projects; (4) uncertainty of the next cycle of political transition and its effects on cooperation sustainability in the long run.

(2) Regionally, China's cooperation with PSCs in the South Atlantic, particularly with Brazil, Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe, and EG, will facilitate a stronger Chinese presence in the area, especially in the Gulf of Guinea. The growing involvement of EG in the CPLP and arrival of the country's representative to FM will bring new opportunities to reinforce trade among CPLP member-states but mainly between China and the PSCs. Considering that in 2022, the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe has granted to the Safebond consortium a 30-year concession to build the Fernão Dias Seaport, and that China is expected to improve the infrastructure of the seaport of Príncipe, China will re-center and expand its presence in the Gulf of Guinea with EG being the regional hub. Furthermore, EG is expected to hold the CPLP presidency (which rotates among member states) and set its agenda, which can be used to push for more trade, investment, and development cooperation. As the death penalty has been abolished with a new Criminal Code coming into effect in late 2022, EG will continue to play an active role in political cooperation with other CPLP members, particularly in building international legitimacy. With EG's participation in Forum Macao, the country can gain new access to markets by leveraging the role of The Macao Special Administration Region (MSAR)PRC as an extended platform for China and the PSCs. Within the regional dimension, the two pillars of future cooperation between China and EG are expected to shift from "infrastructure connectivity" to "policy coordination" in the context of the B&RI's five-pillar approach. A potential shift can also be observed by China extending an invitation to EG to join the Global Development Initiative (2021), a new global public product of China that further extends the B&RI's reach. EG is expected to play a role, supported by China, in developing digital sovereignty in Central Africa. Consequently, we can expect five regional impacts resulting from Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation: (1) EG is expected to increase its role in international organizations (such as Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, FOCAC and OACPS), as leveraged by Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation; (2) EG is expected to support multilateralism with Chinese characteristics as an innovative approach to new forms of cooperation; (3) EG's CPLP membership will provide a boarder platform for multilateral economic and commercial exchange with all member states of Forum Macao (FM); (4) EG's FM membership will provide a supplementary platform for bilateral economic relations with China; (5) Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation under the B&RI framework will give China a regional positioning, presence, and access, considering its relational role in the context of EG, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Angola.

(3) Globally, in addition to future domestic and regional impacts, Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation has constantly been criticized for benefiting only the politically and economically privileged classes of EG and the national strategy of China itself, while "Chinese aid does not contribute to improve their living conditions" (Estaban, 2010b). Negative and questionable voices have emerged ever since, although in the implementation of various mega-projects China has indeed fulfilled its social responsibility in the form of numerous donations and construction of supporting facilities. As tensions between China and the U.S. continue to mount, China will continue to be perceived as "a systemic competitor, rather than a partner", and Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation is part of that global game. Consequently, the Sino-Equatoguinean layer will



add to the Chinese's global engagement as it will support the accession of EG to WTO, as well as a political alignment at the International Monetary Fund and United Nations General Assembly.

The potential of Sino-Equatoguinean maritime security cooperation, which is considered a significant move of "China's Pan-African security architecture", will be a strong concern for the U.S., and perhaps for Brazil and Angola as well (Tanchum, 2021). In this line of reasoning, the oil and gas maritime exploration and the perspectives of a new Chinese naval base in EG will bring not only a new focus of maritime geopolitical tension but also a new push for the fight against sea piracy.

Despite facing a number of challenging aspects in the future, both China and EG are committed to developing a deeper and more pragmatic cooperation under the "principle of multilateralism, dialogue and consultation and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries" (Embajada de la República Popular China en la República de Guinea Ecuatorial, 2020). Considering the domestic, regional and global perspectives, it is reasonable to conclude that the bilateral cooperation between China and EG is expected to continue to deepen and diversify under the B&RI framework, with especial emphasis on digital and maritime cooperation. China is now developing a strategy for the Gulf of Guinea, in which Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation operates in conjunction with Sino-Angolan and Sino-São Toméan cooperation.

EG's accession to CPLP and membership of FM have been seen by China as a game-changing opportunity, not only to step up its engagement in the South Atlantic and access to Central Africa as part of its globalness (and global vision), but also to offer concurrent models of cooperation in relation to the EU and the U.S. Furthermore, from the Chinese standpoint, its EG partnership has a strategic sense, encompassing a new competitive regional engagement with major global players. The number of Chinese economic agents operating in EG associated with the oil and gas industry as well as in other sectors — namely, communications, media, logistics, fishing, maritime research, education and training, and security — are expected to increase, and infrastructure projects with symbolic diplomatic value (not with economic endeavor) will likely continue.

Likewise, EG's accession to the CPLP and FM membership have been perceived by EG also as a game changer in the regional positioning of the country vis-à-vis its neighbours, and as a new source of political legitimacy for current leadership. The weight obtained with its partnership with China allows EG to endeavour to accede to the WTO, and to be more active in gaining and utilizing its memberships in international organizations, namely, the CPLP, AU, OACPS and AfCFTA. Furthermore, from EG's viewpoint, its Chinese partnership leverages a small archipelago state to the condition of a functional regional power in the Gulf of Guinea.

To summarize the impact of Sino-Equatoguinean cooperation, we identify a clear two-fold answer to our research question: on the one hand, future Sino-Equatoguinean relations will leverage the political legitimacy of the current establishment, but uncertainties associated with the political transition in EG will endure; on the other hand, by reinforcing its presence in the South Atlantic through EG, China will gain access to markets in Central Africa (digitalization, oil and gas included) and extend its influence on a number of international organizations, for example the CPLP.



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