

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND GUINEA-BISSAU BETWEEN DIPLOMACY, ECONOMY AND SECURITY

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Abstract

Guinea-Bissau is experiencing a difficult time for growth and development in this period. Political tensions and the impact of natural disasters make it difficult to build solid international relations that could allow the country to produce better infrastructures and to enter the scene in the region as well as in the world. The complex relations of the People's Republic of China with the country also fit into this framework. This element must be taken into serious consideration, in light of the important presence of the Asian country on the African continent, and of the volume of business and the support for infrastructure construction that it guarantees to many African nations. Diplomatic relations between the African country and its political parties with China have been fluctuating, and marked by internal issues as well as international events. To date, the People's Republic of China has outlined a major investment plan in Guinea-Bissau. The purpose of the article is to trace a brief history of relations between the African and Asian countries, and to understand the national and regional conditions of the new cooperation and trade projects, with respect to both the continental dimension and that of Guinea-Bissau's internal politics.

Keywords

Africa-Asia Relations, Decolonization, South-South Trade, Socialism, Belt and Road Initiative.

Resumo

A Guiné-Bissau está a atravessar um período difícil em termos de crescimento e desenvolvimento. As tensões políticas e o impacto das catástrofes naturais dificultam a construção de relações internacionais sólidas que permitam ao país criar melhores infraestruturas e entrar em cena na região e no mundo. As complexas relações da República Popular da China com o país também se enquadram neste contexto. Este elemento deve ser levado em consideração, tendo em vista a importante presença do país asiático no continente africano e o volume de negócios e o apoio à construção de infraestruturas que garante a muitas nações africanas. As relações diplomáticas entre o país africano e os seus partidos políticos com a China têm sido flutuantes e marcadas por questões internas, bem como por eventos internacionais. Até à data, a República Popular da China delineou um importante plano de investimento na Guiné-Bissau. O objetivo do artigo é traçar uma breve história das relações entre os países africanos e asiáticos e compreender as condições nacionais e



regionais dos novos projetos de cooperação e comércio, tanto no que diz respeito à dimensão continental como à política interna da Guiné-Bissau.

Palavras-chave

Relações África-Ásia, Descolonização, Comércio Sul-Sul, Socialismo, Iniciativa "Belt and Road".

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Introduction

The historical-political phase we are experiencing is characterized by the explosion of some territorialized criticalities which, however, pose imbalances that are difficult to heal within the world-system. On the one hand, the planet is experiencing an increasingly widespread phase of development, on the other, local crises and instabilities threaten to undermine this delicate order.

This is not entirely accidental, but it is part of an internal logic of the world economic system¹ which international political institutions try to put a stop to. At this stage it is possible to argue that Africa is growing, economically and infrastructurally. This is the framework in which the recent history of Guinea-Bissau fits. A country that has gone through a harsh phase of decolonization, it seeks to grow and stabilize in the globalized and interconnected world in which we live. After the separation from the Portuguese colonial regime, Guinea-Bissau was first led by the authority of the national liberation movement, and then entered a phase of serious political clashes and relative instability. Despite this, the country has many resources and great growth potential that must only be used to the best. In this sense, it is trying to grow in the infrastructural field and to build its own economic-political autonomy starting from the sectors in which it finds the greatest advantages. It is in this context that we can insert and read the relations between the Sub-Saharan country and the People's Republic of China. These countries

¹ "According to [David] Harvey's theory, the constitutive element of capitalist development is represented by the continuous production and reproduction of space to ensure favorable conditions for the accumulation of capital. In doing this, however, capitalism suffers from a space-time contradiction that derives from its double need to continually speed up the circulation of goods and capital and to create, at the same time, material structures and infrastructures anchored to the territory. The construction of spatial fixes, functional to absorb the accumulated capital, in fact requires long-term investment projects that slow down and limit the regeneration and replacement of capital. [...] The expansion of capitalism therefore determines a growth of antagonism between different actors who seek to acquire or destroy the assets of rivals through commercial and financial competition, or geopolitical maneuvers. The creation of new spaces for "endless accumulation" therefore also implies the devaluation and / or destruction of some pre-existing assets [...]. During a crisis of over-accumulation, certain economic assets abroad are in fact devalued by means of financial and / or military operations (US model), in conditions, for example, of low competition and political corruption, thus opening up to fierce competition for their hoarding at very low prices, where the strongest wins. The consequence of such crisis situations is therefore also manifested in the increase of geopolitical rivalry, in the context of which it is decided which territories will have to endure the attack of devaluation. The accumulation of capital can in fact be maximized only in conditions of limited competition and geographical concentration of wealth / power, otherwise distribution and fair exchange would prevail over accumulation and unequal exchange". Fabio Massimo Parenti, *Mutamento del sistema-mondo. Per una geografia dell'ascesa cinese*, Aracne, Rome 2009, pp. 31-34 [translated from Italian].



have actually experienced a very similar recent history, having both freed themselves from the colonial yoke, albeit in different ways and contexts. Not only this, but Guinea-Bissau has also received help from the Asian country in this delicate process, which has favored alternating diplomatic relations between these two political entities. The theoretical profile of Chinese politics has always been addressed both to the sector of countries emerging from colonization, and to the idea of development cooperation between decolonized countries. This is why the relations between Guinea-Bissau and China are so important and so strongly characterized in a political sense, although this profile may escape the less attentive analyst.

In this historical moment we see two trends that go to marry almost spontaneously: on the one hand, China seeks partnerships with African countries, both to follow the premises of its international economic policy, formulated since the early days of the revolutionary communist government, which to acquire through trade and cooperation of raw materials of great importance for the country's industry; on the other hand, there is the attempt of many African countries to grow and to guarantee ever greater stability and security, but in addition to that try to internationalize, accessing international markets and selling their raw materials becomes a necessity for these countries.

Internationalization, in the first form of export, is therefore of vital importance, as is the attraction of foreign investment.

These are significant historical trends, and despite all the elements of instability and volatility they cannot change overnight: they represent in many ways the structural nature of today's world economy. World economy marked by a restructuring of the specific weight of countries and continents, thanks to a greater diffusion (albeit slow) of economic development.

With this article we intend to demonstrate how the political history of Guinea-Bissau has determined all those political and economic trends that, to date, are relevant within a complex analysis of the actual condition of the country as well as its specific relations. In this case, the actual weight that the phenomenon of decolonization has had has conditioned in all respects the form that the country, its trade and its diplomatic measure have assumed. It is precisely this dimension that, as we will see, has put it in comparison with contemporary China, also born from a phenomenon of decolonization. This has structured, over time, a certain type of economic-political relationship between the two countries that intervenes in a context that is undoubtedly not easy (both at a regional and global level), but that moves at rapid speed in a world situation in complete restructuring.

Guinea-Bissau between risks and regional context

One of the examples that are often cited is that of the Congolese economic miracle, where the African country has experienced significant growth rates. This African country, now a symbol of renewed hopes for economic growth, has gone from a domestic product



growth rate of 5.8% in 2018² to an expected growth of 6.4% in 2022³, and this despite the uncertainties and difficulties caused by the impact of the pandemic⁴.

All this is part of a generally positive trend of the entire sub-Saharan region. The region's economy is expected to expand to 3.6% according to data from the World Bank⁵.

Even extending the analysis to the whole region, we see how the recovery from the difficult pandemic phase of Covid-19 has led to good economic outlets, again according to informations released by the World Bank:

"Prospects for the East and Southern African subregion show a sustained recovery (4.1 percent) from the recession, down to 3.1 percent in 2022, and then settling around 3.8 percent in 2024. The Western and Central Africa subregion is projected to grow 4.2 percent in 2022 and 4.6 percent in 2023. The 2022 forecast is revised up by 0.6 percentage point compared to the October 2021 forecast, largely reflecting upgrades in Nigeria.

Economic activity in Sub-Saharan Africa is projected to grow at 3.9 percent and 4.2 percent in 2023 and 2024, respectively. A recovery in global demand is expected in 2023 as most of the shocks dragging down the global economy are expected to dissipate."⁵

Guinea-Bissau fits into this context, experiencing alternating phases in its successes in terms of economic growth. According to the African Development Bank Group, despite the negative score of 1.4% in growth (due to the aforementioned difficulties of the specific period⁶), this country should have achieved growth of 3.8% in 2021⁷. Furthermore "GDP growth in 2022 and 2023 is projected at 3.7% and 4.5%, driven by recovery in trade⁹". Unfortunately, this is part of a context of serious volatility, due to events of a political or environmental nature. Starting with the former, we must remember that Guinea-Bissau is frequently harassed by climate shocks. In 2003, 2004 and 2005 the African country underwent severe flooding which damaged its infrastructure, villages and the agricultural sector, leaving a serious impact on the economy and society⁸.

"Floods are a recurring natural hazard in Guinea-Bissau, especially along its coast. Drought is a recurring natural disaster in Guinea-Bissau and has experienced some

²Africa News staff, DRC faces economic challenges, on Africa News: <https://www.africanews.com/2019/06/20/drcfaces-economic-challenges/>

³ Reuters staff, Congo an economic 'bright spot' in Africa, says IMF chief, on Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/congo-an-economic-bright-spot-africa-says-imf-chief-2021-12-08/>

⁴ "Georgieva said the world economy is recovering from the worst impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, but has lost a bit of momentum with the United States and China slowing down."

Reuters staff, Congo an economic 'bright spot' in Africa, says IMF chief, on Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/congo-an-economic-bright-spot-africa-says-imf-chief-2021-12-08/> ⁵The World Bank, The World Bank in Africa, on The World Bank website: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/overview>

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ "The agriculture-based economy suffered from lockdowns and closure of borders in 2020, recovering in 2021." African Development Bank Group, Guinea-Bissau Economic Outlook, on African Development Bank Group website: <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/west-africa/guinea-bissau/guinea-bissau-economic-outlook>

⁷ African Development Bank Group, Guinea-Bissau Economic Outlook, on African Development Bank Group website: <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/west-africa/guinea-bissau/guinea-bissau-economic-outlook> Ibidem.

⁸ Climate Change Knowledge Portal, Guinea-Bissau, on Climate Change Knowledge Portal – The World Bank website: <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/guinea-bissau/vulnerability>. Ibidem.



devastating droughts in the recent past. Heavier rainfall events in the future along with higher tides from rising sea level will continue to impact the coast. Sea level rise continues to affect Guinea-Bissau's coastal region and is a serious threat to 70% of the population who reside along the coast. [...] Water resources in Guinea-Bissau are diminishing due to the observed decrease in rainfall since 1961 causing: a slower recharge of aquifers and increasing the depth at which water can be accessed, a reduction in the volume of water in rivers, and an increase in saltwater intrusion on coastal aquifers."¹¹

Added to this are the high epidemic risks for the population, including that of meningitis⁹. According to the United Nations, Guinea-Bissau's environmental disasters could increase in the next period, especially in the areas already affected¹⁰. This for obvious reasons has very strong repercussions on the economy¹¹. Also according to the African Development Bank Group:

"Guinea-Bissau is 130 on the 2021 GCRI—ranked first as more exposed to extreme events—but data issues may muddy the picture. The climate change impact is widespread, and resources are being fast depleted, with fires destroying more than 120 ha of forest every year. Despite an overall decrease in rainfall, rain events are growing increasingly intense, often paired with strong winds, causing huge agricultural losses. In 2020, severe floods hit the rice-producing region in the south."¹²

Beyond that, the political factor must also be considered. Guinea-Bissau, which for a long time was governed by the movement that led it to anti-colonial national liberation, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, is experiencing a phase of political alternation which is expressed with very bitter clashes. Unfortunately, this type of political disruption and enmity took place immediately before decolonization took place.

"The national political arena has been marked since the assassination of Cabral in January 1973 by profound struggles for power among competing institutions, leaders, and ethnic groups that have been significantly affected by the rice-producing peasantry. Rather than ideological unity and cultural integration, the leadership has been weakened by personal antagonisms and serious ethnic divisions."¹³

Political tensions in the country must be kept in mind in a three hundred and sixty degree consideration of the country's future, because an unstable country attracts far fewer foreign investments, and does not allow governments to operate in a linear manner with

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ AA.VV., Guinea-Bissau Disaster Risk Profile – Floods & Droughts (2019), UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2019, p. 15: <http://riskprofilesundrr.org/documents/1521>

¹¹ "The amount of lost working days amounts to 44.000 under present climate conditions, and increase to 57.000 in the future. Under present climate conditions, 0.22% of the average number of working days in crop cultivation are lost and this is predicted to increase to 0.28% in the future. However, the number of working days lost, expressed as a percentage of the average amount of days required for harvesting, is approximately 7 times higher."

AA.VV., Guinea-Bissau Disaster Risk Profile – Floods & Droughts (2019), UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2019, p. 16: <http://riskprofilesundrr.org/documents/1521>

¹² African Development Bank Group, Guinea-Bissau Economic Outlook, on African Development Bank Group website: <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/west-africa/guinea-bissau/guinea-bissau-economic-outlook>

¹³ Joshua B. Forrest, Guinea-Bissau Since Independence: A Decade of Domestic Power Struggles, in Modern African Studies, vol. 25 no.1 y. 2008, p. 96.



respect to the modernization measures necessary for the proper functioning of an economy within the international scenario. Also the political element, in this sense, is to be understood in its weight on the relations that Guinea-Bissau is developing with the People's Republic of China, given that the latter are aimed, among other things, at a lasting economic partnership, which it leads to the interrelation of the two countries in large commercial projects and, with the Belt and Road Initiative, infrastructural projects.

In this context, it becomes very important to take into account, as already mentioned, the regional instability, which extends to the whole of West Africa¹⁴ and which obviously can also have serious repercussions on Guinea-Bissau. Guinea-Bissau itself is experiencing political turmoil that will continue through 2024¹⁵ and 2025¹⁶. It is therefore essential to take into account these possible instabilities in order to understand the role of the country's political actors and its tendency towards growth.

China and Guinea-Bissau: a history of decolonization

When we talk about the relations that have developed diachronically between China and Guinea-Bissau we must bear in mind the most important element that has structured their existence and development, namely decolonization. Guinea-Bissau became autonomous in recent times after the national liberation struggle against Portugal. This was part of a continental movement which was that of rejection of the colonization that Western countries still exercised against African ones. This was a period of bitter clashes and transformations within not only the entire African continent or all the countries that belonged to what Mao called the "Third World"²⁰, but for the entire world power structure.

As has rightly been pointed out by various authors and thinkers of international politics, this period coincided with that of the re-dimensioning of the political-strategic influence of Europe, the so-called Old World, on the fate of the planet. Europe, in that specific historical phase, withdrew from its world influence to the advantage of other forms of political influence that projected themselves from other centers of radiation¹⁷. The two main ones, famously, were the United States of America and the Soviet Union, but over time the People's Republic of China was added. The latter was another country that, after an arduous war during the Second World Conflict, arose from a period of political prostration and lack of autonomy. Specifically, China, which boasted centuries and centuries of sovereign civilization, in modernity had found itself in conditions of

¹⁴ Héní Nsaibia, Conflict intensifies and instability spreads beyond Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, on ACLED website: <https://acleddata.com/conflict-watchlist-2025/sahel-and-coastal-west-africa/>

¹⁵ Dominic Wabwireh, Tensions rise in Guinea-Bissau over president's mandate expiration date, on Africa News: <https://www.africanews.com/2025/02/26/tensions-rise-in-guinea-bissau-over-presidents-mandate-expiration-date/>

¹⁶ Hany Wahila, Guinea-Bissau: Continued Turbulence in Struggle to Restrain Executive Power, on Africa Center for Strategic Studies website: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/2025-elections/guineabissau/> ²⁰ Mao Zedong, On Diplomacy, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing 1998.

Editorial Department of Renmin Ribao, Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism, Renmin Ribao, Beijing 1977.

Jiang An, Mao Zedong's "Three Worlds" theory: Political considerations and value for the times, in Social Sciences in China, vol. 34 no. 1 y. 2013, pp. 35-57.

¹⁷ "International relations were losing their Eurocentric character as a result of the rise of Russia and the U.S. as superpowers and the internationalization of the economy."

Paul Piccone and G. L. Ulmen, Schmitt's Testament and the Future of Europe, in Telos, n. 83 y. 1990, p. 4.



subordination with respect to Europe and the United States, and to Japan which was building the so-called "Coprosperity Sphere"¹⁸.

The Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao, had to free itself first of Japanese influence on the country, together with the Nationalist Party (in Chinese "Kuomintang") led by Chiang Kai-shek. After that it had to fight against his own previous Kuomintang allies, supported by various foreign powers. This type of victory proved to be the decisive moment for national and international politics, as well as for the economy of this country, which after some difficult periods took off and was able to maintain its autonomy from the centrifugal forces of the changing global scenario. Not only has China established its own perimeter of autonomy with respect to the West (European or American) and the Japanese Empire, but also towards the Soviet Union: as the French historian Maurice Meisner, biographer of Mao recalls, China entered into bitter conflict with the Stalinist leadership to guarantee the foundation of an autonomous communist state despite the contrary opinions of Moscow, which preferred collaboration between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang¹⁹. These disagreements escalated over time, until there was almost a complete break between the USSR and socialist China, where the latter accused the Soviet country of being a "social-imperialist" entity²⁰. It is very interesting for us to note how the rift between China and the Soviet Union led to an intensification of the leading role of the East Asian country towards the decolonized world, and in particular Africa, especially starting from 1962²¹. It could be said in fact that since that serious division in the socialist bloc, China has represented a much more important agglomeration point for Africa than the Soviet Union²².

This type of fracture did not damage, in the global political perspective and in world public opinion, the idea of bipolarity, the division of the world between communist countries and the capitalist world. The non-aligned countries became part of this political-internationalistic evaluation mode as elements of confirmation.

It is within this scenario that Guinea-Bissau gained its independence, through the political struggle of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde. The Party obtained the independence of the African country in 1973. Being the party of clear

¹⁸ Jeremy A. Yellen, *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2019.

¹⁹ Cf. Maurice Meisner, *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait*, Polity, Cambridge 2006.

²⁰ "'Social imperialism' [...]. It was used to describe those Marxists of the Second International who acquiesced in the violent escalation of national rivalries in 1914: who made their peace, in other words, with the imperialist character of their respective nation-states. This was also an option for reform instead of revolution, an explicit legitimization of the gradualist practice into which most of the socialist parties had comfortably settled" [Geoff Heley, *Defining Social Imperialism: Use and Abuse of an Idea*, in *Social History*, vol.1 no.3 y. 1976, p. 266]. Later this term was used no longer against the European social democratic reformists but against the Soviet Union: cf. Mao Tse-Tung, *On Khrushchov's Phoney Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World: Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU (IX)*, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing 1964.

²¹ Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet split and its consequences*, in Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Craig Daigle [edited by], *The Routledge Handbook of the Cold War*, Routledge, London / New York 2014, pp. 81-82.

"On 5 October, in a conversation with North Korean Vice Premier Yi Chu-yŏn, Zhou Enlai said that Albania, Cuba, Guinea, and Algeria had all requested aid from China in 1960" [Danhui Li and Yafeng Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959-1973: A New History*, Lexington Books, Lanham 2018, p. 146].

²² Robert A. Scalapino, *Sino-Soviet competition in Africa*, in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 4 no. 4 y. 1964, p. 640. These were already the accusations that the Soviet leadership made against Mao in 1956: Mingjiang Li, *Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split: Ideological Dilemma*, Routledge, London / New York 2012, p. 32.



socialist inspiration, like most of the anticolonial political movements and groups of the time, the country quickly approached the communist camp:

"Ideology facilitated the interaction between the PAIGC and the communist states. The politics of Cold War brought the communist states to the same side of the national liberation movements; both claimed to fight Western imperialism. It is important to note that neither Cabral nor the PAIGC could be classified as Marxists; yet, in many ways, Marxism informed the organization's political work. Cabral's political analyses relied on the Marxist class-based approach and his political language included Marxist vocabulary. Additionally, there was a confluence of ideological precepts that linked the PAIGC to the communist states: anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, the legitimacy of national liberation struggle, and internationalism were at the heart of their political discourse."²³

This did not prevent Cabral, however, from maintaining excellent diplomatic relations with various religious denominations and many Western countries²⁴.

The first country to recognize its independence was socialist Romania²⁵ (whose influence fell under the USSR), but diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China were inaugurated shortly after. It should be remembered, however, that before this, the President of the country, Ahmed Sékou Touré, was considered as early as 1958 as a real "communist" by American officials, having also renounced maintaining close relations with the former French colonialists, and having also requested assistance from the Soviet Union for his country²⁶.

First of all, it must be remembered that the party in question was supported in the liberation struggle from China, in line with the internationalist plans of the communist political theory. Notoriously, however, there were some theoretical differences between China and the Soviet Union (as we have already mentioned) and one of these was that Maoist China followed a line that could be defined as national-communist, according to which national revolutions did not have to conform ideologically and politically to a central model, or to refer politically to a specific international institution²⁷. This could also be one of the reasons for the very specific evolution of the conduct and ideological line of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde.

The relations between the two countries were situated within an issue, identified by the Chinese President Mao, namely that of the "Third World"²⁸. This theory postulated the

²³ Abel Djassi Amado, The PAIGC 'Congratulatory' Diplomacy towards Communist States, 1960-1964, in *Lusotopie*, vol. 19 no. 1 y. 2020, p. 5: <https://journals.openedition.org/lusotopie/4640>

²⁴ António Tomás in Review of African Political Economy staff, Amílcar Cabral's life, legacy and reluctant nationalism – an interview with António Tomás, in Review of African Political Economy: <https://roape.net/2023/05/03/amilcar-cabrals-life-legacy-and-reluctant-nationalism-an-interview-with-antonio-tomas/>

²⁵ "Romania had a multidisciplinary and multifaceted economic and political approach in Africa, for example, Romanian media. It propagates the involvement in supporting liberation movements (the fact that Romania was the first state that recognized Guinea-Bissau's independence)." Cristian-Constantin Şipeţean, Economic and political relations between Romania and African countries during the totalitarian regime (1965-1980), in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie "George Bariţiu" - Series Historica*, no. 51 y. 2012, p. 235.

²⁶ Jeffrey James Byrne, The Cold War in Africa, in Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Craig Daigle [edited by], *The Routledge Handbook of the Cold War*, Routledge, London / New York 2014, p. 152.

²⁷ Orazio Maria Gnerre, In the Flow of History and International Relations: A Theoretical Profile of Contemporary China, in *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental Studies*, vol. 2 no. 1 y. 2022, p. 109.

²⁸ "On 10 April 1974, Chinese vice premier Deng Xiaoping brought Mao's three-worlds thesis to the General Assembly of the UN. Deng labeled the Soviet Union and the US, the two superpowers that formed the First



principle that countries not aligned with US or Soviet global power should join in a struggle for independence and the acquisition of development capabilities. In this sense, Africa was a geopolitical hub of great importance, together with the colonized countries of Asia and Latin America. The attention of the People's Republic of China towards Africa has therefore always been of great importance. Suffice it to say that the theory on the Three Worlds was enunciated by Mao for the first time in the presence of the Algerian president Houari Boumediene²⁹.

China, during the decolonization, entered the political game of the Lusophone nations and subjected to Portuguese rule, including Guinea-Bissau³⁰. China has also developed the idea of South-South trade, a principle still considered valid by the Asian country and promoted by international institutions such as the United Nations³¹. This principle was launched during the Bandung conference of 1955. The official theme of the conference was, not surprisingly, that of dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Africa. China, as mentioned, was among the main promoters of the Conference, showing great interest in the project and favoring a theoretical line on how this type of cooperation relationship should work. This event is also so important for contemporary China, which laid the foundations for the development of the concept of South-South cooperation in contemporary history, that on the 60th anniversary of this conference, in 2015, a third session was held in Bandung and Jakarta, in which President Xi Jinping took part³².

At the first Bandung conference took part these African nations: Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, Liberia and Sudan. But during the second, in 2005, so well after the period of decolonization, the African nations participating were 52. The cementing of Afro-Asian relations meant at the time and still means that of Sino-African relations.

As we were saying, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde almost immediately established diplomatic relations with China once colonial power was overthrown. Diplomatic relations with the Asian country were already underway in 1974, in line with political cooperation prior to the moment of decolonization. This cooperation

World, as "the two largest international oppressors and exploitators" and the "main war originators in the contemporary era." The Second World, composed of other capitalist/developed countries, while facing the attempts by the two superpowers to control them, demonstrated in their policies the legacies of their own past as colonial powers. The Third World, formed by the vast majority of developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, favored the "tendency of revolution" and opposed "the tendency of war," and they thus represented the "force playing a major role in promoting progress in the world."

Chen Jian, China's changing policies toward the Third World and the end of the global Cold War, in Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Sergey Radchenko [edited by], *The End of the Cold War and the Third World: New Perspectives on Regional Conflict*, Routledge, London / New York 2011, p. 106.

²⁹ "Mao [...] said to Algerian leader Houari Boumediene that "China belongs to the Third World, as politically and economically China is not in the same group of the rich and powerful, and thus can only be with those countries that are relatively poor." Mao's new expressions immediately became the basic guideline of the PRC's international policies."

Chen Jian, China's changing policies toward the Third World and the end of the global Cold War, in Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Sergey Radchenko [edited by], *The End of the Cold War and the Third World: New Perspectives on Regional Conflict*, Routledge, London / New York 2011, pp. 106-107.

³⁰ Steven F. Jackson, China's Third World Foreign Policy: The Case of Angola and Mozambique, 1961-93, in *The China Quarterly*, no. 142 y. 1995, pp. 388-422.

³¹ United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, About UNOSSC, on United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation website: <https://unsouthsouth.org/about/about-unossc/>

³² Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping Attends Activities Commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Bandung Conference, on Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China website:

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/2015zt/xjpdjstjxgsfwbfydnxycxyfldrhyhlhy60znjnhd/201505/t20150505_704906.html



was interrupted at a certain moment due to political-ideological disagreements between the nationalist and pan-African movement for the liberation of Guinea and Communist China. Between the 1960s and 1970s the movement oscillated between alliances with the Soviet Union and China, reconsolidating the latter towards the end of this period³³.

In any case, after decolonization, after a few months, relations between China and Guinea-Bissau were re-established. This happened in the period immediately following decolonization, only to be interrupted, again in 1990, with the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde still in power. Until that date there had been economic exchanges between the two countries and China had provided for the construction of a stadium, a hospital and other facilities in the African country³⁴.

Relations broke off as Guinea Bissau began diplomatic relations with Taiwan³⁹. The relationship was then "mended" in 1998. This was done with a joint statement that between them said:

"The government of the People's Republic of China supports the efforts made by the Republic of Guinea-Bissau for maintaining the national sovereignty and development of economy. The government of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau recognizes that the government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole China and that Taiwan is a part of the inseparable territory of China. The People's Republic of China expressed its appreciation for the stand adopted by the government of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau."³⁵

Despite the ups and downs of the political events in Guinea-Bissau, China has shown a continuing interest in the African country. Over time, the history of diplomatic breakups and estrangements has also given rise to as many rapprochements.

Today's relations between China and Guinea-Bissau

As we have said, Chinese policy in Africa continues to follow the principles emanating from the first Bandung conference in 1955, albeit renewed for the present time. One of the fundamental elements remains that of the political and economic relationship between Asia and Africa, as geopolitical entities close in interest and in recent history.

In fact, among the points proposed by Xi Jinping during the re-edition of the Conference in 2015, there was the expansion of south-south cooperation, and therefore the expansion of the number of countries that exchange and cooperate with each other, and also the increase in cooperation between Asia and Africa. In this sense, Xi Jinping said, relations between Asia and Africa are to be considered winning, given the complementarity of the growth projects of these two areas³⁶. We must also remember, to reiterate the centrality of the relationship between China and Africa in contemporary international politics, a relationship that therefore assumes importance also for Guinea-

³³ Julião Soares Sousa, Amílcar Cabral, the PAIGC and the Relations with China at the Time of the Sino-Soviet Split and of Anti-Colonialism. Discourses and Praxis, in *The International History Review*, vol. 42 no. 6 y. 2020.

³⁴ Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Guinea-Bissau, on China.org.cn: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/focac/183519.htm> ³⁹ Ibidem.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Xinhua staff, Xi raises three-point proposal on carrying forward Bandung Spirit, on China Daily: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015xivisitpse/2015-04/22/content_20511293.htm



Bissau, that Asia and Africa are areas of relative growth, in which some actors are performing very positively compared to their recent history. It is no coincidence that Asia and Africa have two of the BRICS countries (respectively China and South Africa), an economic and political alliance between growing countries. Africa, as we have already seen, is also experiencing growth processes in some specific territories which introduces it to a substantially positive trend.

The economic relationship between BRICS and Africa is in fact today becoming a topic of interest for world politics:

"The size of the BRICS economies, their economic potential and their increasing international demand for goods make them particularly relevant to Africa's development. The greatest impact of the BRICS on Africa will be achieved through three key channels: trade, investment and development assistance. Regarding Trade between the BRICS and Africa, it can be summarized under two key features: Africa's exports to the BRICS are dominated by fuels and primary commodities (mainly to China and India) and the BRICS' exports to African countries are dominated by manufactured goods. For resource-rich African countries, gains from the primary commodity boom should be invested to fund higher-value production (primarily in manufacturing). They also need to invest in physical infrastructure to address steep transport costs. Further, Africa's producers have to be more closely linked to global value chains, coordinating with them (to ensure that production and information are linked in a timely manner) and meeting global standards. [...] The size of the BRICS economies, their economic potential and their increasing international demand for goods make them particularly relevant to Africa's development."³⁷

Despite the political instability of the African country, China has started trading with the African country again. According to Chinese data, the volume of trade between the two countries in 2002 was \$ 4.504 million³⁸. To date, China continues to invest in the African country (including in a \$ 48 million project for the modernization of the country's telecommunications network³⁹), as in many other sub-Saharan countries. It was also noted that "China [is] a major bilateral donor in Africa and means they will overtake the US as the biggest aid donor to Africa"⁴⁰.

Guinea-Bissau also signed a memorandum with China in November 2021 regarding its adhesion to the Chinese project of the so-called "Belt and Road Initiative"⁴¹. The Belt and Road, or BRI, is a vast infrastructure construction project as well as an extension of commercial lines that will connect a whole series of countries and outlets to China and to each other, innervating from Eurasia to Africa. The extension of the Belt and Road to

³⁷ AA.VV., BRICS in Africa: Economic Ties and Impact. BCP Papers – v. 7 n. 1, on BRICS Policy Center website: <https://bricspolicycenter.org/en/publications/brics-in-africa-economic-ties-and-impacts/>

³⁸ Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Guinea-Bissau, on China.org.cn: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/focac/183519.htm>

³⁹ Chris Devonshire-Ellis, Guinea-Bissau Joins The Belt And Road Initiative, on Silk Road Briefing: <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2021/11/28/guinea-bissau-joins-the-belt-and-road-initiative/>

⁴⁰ Elling Tjønneland, The Changing Role of Chinese Development Aid, CMI Insight number 2 March 2020, p. 4: <https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/7173-the-changing-role-of-chinese-development-aid.pdf>

⁴¹ National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China, Guinea-Bissau Joins Belt and Road Initiative, on National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China website: https://en.ndrc.gov.cn/news/mediarresources/202112/t20211210_1307485.html



Africa seems very powerful, and many African states have already joined the project, including South Africa.

This type of project could certainly guarantee Guinea Bissau some types of advantages, if exploited to the fullest in relation to increasing investments for development. Furthermore, the guarantee of the construction of infrastructure projects such as ports, highways and railways is of great importance for the Sub-Saharan countries.

Obviously, many variables remain in diplomatic relations between two countries, but Chinese investments tie the Asian country to the African one. These political-economic phenomena should be analyzed not only with a national focus but also with a regional one, to establish the development potential and external influences coming from the geographical sector in which a political unit (in this case Guinea-Bissau) exercises its administration.

It is interesting to note how the meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Guinea-Bissau President Umaro Sissoco Embaló in 2024 underlined what we have repeatedly expressed in this article, namely that the relations between the two countries are dictated by a common history: "Xi Jinping noted that China and Guinea-Bissau have a history of special friendship. China supports Guinea-Bissau in independently exploring a development path that suits its national conditions and intends to inherit the traditional friendship with Guinea-Bissau⁴²". The two presidents decided to elevate the relationship between the two countries to a strategic partnership⁴⁸. This type of partnership, demonstrating how the model of social and economic relations is very similar to that developed in the Mao era, would produce a type of multilevel exchange, ranging from economic aid to infrastructure construction to trade⁴³. In this meeting it was highlighted that "both China and Africa have splendid civilizations, both have suffered from the painful history of colonization and aggression, and both cherish and pursue national independence and liberation⁴⁴".

Currently, the two countries are working on the mining sector in Guinea, as Guinea-Bissau has signed an important agreement with Chinalco⁴⁵. Partnership (within the BRI project) therefore manifests itself not only in the construction of infrastructure⁴⁶, but also in commercial alliances.

That said, the level of infrastructure construction also plays a role in this type of partnership: "Speaking at Osvaldo Vieira International Airport in Bissau before his trip,

⁴² CRI Online staff, Colloquio tra Xi Jinping e presidente di Guinea-Bissau, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, on CRI online [translated from Italian]: <https://italian.cri.cn/2024/07/10/ARTIzKaE0xRoIehr3fAO8PhS240710.shtml> ⁴⁸ AfricaNews staff, Guinea-Bissau, China upgrade ties as presidents meet, on AfricaNews:

<https://www.africanews.com/2024/07/11/guinea-bissau-china-upgrade-ties-as-presidents-meet/>

⁴³ "Guinea-Bissau hopes to learn from China's development experience, and strengthen cooperation with China in areas such as trade, investment, infrastructure and mineral resources" [Xinhua staff, Chinese, Guinea-Bissau presidents hold talks, elevate ties, on Xinhua: <https://english.news.cn/20240711/89ecee3ff4694d5f8fe67ca686b244d2/c.html>].

⁴⁴ Xinhua staff, Chinese, Guinea-Bissau presidents hold talks, elevate ties, on Xinhua: <https://english.news.cn/20240711/89ecee3ff4694d5f8fe67ca686b244d2/c.html>

⁴⁵ Sarnali Chakraborty, Advancing Guinea-Bissau's mining sector with the newly signed agreement with Chinalco, on Al Circle: <https://www.alcircle.com/news/advancing-guinea-bissau-s-mining-sector-with-the-newly-signed-agreement-with-chinalco-112691>

⁴⁶ Wang Zizheng, Lyu Chengcheng and Zhou Chuyun, Feature: China-Guinea-Bissau partnership yields tangible benefits, empowers local fisheries, on Xinhua: <https://english.news.cn/20240712/726db3f9f1e74646b8f38bc3e8f3a575/c.html>



Sissoco Embaló said that China had committed a further US\$27.5 million to Guinea-Bissau to be allocated to new projects. Infrastructure currently being built with China's help includes an 8.2-kilometre, US\$14.8 million highway connecting the airport to the town of Safim. Upcoming projects include a conference centre, around 300 kilometres of road rehabilitation, and a university campus for 12,000 students⁴⁷.

Conclusions

We have seen how the history of Guinea-Bissau and the People's Republic of China has already been intertwined at the time of decolonization. This was due both to theoretical-political issues and to the material and geopolitical interests of both the actors in question. This type of gravitational field that was activated in the decolonial period between Asia and Africa is certainly not extinguishable due to transitory political issues, but manifests a long-lasting trend under which compelling reasons are harboring. These reasons must be kept in mind because they represent one of the key issues for interpreting contemporary international politics and the advanced stage of globalization processes. The latter, as President Xi Jinping himself reiterated in his 2017 speech at the Davos Forum⁴⁸, are not only the processes of deconstructing international security or political sovereignty created by uncontrolled market phenomena, but they are also the establishment of relations of mutual interest between global actors for the benefit of a spread of well-being and human development. This type of request was naturally processed within the political discourse of territorial and national realities that have experienced periods of subordination.

With this article we intend to demonstrate how the relations between China and Guinea-Bissau, which have developed over a long period of contemporary history, from the context of the Cold War to the present day in a phase of growing multipolarization, have occurred on a double track, that is, that of diplomatic dialogue permitted by a certain type of political-cultural attitude, and by a realistic approach towards the economic and trade needs of the two countries. Specifically, the colonial question is not of secondary importance with respect to these two areas, because decolonization provides both a framework of political meaning to the cooperation between the two countries (which therefore also occurs in areas other than the merely economic one), but also guarantees the development of a certain type of international trade that has its origins in the time of cooperation between non-alienated countries. The meaning we want to derive from this is that in certain global contexts a certain type of diplomatic, political and economic relationship is inseparable, and represents a unitary nexus that has been composed and stratified in recent history. This is why, despite ups and downs, the near future of Guinea-Bissau and China seem to be closely linked. The question, however, cannot be considered without bearing in mind the intercontinental relations between Asia and Africa, and the role that both of these continents are assuming on the face of the earth.

⁴⁷ The Macao News staff, Guinea-Bissau and China sign a strategic partnership agreement, on The Macao News: <https://macaonews.org/news/lusofonia/china-guinea-bissau-strategic-partnership/>

⁴⁸ Xi Jinping, Full Text: Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the World Economic Forum, on The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China website: http://www.china.org.cn/node_7247529/content_40569136.htm



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