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China-Africa agricultural cooperation in the making: old patterns and new narratives

Coordinatrice del Corso: Ch.ma Prof.ssa Giulia Albanese

Supervisora: Prof.ssa Paola Minoia

Dottoranda: Mariasole Pepa

ABSTRACT

Agriculture remains a priority sector in China-Africa agricultural cooperation, however, modalities, discourses, and practices have radically changed since the mid-1950s. This study investigates the consolidation of China-Africa agricultural cooperation as representative of South-South cooperation (SSC). The rise of BRICS countries and particularly of China-in-Africa is key in discussing the transformations in the global development regime. This thesis consists of four articles, and critical development studies and geography provide the overall framework. First, this dissertation focuses on examining the challenges of China-Africa relations, under the framework of SSC, considering China's increasing geoeconomic and geostrategic interests in the continent. The second article explores the challenges and limitations of the Chinese Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers (ATDCs) as of current flagship projects of China-Africa agricultural cooperation. The third case study article examines the ATDC in Tanzania and China-Tanzania relations, with a specific focus on the diversification of African dependency. The material for the case study was collected through qualitative methodologies and fieldwork in China during May-July 2019 and in Tanzania in March 2020. The fourth article concludes the thesis with an exploration of changes in China's official discourses on Sino-African agricultural cooperation, from the perspective of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) documents issued between 2000 and 2018. Particularly, the article questions how China's discourses have evolved in a time of economic, political, and socio-ecological crises exacerbated by the spread of Covid-19. The dissertation contributes to the current academic debate on the 'rise of the South', involving China particularly in the re-articulation of the global development regime traditionally dominated by the West and the United States' hegemony. Particularly, this study contributes, through the case of China-Africa agricultural cooperation, to the discussion on the convergence and co-optation of practices and political framings between Northern and Southern partners.

Keywords: China-Africa; South-South Cooperation; development geography; agricultural cooperation; FOCAC

L'agricoltura rimane un settore prioritario nella cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa da diversi decenni, durante i quali le modalità, le retoriche e le pratiche che intercorrono nel rapporto tra la Cina e i paesi africani sono invece radicalmente cambiate. La ricerca approfondisce il consolidamento della cooperazione agricola tra Cina ed Africa come rappresentativa della cooperazione Sud-Sud. L'ascesa dei paesi BRICS e, in particolare, della *Cina-in-Africa* rappresenta la chiave per discutere le trasformazioni in atto nell'architettura dello sviluppo globale. Questa tesi è composta da quattro articoli e gli studi sullo sviluppo e sulla geografia critica forniscono il quadro teorico generale. Il primo articolo esamina le sfide delle relazioni tra Cina e Africa, sotto il quadro della cooperazione Sud-Sud, considerando i crescenti interessi geoeconomici e geostrategici della Cina nei paesi africani. Il secondo articolo esplora le sfide e i limiti degli Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers (ATDCs) come progetti faro della cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa. Il terzo articolo esamina l'ATDC in Tanzania e le relazioni Cina-Tanzania con particolare attenzione alla diversificazione della dipendenza africana. I dati per il caso di studio sono stati raccolti attraverso l'utilizzo di metodologie qualitative e di un periodo di studio svolto in Cina tra marzo e luglio, nel 2019 e il successivo in Tanzania, nel marzo del 2020. Il quarto articolo conclude la tesi con un'analisi dei cambiamenti nei discorsi ufficiali della Cina sulla cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa durante il Forum sulla cooperazione Cina-Africa (FOCAC) dal 2000 al 2018. In particolare, questa parte esamina come il discorso ufficiale della Cina si sia evoluto in un periodo di molteplici crisi socio-ecologiche, politiche ed economiche inasprite dalla diffusione del Covid-19. Questa tesi contribuisce ai dibattiti accademici sul ruolo del Sud e, in particolare, della Cina, nel riarticolare le dinamiche di sviluppo globale tradizionalmente dominate dall'Occidente e dall'egemonia statunitense. Attraverso il caso della cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa, questo progetto di ricerca contribuisce all'analisi della convergenza e la cooptazione di pratiche tra attori del Nord e del Sud Globali.

Parole Chiave: *China-Africa; cooperazione Sud-Sud; geografia dello sviluppo; cooperazione agricola; FOCAC*

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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This thesis is based on the following articles:

- I. Pepa, M. (2021). Cina-Africa e le sfide della Cooperazione Sud-Sud: l'erosione del principio di non-intervento. In F. Dini, F. Martellozzo, F. Randelli, P. Romei (a cura di), *Oltre la globalizzazione – Feedback*, Società di Studi Geografici. Memorie geografiche NS 19, 2021, pp. 555-560. Isbn: 9788890892684

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- III. Pepa M. (2021). Cooperazione agricola Cina-Tanzania: innovazione o dipendenza?. *Rivista Geografica Italiana - Open Access*, (3). <https://doi.org/10.3280/rgioa3-2021oa12537>

- IV. Pepa M., Minoia P. (unpublished). The power of the Chinese discourses on China-Africa agricultural cooperation

The articles are referred to in the text by their roman numerals.

Author's contribution

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------|--|
| AFSA | Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa |
| AGRA | Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa |
| ATDCs | Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers |
| AU | Africa Union |
| BRI | Belt and Road Initiative |
| BRICS | Brazil, Russia, India, China, South-Africa |
| CDS | Critical development studies |
| CGTN | China Global Television Network |
| CI | Confucius Institute |
| CIDCA | China International Development Cooperation Agency |
| DAC | Development Assistance Committee |
| FOCAC | Forum on China-Africa Cooperation |
| GIZ. | Germany Agency for International Cooperation |
| GM | Genetically modified |
| IMF | International Monetary Found |
| MOA | Ministry of Agriculture |
| MOFCOM | Ministry of Commerce |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| ODA | Official Development Assistance |
| PPP | Private-public partnership |
| RWA | Rural Women Assembly |
| SAPs | Structural Adjustmnet Programmes |
| SOEs | China's state-owned enterprises |
| SSC | South-South Cooperation |
| US | United States |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| WB | World Bank |
| WP | White Paper |
| WoMin | African Gender and Extractives Alliance |

1 INTRODUCTION

This study around China-Africa agricultural cooperation unfolded in the aftermath of the 2007/8 global financial crisis, academic debates on the resurgence of land grabbing and extractivism, and the renaissance of the ‘Spirit of Bandung’ (Borras et al., 2011; Borras & Franco, 2013; Gray & Gills, 2016). All these factors are strictly related to the renewed geopolitical interest in Africa land and African natural resources that resulted in a ‘new’ scramble for Africa (Moyo et al., 2012).

The consolidation of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South-Africa) countries, particularly of China-in-Africa, challenged the western-dominated international development regime contributing to a remaking of maps of development/underdevelopment (Mawdsley, 2015; Sidaway, 2011). In this context, China’s foreign aid in Africa is representative of South-South Cooperation (SSC) modalities and practices (Huang et al., 2019). China plays a prominent role within BRICS countries and, indeed, it represents the main financial contributor to SSC (Kitano, 2019). The consolidation of China both as a global economic power and as an international development cooperation partner has contributed to challenging the United States supremacy and the world hegemony of development (Giunta & Caria, 2020). These changing geographies of power have contributed to enhancing the complexity of the world system with a great emphasis on the middle (Raghuram et al., 2014).

Following the 2007/08 global financial crisis, a great academic and media interest was raised around China’s involvement in African agriculture (Brautigam, 2015; Buckley, 2013; Cheru & Modi, 2013; Chichava et al., 2014; Jiang, 2020; Xu et al., 2016). Indeed, China’s agricultural engagement in Africa has been reported as a case of land grabbing (GRAIN, 2008), a form of neocolonialism, or as an opportunity for African countries to start negotiation with non-Western partners (Moyo, 2016). Yet, China’s presence in African agriculture is far from being new, and agriculture has been a top priority sector since the mid-1950s. The forms and modalities of China-Africa agricultural cooperation have changed, and, from the new millennium, they are increasingly characterized by a model that combines elements of aid, business, and investment (Jiang, 2020). Much of the debate of China’s foreign aid in African countries is related to a different understanding of what aid means. Hence, China does not embrace the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/Development Assistance Committee (DAC) definition of Official Development Assistance (ODA). The link between aid and investment is crucial in China’s assistance to Africa. On the one hand, aid plays a major role in mobilizing Chinese investments, on the other hand, historical relations are crucial in advancing aid and investment at the macro and micro-level (Morgan & Zheng, 2019).

Overall, these dynamics are unfolding in a time of multiple socio-ecological, economic, and political crises amplified by the spread of COVID-19 that exacerbated the fragility of our food systems (Ploeg, 2020). China-Africa agricultural cooperation evolves in a global context of increasing environmental degradation, contestation for control over land, and increasing violence, especially against women (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021). Finally, China's interest in African agriculture resulted from China's food insecurity and growing tension due to China-US trade war: these changing dynamics could turn agriculture and food into key geopolitical interests (Cheng & Liu, 2021; Johnston et al., 2021; Ndzendze, 2020; Zhang, 2019).

1.1 Research questions and aims

The main objective of this thesis has been to critically analyze the consolidation of China-Africa agricultural cooperation as representative of South-South Cooperation modalities and practices. This dissertation has three main goals that are linked to each other. The first goal is to reflect on the polycentric future of international cooperation considering the challenges of SSC in the wake of 'China in Africa'. The other goal is to investigate the shifting of China-Africa agricultural cooperation from the 1950s to the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers (ATDCs) as a recent evolution and flagship project of China's agricultural engagement in Africa. This entails an examination of the ATDC in Tanzania adopting a dependency lens of China-Tanzania relations in agriculture. The third goal is to critically question the power/knowledge relations in the Chinese discourses on African agricultural cooperation, and unsettling China's geostrategic interests. Overall, this thesis intends to examine the past, the present, and question the future of China-Africa agricultural cooperation due to the centrality of this relationship in discussing the remaking of development cooperation.

This dissertation answers the following questions:

1. What are the challenges of South-South cooperation under the consolidation of China-Africa relations? (Article I, II)
2. How has China-Africa agricultural cooperation evolved into the ATDCs, and with what effects? (Article II, III)
3. How does China's agricultural engagement in Tanzanian agriculture contribute to the diversification of dependency? (Article III)

4. How do the Chinese discourses on African agriculture evolve in a time of multiple ecological crises? (Article IV)

The research questions are addressed in four separate articles included in this dissertation. The contributions of the articles to the dissertation are the following:

Article I reflects on the future of international cooperation analyzing the consolidation of South-South cooperation through the perspective of China-Africa relations. The chapter examines the challenges in maintaining the rhetoric of SSC due to the consolidation of Chinese geostrategic and geoeconomic interests in the continent. In particular, the article discusses the principle of non-interference as the founding principle both of SSC and China's foreign policy in Africa. It addresses the first question contributing to the debate on the neutrality of cooperation propelled by the Chinese government. The article concludes by reflecting on the urgent necessity to move beyond 'win-win' discourses which have legitimized China's intervention in Africa and highlighted the realpolitik of China's engagement in African states.

Article II reviews the literature on China-Africa agricultural cooperation under the framework of Chinese foreign aid as a form of South-South cooperation and explores the literature on the ATDCs. This article set the context of the international debate around China's agricultural engagement in Africa considering the 'Scramble for Africa', and the 2007/08 food and financial crisis. First, the article discusses how Chinese foreign aid resembled South-South Cooperation principles and emphasizes the different conceptualizations of aid between China and the OECD/DAC. Indeed, the blurred lines between aid and business are central in understanding China's foreign aid in Africa. The article is followed by a review of the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers as representative of the 'aid+business' model and as the flagship project of China-Africa agricultural cooperation. The paper further shows the mechanism, actors, and evolution of the Chinese ATDCs in Africa. In the conclusion, I discuss the limits in ATDC's research, and I propose a shift towards a political economy approach that accounts for place and space as an active constituent in China-Africa agricultural cooperation.

Article III focuses on China-Tanzania agricultural cooperation through the case of the Tanzanian ATDC. The study draws from the review of academic literature in critical geography, development studies, international relations, and working papers produced by research institutions relevant to China-Africa relations. Moreover, the study is based on participant observation in Tanzania and

China. The article first discusses dependency theory and world-system analysis as a lens to examine China-Africa agricultural cooperation. That is followed by a historical review that captures the evolution of China-Africa agricultural cooperation from the mid-1950s, with a particular focus on China-Tanzania relations in agriculture. Article III looks at the case study of the ATDC in Dakawa discussing how the Center has contributed to the consolidation of the dependency on Chinese technology, capital, know-how, seeds, machinery, and so on. The article suggests that China has contributed to the diversification of African dependency and concludes with a discussion on the critical aspects of China-Africa agricultural cooperation for development geography.

Article IV analyses the Chinese discourses on African agriculture at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) from the 2000s until FOCAC 2018. The study adopts discourse analysis to unsettle China's official discourse, in turn, uncovering power/knowledge relations. The article reflects on changes in China's agricultural discourses at FOCAC and interrogates how development discourse is articulated in a time of multiple crises. First, the article examines China's critical geopolitics and China's geopolitical image of African agriculture. Then, it discusses the role of agricultural modernization, agro-technology, and green development as key in China's dominant narratives. The analysis reveals that China is constantly increasing its involvement through the support of Chinese companies, trade and export policies, and, more recently, through an emphasis on agricultural 'modernization', which implies a technology transfer in agriculture. The article further discusses the consolidation of African food sovereignty movements that, on the one hand, condemn and resist land appropriation, and extractivism, on the other hand, propose solid alternatives, drawn from African diversity, to foreign developmental model which are still transferred to Africa under the promise of betterment.

The outline for the rest of this synopsis is the following. Chapter 2 presents a brief introduction to China-Africa relations, that is followed by a discussion on China-Africa agricultural cooperation with a focus on ATDCs, and on recent debates around China's foreign aid. The key concepts and theoretical approaches that supported the thinking and analysis throughout the research process are presented in Chapter 3. The case study of the Tanzanian Agricultural Technology Demonstration Center in Dakawa is introduced in Chapter 4. The methodology employed in the study, the ethical considerations, positionality, and emotionality are discussed in Chapter 5. Key findings and main reflections that surged from this dissertation are discussed in Chapter 6. Then, the four articles which compose this thesis are introduced. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis.

2. SETTING THE CONTEXT: CHINA-AFRICA RELATIONS

To date, China-Africa relations remained an highly debated topics despite a large number of studies that have focused on this relationship (Alden & Large, 2018; Mlambo et al., 2016). Yet, questions abound around, for instance, the gain and loss in China-Africa economic relations, the role of African agency, the question of debt financing, and China's environmental impacts in Africa. These concerns unfold in a time of multiple crises exacerbated by the transmission of Covid-19. The following section aims to capture China-Africa relations in the context of agricultural cooperation under the SSC framework, and global development debates.

2.1 Chinese presence in Africa: an overview

In the last decades, China-Africa relations are increasingly exposed to international attention, however, China's presence in Africa is far from being new. This resulted in a great number of studies that explored, from multiple perspectives, the Sino-African engagement (Alden & Large, 2019; Fei, 2021; Frangton, 2020; Hodzi, 2018; Jiang, 2020; Lee, 2018). These academic, political, economic interests are related to China's increasing influence in Africa. In other words, since 2009 China remained Africa's largest trading partner and Chinese engagement has continued to increase in the continent.

At the present, China's engagement in Africa remained highly contested and unilinear perspectives are still dominant in the mainstream debates (especially in the West). Indeed, according to the literature, there are three main interpretations of China's presence in Africa (Moyo, 2016). According to a first thesis, China is a new-colonial power that intends to extract African natural resources to fuel its economy, yet, without being interested in investing in African economic or institutional development. The second perspective is premised upon benign views which regard China as a non-Western partner that could contribute to open a space of political and economic negotiation on activities directed to African countries in different forums (Amin, 2006). For instance, China's presence in Africa created room to negotiate lending conditionalities with financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). A third perspective values China-in-Africa as part of a global process of primitive accumulation under the world-system mechanism (Moyo et al., 2013; Moyo, 2016). However, Afro-Chinese relations are complex and the nature of the engagement is diverse depending upon: e.g. the sector considered, the African countries China is dealing with, the state and non-state actors involved, and the African

agency/power. Hence, it is necessary to move beyond dominant rhetoric and explore the facts through critical contextual analysis (Kamoche et al., 2021).

China-Africa relations dated back to the Bandung Afro-Asian conference in 1955. Yet, since the early 1950s, the modalities, practices, and objectives have radically changed shifting from China's ideological support to an economic-driven engagement in the new millennium (Kaplinsky et al., 2010). The economic rise of China led African, Asian, and Latin American countries to increasingly engage with China as a strategic non-Western partner. In the early 2000s, the launch of the 'Go out' policy which supports Chinese companies to invest abroad, has represented one of the first political instrument to internationalize the Chinese presence in African states. A recent Beijing's attempt to deal with internal overaccumulation is surely represented by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, which represents a geostrategic instrument to transfer capital in more profitable (African) space (Carmody et al., 2021). BRI is a global infrastructural initiative that has largely interested Africa in a particular time, following the 2007/08 global crisis, when the funding for infrastructural projects coming from traditional Western institutions declined and African demands increased (Gambino, 2020). Hence, China fixed the gap, and, for instance, between the 2000s and the 2018 Chinese lenders committed a total of USD 37.4 billion only for the transport sector (Ibid.).

Besides China's geoeconomics and geopolitical interests changed, the 'South-South' strategic narrative still supports China's influence in African states (Carrozza, 2021). In the past years, Chinese engagement in Africa has continued to increase, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation symbolizes the consolidation of this relationship (Taylor, 2011). Starting in the 2000s, FOCAC represents a unique regional forum that is held every three years alternatively in Africa and China. The areas of cooperation under FOCAC has expanded ranging from agriculture, infrastructure to security, digital, and health cooperation fueled by the spread of Covid-19 (Van Staden, 2021). As reaffirmed by the 2021 White Paper on China and Africa, FOCAC is an instrument to boost China-Africa relations as "a pacesetter for international cooperation with Africa in the new era" (Xinhua, 2021). However, what remained highly questionable, over the years, is the neglected space for African non-state actors' voices at FOCAC, and overall, to which extent FOCAC is benefiting African countries (Folashadé, 2021; Ibonye, 2020).

The role of China, apart from being discussed as the 'factory of the world' or as a global economic power, has rapidly increased in development finance. The consolidation of China as a donor opened

a contested space of competition/convergence with Western development institutions (Chin & Gallagher, 2019). As the main contributor to SSC, China's role in the Global South, particularly in Africa, remains key in challenging traditional Western donors and development institutions (Mawdsley, 2015). Hence, the role of China in reshaping the traditional international cooperation regime long western-dominated is central in discussing the 'future' of a polycentric development landscape. Nevertheless, China-Africa relations seem to follow well-known patterns of asymmetric power imbalance that has underpinned North-South axis (Carmody, 2013), contributing to the diversification of African dependency rather than propelling a real alternative to West (Taylor & Zanjontz, 2020). Yet, the convergence, competition, co-optation of practices between Northern and Southern partners remain an heated debate (Mawdsley, 2018).

Moreover, together with hard power, China is strongly affirming its presence in Africa through soft power instruments (Shangwe, 2017). For instance, China has financed African main infrastructural building such as the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa and the Ghana Ministry of Defense in Accra. It is interesting to notice how these infrastructures resembled the architecture of China's buildings (Amoah, 2016). China's cultural presence exploded through the establishment of the Confucius institutes in several African countries and with China's media voice in the continent (Jiang et al., 2016). As commented by Benabdallah (2019), China is boosting its soft power through a high number of educational and cultural programs in African countries as a type of productive-relational power. However, apart from culture, education, and media, China's soft power encompasses economic activities, diplomacy, and foreign aid (Kurlantzick, 2007; Shangwe, 2017).

Overall, the Chinese engagement in Africa is still highly controversial, for sure, the spread of Covid-19, climate change concerns, food insecurity, and the increasing China-US trade war would be some of the key issues that will shape and guide China-Africa relations in the near future. Yet, Covid-19 seems to reinforce China's soft power in the continent, for instance through the 'donation diplomacy', and to boost African dependencies on China (Carmody, 2021). In light of the above, despite the rapid evolution of Sino-African relations in the last two decades, China's demand for African natural resources and raw materials, access to the African market, and geopolitical support of African countries in the world forum would remain constant features of China-in-Africa (Ibid.). However, this trend is not uniquely Chinese but underpinned the economic engagement of Northern and Southern partners in Africa.

2.2 China-Africa agricultural cooperation

Agriculture has represented a strategic sector in China-Africa relations (Cheru & Modi, 2013). China's agricultural engagement in Africa has received particular attention following the 2007/8 global crisis, however, the engagement is far from being recent. China's foreign aid in Africa, as well as South-South cooperation are guided, at least rhetorically, by the five principles of peaceful coexistence: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (Huang et al., 2019). A clear example of how these principles are rhetorically adopted in China's official contemporary discourse is provided by President Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the FOCAC 2018: *"We respect Africa, love Africa and support Africa. We follow a "five-no" approach in our relations with Africa: no interference in African countries' pursuit of development paths that fit their national conditions; no interference in African countries' internal affairs; no imposition of our will on African countries; no attachment of political strings to assistance to Africa; and no seeking of selfish political gains in investment and financing cooperation with Africa"* (Xinhua, 2018). Yet, President Xi added "We hope this "five-no" approach could apply to other countries as they deal with matters regarding Africa" (Ibid.). However, as discussed in Article I, China's growing economic interests in African states has challenged the Chinese presumed non-interference and neutrality in Africa. With respect to the non-interference principle, Hodzi (2019) claims that China's intervention in Africa depends upon Chinese geoeconomics interest in African states especially in relation to natural resources and raw materials. Simultaneously, China is consolidating its presence in the African security sector, and the establishment of the first Chinese overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017 is representative (Alden & Jiang, 2019).

China-Africa agricultural cooperation is usually explored by adopting a tripartite periodization (Jiang, 2020). First, an initial period (1960-1980) characterized by China's need for political recognition in the international arena which translated into the support of large state farms in Africa (Brautigam & Tang, 2009). China's admission into the United Nations (UN) in 1971, largely supported by the African governments, is representative of the geopolitical role of African countries for China. A second phase (1980-2000) has been driven by China's opening up in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping and by a major emphasis posed on mutual (economic) benefit. As a result, China moved from the support of large-scale state-farms to small-scale agricultural projects. These changing dynamics combined with the inclusion of China's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in cooperation projects. Before the start of the new millennium, Beijing's interest in combine elements of aid,

business, and investment was already clear (Jiang et al., 2016). The ‘aid+business’ model is representative of China-Africa agricultural cooperation in the new millennium. Indeed, starting from the 2000s China launched the ‘Agriculture Go out’ policy and at the same time, agricultural cooperation has been a major area of interest in FOCAC until today. As a matter of fact, during the last 2021 FOCAC, President Xi reaffirmed in his keynote speech the centrality of agriculture in Afro-Chinese relations and pledged to send over 500 Chinese agricultural experts to Africa. Moreover, President Xi announced the establishment of over ten poverty and agricultural projects, the construction of new demonstration centers, and the support of Chinese companies to invest in African agriculture (Xinhua, 2021b).

In the last decades, it is clear that China-Africa agricultural cooperation has largely expanded in terms of projects, actors, and economic involvement. Due to China’s food insecurity and increasing China-US trade war, the role of African agricultural export appeared even more crucial in FOCAC 2021. Agriculture increasingly became a geopolitical interest in Sino-African relations. Yet, it remains unclear the relevance of China’s agricultural experience for African agriculture (Buckley, 2013). Moreover, as discussed in Article IV, the Chinese official discourses at FOCAC highlight the role of China’s enterprises in African agriculture while the role of peasant farming, indigenous and technology knowledge system remains invisible. In the case of the Chinese ATDC in Tanzania, the role of local actors such as farmers is limited, and the Tanzanian enterprises are not included in the project. The major role is played by the Chinese companies in charge of the Center. Yet, this led to reflect around who is benefiting from Chinese agricultural cooperation projects in African states. These questions will be further explored in Chapter 6.

2.2.1 Aid, business, investment: the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers (ATDCs)

The Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers (ATDCs or the Center), apart from being representative of the ‘aid+business’ model, represent the flagship project of China-Africa agricultural cooperation (Xu et al., 2016). ATDCs have received international and academic attention, still, country-based research have remained limited. For the relevance of the ATDCs in discussing China’s contemporary agricultural engagement in Africa, the Centers became one of the main research interests of my PhD thesis (Article II, III).

ATDCs have been launched during the 2006 FOCAC and since then more than 25 Center have been established around African Countries. The final objective of the Centers is to overcome the economic unsustainability of previous Chinese agricultural cooperation projects linking aid and

business. First, the Centers are commercial base and diplomatic space to increase Chinese influence in African countries and attract Chinese companies to invest in African agriculture. Second, ATDC served as a demonstration and training base to show the relevance of Chinese techniques and technologies in increasing food productivity (Jiang, 2020). The Centers are characterized by three distinct phases: construction, technical cooperation, sustainable/commercial phase (Ibid.). The first two phases are nearly completely financed by the Chinese government but in the commercial phase the Center should be economically independent from external funds. However, these Centers are facing several challenges in the ground, and their impacts, despite the main narratives, are limited. On the one hand, I have attempted to question the challenges and limitations of ATDCs (Article II). On the other hand, due to the varieties of the Center depending on the African countries and actors involved, I continued to explore how these dynamics have unfolded in a specific geography (Article III).

2.3 From China's foreign aid to international development cooperation

The complexity in researching China-Africa agricultural cooperation is exacerbated by the fact that China does not embrace the OECD/DAC's definition of ODA. When I started researching Sino-African agricultural cooperation, the lack of an official project-level aid data, together with the difficulties in understanding what aid means in the space of Afro-Chinese relations and what falls under this category, was a hotly debated argument (Morgan & Zheng, 2019; Plekhanov, 2017). However, in the last years, China has attempted to accommodate these international (especially western) criticism. Indeed, in 2018 China established the first international development cooperation agency 'CIDCA' (Chinese: 国家国际发展合作署), which aims to enhance the planning and coordination of China's foreign aid. Yet, when I have visited Beijing in 2019 the CIDCA was composed of just a few members, and it has appeared that its role was still limited compared to the power of the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM). Still, the establishment of the first Chinese development agency is a clear sign of the role China wants to play in the international cooperation arena. Another recent example is the release on January 2021 of the Chinese White Paper on International Development Cooperation in the New Era (Xinhua, 2021).

The White Paper (WP) proved the changing modalities and narratives in China's foreign aid as a consequence of the international criticism towards Chinese development assistance practices, for instance resulted by the aggressive role played by the BRI (Xue, 2021). First, it is interesting to note a shift in the terminology from 'foreign aid' to 'international development cooperation': this reflects

a more familiar framework that could support the Chinese discourses on development cooperation (Ibid.). These changes reflect a more comprehensive definition that goes beyond China's unilateral foreign aid. Indeed, in a footnote of the WP, it is specified that "international development cooperation refers to China's bilateral and multilateral efforts, within the framework of South-South cooperation, to promote economic and social development through foreign aid, humanitarian assistance, and other means" (Ibid.). Interestingly the WP highlights China's role in multilateral institutions with a particular emphasis on trilateral cooperation. For instance, one section of the WP debates China's support of the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2021). Moreover, China has committed to making "the aid process more transparent" (Xinhua, 2021a), increasing accountability and ownership of the projects, and improving financing efficiency (Xue, 2021). Yet, South-South Cooperation and the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund have remained the top priorities of the document. Another interesting aspect is the fact that the WP contains the aid figures from 2013 to 2018 (UN, 2021). According to the data's geographical distribution, the majority of China's foreign aid is directed towards Africa (44,65%), at the same time, Africa has been the first target for cooperation in human resources (45,04%) (Xinhua, 2021a).

China's attempts to introduce wording and framework which are typical of the international cooperation system are surely interesting for the remaking of development cooperation. However, this convergence in terminology and call for tripartite cooperation does not translate in China embracing OECD/DAC definitions or standards. On the contrary, China has reaffirmed its role in the 'new era' under the framework of South-South Cooperation. Overall, 'international cooperation' poorly captured major challenges in the 21st century, and North-South framing appeared outdated which has highlighted the need for a 'more critical theory of 'Development'' (Ziai, 2019).

3. KEY CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I first present the key fields that are relevant to this study. After that, I examine theoretical discussion about changing world-system and the rise of China as an element of diversification. Then, I examine the role of soft power in China-Africa relations, and I introduce the theoretical debates on agriculture and environmental degradation that are relevant for the discussion in the dissertation, and in this synopsis particularly.

3.1 Critical development studies and geography

Approaches to critical development and geography have underlined and supported the research related to this dissertation. Indeed, critical approaches have contributed to challenging outdated binaries constructed around North/South, developed/developing, first/third world which ‘fix’ imaginative geographies that supported specific Western geopolitical and geoeconomic interests (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1994; Said, 1977; Kothari, 2010). The pursuit of ‘development’ has been detrimental for African countries, and the development concept its self has been rarely contested by African governments (Bassey, 2019). Development entails economic growth, and expansion without tackling the unsustainability of the project or considering the socio-ecological limits of our planet (Ibid.). In this respect, post-development and decolonial thinking have opened a contested space to challenge the primitive idea of development and to reflect on alternatives to development.

As a heterogenous field of inquiry, critical development studies (CDS) evolved in the same timeframe of mainstream models of development to challenge the idea and meanings of development premised upon modernization and capitalism (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2018). Originally, CDS have been influenced by dependency and world-system theories and by several Marxist theories, yet, CDS consist in a persistent attempt to interrogate capitalism and foremost to force us to imagine differently (Ibid.). Despite its evolving nature, critical development studies have challenged mainstream development rhetoric in four main ways (Bowles & Veltmeyer, 2021). First, unlike mainstream theories, CDS deconstructed the ideology of capitalism as a promise of betterment while intending to understand contradictions that underpinned capitalism. Second, CDS contributed to examining how actors at different level have challenged the neoliberal ‘development’ model as also an act against capitalism. As discussed in Article IV, African agrarian and food sovereignty movements have challenged development projects which are transferred to Africa under the Alliance for a New Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). Resistance movements have not

just contested the intensive agricultural model but the capitalist system as a whole. Third, CDS have assumed that resistance and alternatives to capitalism are emplaced in the periphery, and, fourth, CDS have considered the uneven development across the world-system.

Therefore, critical approaches in geography and development studies have challenged binaries construction, which do not reflect broader changes in the 21st century. Hence, they have contributed to capturing a changing development landscape where the ‘rise’ of the South, particularly of ‘China-in-Africa’, together with the consolidation of BRICS and SSC have contributed to the ‘*southernization*’ of development (Mawdsley, 2018). Yet, in this study, I am particularly interested in the persistence of unequal power relations that remain solid beyond the North/South axis (Ziai, 2019). In light of the above, geographers have for long contributed to the understanding of the spatiality of development (and to development studies) contesting postcolonial North-South inequalities (Bignante et al., 2015; Glassman, 2010; McEwan, 2019; Minoia, 2009). The role of development geography is indeed central in the shifts from International to Global development, and in contributing to more nuanced maps (Kothari, 2019; Sidaway, 2011).

A particular field of interest for this dissertation is ‘the rise of South’ and the reinvigoration of South-South Cooperation (Chaturvedi et al., 2012; Modi, 2011). As discussed in Article I-III, this has represented one of the main changes in the geography of development that has contributed to a polycentric development regime. The consolidation of Southern development partners, particularly of China-Africa relations, have reaffirmed how spatial division poorly captured current geographies of power (Mohan et al., 2019). In this work, I strongly align with Mohan (2021): spatial binaries do not capture China’s rising engagement. Indeed, “China is simultaneously ‘Southern’, ‘Northern’ and neither” (Mohan, 2021: 5). Yet, South-South geographies have opened a set of epistemological and ontological questions which has so far not received excessive attention in development study (Fourie et al., 2019). If on the one hand, the ‘Rise of the South’ have complicated the use of binaries, on the other hand, this opens a debate around the notion of the South, or in the word of Gonzalez-Vicente (2019) “Where is the South?”.

3.1.1 Towards a polycentric global aid regime

One of the main objectives of this thesis is “*to reflect on the polycentric future of international cooperation considering the challenges of SSC in the wake of ‘China in Africa’*”. The changing geographies of the international development system reflect a multipolar world where the rise of China ends the Eurocentric hegemony of the world-system (Arrighi, 2007).

The international development system is a product of the post-1945 era fostered by the United States economic ambitions and traditionally dominated by Western development institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The mainstream development ideologies emerged with President Truman's 1949 inaugural speech that is recognized as the birth of modern development (Sachs, 2010). Although, decades of development intervention's failures, such as the disruptive role of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) for African countries sponsored by the WB and IMF (Federici et al., 2000; Konadu-Agyemang, 2000), and the problematic frameworks of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that poorly captured Africa's reality on the ground (Obeng-Odoom, 2013), the international development system is still 'alive'. However, problems of hunger, poverty, and other development 'goals' are far from being reached. Yet, critics of the notion of 'development' and of the development apparatus as a whole are not new (Escobar; 1995; Ferguson, 1994; Sachs, 2010). Post-development projects have contributed to dismantling the naturalization of development categories (Ziai, 2017). This debate opens a space to interrogate 'alternatives to development', including those that, through a pluriversal thinking, challenge the development principles at the basis of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development (Demaria & Kothari, 2017; Kothari et al., 2019).

The geography of the global aid regime traditionally dominated by the North-South spatialities is undergoing profound ruptures with the consolidation of SSC, the rise of BRICS countries, and 'China in Africa' in particular (Carmody, 2013; Horner & Hulme, 2019; Mawdsley, 2018). Western development institutions are challenged by the discourse, practices, and modalities of SSC, in other words, SSC is mining the dominant North/South, donor/recipient binaries construction that have dominated the international cooperation system in the last decades (Six, 2009).

The expansion of the South provoked a 'cooperation, competition, and convergence' between Southern partners and traditional northern members of the OECD-DAC (Mawdsley, 2015). The consolidation of SSC is driving a *southernization* of the North in terms of development narratives with the shift from poverty to economic growth discourses, and from aid to more variegated development finance instruments (Mawdsley, 2018). In this context, North/South categorization became fluid, and identities blurred (Mawdsley, 2020). This is to say, that in coming years it will be challenging for Southern partners to maintain an ideational distinction with the North (Mawdsley, 2019). Another SSC challenge is the limit to maintaining the principle of non-interference, due to the consolidation of Southern geoeconomics and geostrategic interests. In this respect, the case of China-Africa relations is representative to discuss these challenges (Article I).

Nevertheless, Southern partners are increasingly enhancing cooperation partnership with Northern actors through trilateral cooperation mechanisms (McEwan & Mawdsley, 2012). In recent years, China has fostered trilateral development cooperation with different bilateral and UN agencies in a variety of sectors such as agriculture, health, infrastructure, disaster management, trade, and investment (Han, 2016). To some extent, Southern actors are borrowing DAC traditional approaches institutionalizing their development practices enabling a ‘two-way socialization’ (Mawdsley & Taggart, 2022). Examples are provided by the establishment of BRICS New Development Bank in 2015 and China’s International Development Cooperation Agency in 2018. Notwithstanding this socialization, the SSC actors do not embrace the OECD-DAC definition of aid and the ‘donor’ label. Despite early assumptions of the inclusion of Southern actors into the mainstream development apparatus, the South maintains its identity vivid (Ibid.).

3.2 Critical geopolitics

A key field that has informed this work is critical geopolitics. Indeed, as discussed in Article IV critical geopolitics challenging power/knowledge structures constitutes one of the main guiding principles for this study.

Critical geopolitics emerged in the early 1990s to challenge power/knowledge representation and interpretation of the global political space (Agnew, 2003; Ó Tuathail, 1996; Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). Foucauldian premises on power/knowledge are central in critical geopolitics considerations of the role of discourse in producing geopolitical imaginaries (Agnew, 2003; Slater, 1993). The rapid development of China has ruffled the traditional geographies of the world economy rooted in the European-American experiences (Agnew, 2010). The role of China in the geopolitical arena became a key academic interest consolidated by the China-US tension and the launch of the BRI (Liu, 2021). Yet, mostly western authors have analyzed China’s intervention in geopolitical terms such as in the case of BRI, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and Chinese international cooperation projects overseas (Ibid.; Oakes, 2021).

The relation between China and Africa is crucial for China’s foreign geopolitical interests and both hard and soft power are used to maintain China’s geopolitics in Africa (An et al., 2020). Indeed, critical geopolitics need to account for the role of the South in altering Western geographic imaginaries (Cheng & Liu, 2021). However, geopolitics have been dominated by European and American stories which have ignored the possibilities for alternative geopolitical world maps (Kong, 2021).

In this study, I am particularly interested in China's geopolitics and into the academic debate inside and outside China (An et al., 2017). On the one hand, to date, Chinese geopolitics appear to be informed by Western theory and terminology, within a new area of studies on Sino-African relations and BRI. On the other hand, An *et al.* 2017 have claimed that an epistemological gap between internal and external voices on China's geopolitics is still persistent. According to the authors, external voices (non-Chinese, overseas Chinese scholars) do not capture China's geopolitics from an endogenous perspective. Yet, internal voices have adopted external theories and terminologies that do not reflect the Chinese socio-political and cultural contexts (Ibid.). Starting from this gap, An et al. (2021a) suggest moving 'towards a Confucian geopolitics' in which cultural analysis has turned into an interpretative lens for China's contemporary geopolitics. However, this paper proposal has not been without commentaries (Kong, 2021; Liu, 2021). Still, if Confucianism is important in China's geopolitical discourse speaking about Confucian geopolitics hide class and power struggles (Gonzalez-Vicente, 2021). Besides the centrality of Confucianism for Chinese people, state leaders, and in China's everyday life "one should avoid attributing everything to Confucian ideas and making Confucianism too fundamental to contemporary Chinese society and its geopolitics" (Liu, 2021: 267). However, as An et al., 2021b have suggested in their response paper, the 'hybridity of Confucian geopolitics' represents the opportunity to open a debate around Chinese geopolitics and the need to decentralize world politics.

Discussions about China's geopolitical discourses on Africa and African development remain central in this study (Power & Mohan, 2010). Foremost, the persistence of China's geopolitical 'China-Africa discourse' rooted in friendship, equality, and win-win is crucial to elucidate China's contemporary engagement in the continent (Strauss, 2009). Besides the endurance of China's discourse, Chinese practices have changed in the last decades becoming more assertive (Carrozza, 2021). Moreover, the different ways in which China's geopolitical discourse has contributed to the depoliticization and naturalization of its engagement in African countries (Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2019) is a key issue that this thesis also considers.

3.3 China in the World-System

This study on China-Africa agricultural cooperation is informed by the literature on world-system and dependency theory. Indeed, the consolidation of China as a global economic power and a leading South-South development partner led to reorienting capitalist world-system and international development cooperation (Cheru, 2016; Caria & Giunta, 2020; Gray & Gills, 2016).

Dependency and world-system theories emerged to contrast the modernization logic that prevailed in the field of development studies following World War II. First, in the late 1950s, these critiques were raised from the work of dependencies theorists (Amin, 1972; Dos Santos, 1970; Frank, 1966). According to Frank (1966), Western countries (the core nations) have exploited periphery states underdeveloping them and maintaining a relationship of dependency. In other words, this exploitative unequal relation has allowed the economic development of the core at the expense of the periphery. Drawing on these critiques, world-system theory (Arrighi, 1990; Arrighi & Silver, 1999; Wallerstein, 1974) assumed the capitalist world economy as a unit of analysis and claimed the hierarchy of core, periphery, and semi-periphery. Indeed, the core, according to world-system theory, functions through continuous wealth flows coming from the extractivism/exploitation of the peripheries. World-system perspective has remained central for structural-historical analyses in critical development studies (Babones, 2018). Importantly, world-system is not static and current research examines the multiplicity of world-systems, such as the rise of Asia, and the role of China in particular. Moreover, recent world-system research is confronting with anti-systemic social movements as a process of globalization from below, or in other words, of a ‘globalized’ world-system (Gills & Hosseini, 2021).

In light of the above, in this work, dependency and world-system theory are relevant to interrogate the consolidation of BRICS countries, of China, and particularly of China-Africa relations. The ‘re-emergence’ of China has led to a reorientation of the world-system. Therefore, China, traditionally a periphery country, has assumed a semi-peripheral role, especially towards African states (Lisimba e Parashar, 2020). Yet, as discussed in Article III, the complexity of these changing geographies of power cannot be reduced in an exchange of the centre to the periphery. Indeed, China has contributed to the complexity of the world-system that resulted in a great emphasis on the middle (Raghuram et al., 2014). According to Arrighi (2007), the emergence of China has symbolized the decline of a Eurocentric world-system hegemony.

In this study, the theoretical discussion interrogates the reproduction of dependency in China-Africa relations, while examining the hierarchy of power. Indeed, despite China has framed itself as a South-South partner, BRICS countries and China have perpetuated the unequal power relations that have traditionally characterized the North-South cooperation led by Western countries (Lisimba & Parashar, 2020; Sindzingre, 2016). Yet, China, like other core countries did, has imported raw materials and natural resources from African states and exported manufactured goods that increasingly compete with local products, resulting in rising Anti-Chinese sentiments (Aidoo,

2017). For instance, in Ghana Chinese involvement in illegal mining activities turned into local contestation and local anger has been also directed towards local politicians that have facilitated Chinese illegal operations in the country (Aidoo, 2016).

Chinese economic intervention has emerged as an element of diversification for the international cooperation with African countries (Taylor, 2014). Yet, it has contributed to a double diversification: in terms of African dependency from Western core countries, and of ‘emerging’ semi-peripheries, within the group of BRICS countries, including China. Therefore, China-Africa relations are repropounding similar exploitative trade and investment patterns that have traditionally characterized the North-South axis (Gonzalez-Vicente, 2017; Lisimba e Parashar, 2020).

3.4 Soft power with Chinese characteristics

The concept of soft power is relevant in the analysis of this thesis because is one of China's main strategies to boost its geopolitical interest in Africa (Amoah, 2016; Tsikudo, 2021). Yet, China’s soft power diverged from the original conceptualization, and this is central to examining Chinese soft power in African states. The term soft power was coined in 1990 by Joseph Nye in his book *Bound to lead*, yet, with a focus on the United States exercise of soft power (Nye, 1990). In Nye’s view, soft power intends to “co-opts people rather than coerces them” (Nye, 2004: 5), and its resources are related to a country’s culture, its political values, and foreign policies.

This concept has attracted particular attention within Chinese political leaders, academics, and journalists, however, China’s conceptualization encompasses also other resources beyond traditional ones such as aid, investment, economic activities, and trade (Shangwe, 2017). According to Li Mingjiang, the behavioral approach that focuses on the ‘soft use of power’ is more appropriate to discuss China’s strategies (Mingjiang, 2009). Despite the different debates, Chinese soft power is growing in African countries. For instance, China’s media voice in Africa has sharply increased as symbolized by the opening of the China Global Television Network (CGTN) headquarters in Nairobi in 2012 (Jiang et al. 2016).

Over the last decade, China’s media engagement in Africa has constantly increased. According to the 2018 report entitled “China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order” by Reporters Without Borders, Africa represented one of the regions where China’s media engagement is now more present (RSF, 2019). The majority of China’s media agencies are state-owned, and a similar

scenario has resembled in Africa. Indeed, China is present in Africa media outlets through the CGTN headquarters in Nairobi, China Radio International which broadcasts are in local languages, and the Chinese Star-Times group that became one of Africa's most important media companies. The growing influence of China's media voices in Africa, as a political and soft power initiative, served as an instrument to challenge Western narratives about China and to maintain a positive image of Beijing (Jiang et al., 2016).

Other crucial examples are represented by the promotion of Chinese culture, education, and socio-political values as traditional soft power (Shangwe, 2017). For instance, China has offered several scholarships to attract African students, and the promotion of the Chinese language through the establishment of the Confucius Institute (CI) in several African countries has been consistent. Yet, Procopio (2015) noted that if on the one hand, CI has reduced African students distance towards the understanding of Chinese culture, on the other hand, CI is only partially effective to support China's rise (Procopio, 2015). However, despite 'traditional' power resources, China is increasingly making use of aid, investment, and trade to increase its soft power in African states (Shangwe, 2017). As Shangwe (2017) noted, after years of China's foreign aid projects in Tanzania, the students who were interviewed at Dar es Salaam University claimed that China has been more helpful than the United States. Furthermore, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the South-South narratives, as discussed in Article IV, have also represented a soft power tool that has sustained China's geostrategic interests in Africa.

Overall, China has invested consistently to promote its soft power overseas. Since the Chinese President Hu Jintao announced, during the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, the need for more investment in soft power initiatives this became a top priority. However, according to Nye (2021), Chinese soft power is still a mixed success. Indeed, according to the author, soft power depends upon a country's civil society instead of its governments. Hence, China should leave more space to its civil society, yet, it is quite difficult to unfold this potential in a country with tight control (Ibid.). As Nye noted, "Creating a Confucius Institute to teach Chinese culture will not generate positive attraction if Chinese naval vessels are chasing fishing boats out of disputed waters in the South China Sea" (Nye, 2021:11). This observation well captured the challenges and partly the (un)success of China's effort to increase its soft power.

3.5 Land grabs, agriculture, alternatives

Much of the public debate on China's farming investments in Africa was raised following the 2007/08 food and financial crisis, and 'new' global land rush (GRAIN, 2008). The debates on land grabbing have leading to a rising media and political interest, and academic attention (Borras et al. 2011; Cotula 2013; Matondi et al., 2011; McMichael 2012). Yet, China's role as a land grabber in Africa and China's growing agricultural investment overseas have garnered an increased interest in academic debate (Brautigam, 2015; Buckley, 2013; Cheru & Modi, 2013; Jiang, 2015).

In the words of Borras & Franco (2013: 1725), land grabs could be defined as "The capturing of control of relatively vast tracts of land and other natural resources through a variety of mechanisms and forms, carried out through extra-economic coercion that involves large-scale capital, which often shifts resource use orientation into extraction, whether for international or domestic purposes". Far from being new, land grabs consist in a colonial continuity of land appropriation (Alden Wily, 2012; Minoia, 2020). Yet, the recent 'land rush' comprised a new set of players such as China and has largely involved competition for Africa's land and natural resources (Moyo et al., 2019). Moreover, it has been characterized by a broader set of pressure factors that goes beyond interest in land for agricultural purposes, and include e.g. mining, forestry, tourism, and biofuel. This higher competition for land appropriation resulted in a variety of interests and actors involved (Cotula, 2012). For instance, natural resource extraction have characterized land-based deals in Africa (Nyantakyi-Frimpong & Kerr, 2017).

However, land grabs have often happened without contestation, as forms of dispossession cause different types of political reactions 'from below' that go beyond resistance (Hall et al., 2015). Social dynamics and inter and intra-class relations are key in shaping different reactions (Borras & Franco, 2013). In this respect, a central debate, which has been largely silent, is the gendered effects of African land deals and to which extent land-based activities have affected women differently (Doss et al., 2014). Moreover, as Greco (2015) noted, the class dynamics of land grabs in Tanzania, and in Africa should be critically taken into account.

Furthermore, the relationship between international cooperation and land grabs is crucial. Indeed, land deals often operated in rural contexts in which development cooperation institutions have intervened in a plurality of forms (e.g., the UN-Millennium Village Projects in rural Africa and the USAID Feed the Future NAFKA rice project in Tanzania) (Cirillo et al., 2015). In the case of China, bilateral cooperation agreements with African countries favored infrastructural agricultural investments and Chinese technology transfer that could foster land appropriation successively (Ibid.).

As discussed in Article IV, there is a growing debate around the rise of ‘alternatives to land grab’ (Oliveira et al., 2020). This has resulted in new forms of dispossession going beyond the direct control over the land that has characterized the ‘new’ land rush, and often produced unseen and indirect effects to those who live around development projects and land investments (Ibid.). For instance, in rural China, the industrial transfer has contributed to ‘expulsion by pollution’, in other words, the land is not taken away directly from the people as usually occurred, yet, people have to leave the land because of pollution (Li & Pan, 2021). Moreover, Martiniello (2021) noted that contract farming is deepening social differentiation and promoting expulsion in Uganda, in a process that he referred to as sugarification.

In this study, China-Africa agricultural cooperation is discussed in a time of multiple socio-ecological, economic, political crises amplified by the spread of Covid-19 that has deepened the fragility of the current food system (Ploeg, 2020). In this context, the role of agriculture and its relation with environmental degradation, hence, climate justice is central. Increasing extractivism in African countries both from traditional partners such as the United States and the European Union, and by BRICS countries and particularly China, has exacerbated environmental degradation (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021). In addition, development actors and institutions have long promoted intervention rooted in agricultural modernization and technology that, as discussed in Article IV, currently characterized China’s agricultural cooperation with African countries. Technological solutions hide the complexity of agriculture, yet, agricultural development intervention should consider the intersection between nature, gender, class, and ethnicity. In other words, as Pereira (2021) noted in the case of Africa: “Questions such as what kinds of technology would support positive change or what kinds of science would most benefit different categories of women as well as men are neither scientific nor technological questions”. Another urgent reflection regards the adequacy of developmental extractivist project in cultural context that have other philosophies of lives and livelihood rooted on diverse environmental ethics and pluriversal thinking based on the relationality between human and more-than-human beings (Gwaravanda, 2019), unlike Western conception based on natura/culture dichotomies, whereas humans commodify and exploit nature (Chemhuru, 2019; Terblanché-Greef, 2019).

Resistance movements have been at the front of land grabs and extractivism in Africa (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021). In Articles II, I discussed the centrality of food and seed sovereignty, by referring to food sovereignty as the right of peasants to determine their food and agricultural system, as propelled by La Via Campesina in the Nyéléni Declaration (La Via Campesina, 2007). This view

goes far beyond the objectives of food security promoted by international organizations and China. However, at the base of food sovereignty, there is a control over the seeds. Yet, seed sovereignty in Africa is increasingly controlled by biotech corporations such as Bayer and ChemChina/Syngenta, and by Green philanthrocapitalist organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which promote hybrid seeds and genetically modified crops. These dynamics showed a convergence in agricultural practices between China and Western institutions. Yet, the role of the Chinese state is central in coordinating agricultural expansion in China and abroad. For instance, Syngenta has been acquired by the State-owned enterprises ChemChina. Following the acquisition in 2017, ChemChina/Syngenta became one of the most important agricultural chemical companies in the world (Zhang, 2019). However, the Chinese government attempts to develop its own global agribusiness, and in this respect the support and the role played by dragon-head-driven enterprises is crucial (Ibid.). Dragon head enterprises either state-owned firms, and private-owned firms are central in China's agricultural investments overseas. Indeed, China is willing to support dragonhead enterprises abroad considering the domestic overaccumulation and also due the fact that private enterprises usually received less media attention compare to SOEs (Ibid.). Indeed, during one interview I conducted in Beijing, the interviewer argued that a greater role will be played by private enterprises in Africa because they receive less media and international interest compared to China's SOEs. In the case of the Chinese ATDCs in Africa, an important role is played by Chinese provincial government trough private-public partnership beyond Chinese state capitalism (Gu et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the role of the Chinese state in controlling market expansion remain central (Schneider, 2017). So, a convergence in agricultural practices does not translated in a greater power of Chinese private enterprises in controlling crucial agribusiness, this remained upon Chinese SOEs. However, as Alami et al. (2021) noted, global development regime is underpinned by a great influence of the state in development either through the intervention of SOEs, SWEs, national and policy bank, techno-industrial policy, National Development Plans, and Economic Nationalism. Despite China is playing a leading role in advancing its SOEs and development institutions overseas, these transformations are also discussed by Northern institution such as the IMF, WB, and OECD.

As discussed in Article III, hybrid seeds need to be bought every year, which exacerbates dependency relationships. However, the centrality of seed sovereignty and farmer-managed seed systems is highly recognized within African farmers both for the importance of local seeds in maintaining biodiversity and reducing environmental impacts, and also for the sacred role of seeds in indigenous communities (Wynberg et al., 2012). Seed sovereignty is part of a broader call for the

decolonization of the African food system that the Rural Women assembly's slogan well captured as 'Womens- guardians of land, seed and life' (Andrew & Lewis, 2017).

Moreover, resistance movements in African countries (e.g., Rural Women Assembly, Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa, WoMin, the Green Belt Movement) do not just contest biotech corporations, monocultures, land expulsion, extractivism, etc., but also propose anti-capitalist and anti-imperialism alternatives echoing African philosophies, eco-feminism, and a decolonization of interventions to dismantle structural hierarchies of power (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021; Kelleher, 2019). Sylvia Tamale (2020) claimed to integrate Afro-Ecofeminism, as a central pillar of the African decolonial feminist approach, into decolonization agendas. In the wake of environmental degradation and extractivism, Afro-Ecofeminism acknowledges the relation between ecological justice and gender recognizing the intersection between class, race, and gender and the role of environmental degradation (Ibid.). African indigenous knowledge systems and African eco-centric worldviews are rooted in the principles of interconnection of beings and knowledges. The respect of these interconnections allow to contrast climate change, loss of biodiversity and to overcome the Cartesian duality of nature/culture and human/non-human beings (Ibid.).

4 CASE STUDY: AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY DEMONSTRATION CENTER (ATDC) IN DAKAWA

The Chinese Agricultural Technology Demonstration Center (ATDC) in Tanzania is located in Dakawa in the region of Morogoro (Fig. 1). Dakawa is a small village with favorable conditions for rice cultivation, and therefore has been a target for cooperation projects by different international organizations such as USAID and JICA in the last decades. Indeed, Dakawa is home to one of the largest irrigation schemes in Tanzania and this resulted in international attention for the development of agricultural cooperation projects (Mdee et al., 2014). The ATDC in Dakawa is operated by the Sino-Tanzania agricultural development Co. Ltd., the Chongqing Academy of Agricultural Science with the collaboration of the Tanzania Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Cooperatives (MAFC). The ATDC is located next to the Dakawa Agriculture Research Institute (TARI-DAKAWA) that represents its local partner. The Center covers a total area of 62 ha and includes three main areas: office and training area, experiment/display area, and production area. The construction of the Center was completed in 2011 and since 2015 it entered the business/sustainable phase. According to China's official brochure, the Center host 28 staff and 11 Chinese experts. Yet, when I visited Morogoro in March 2020 just two Chinese experts were living at the Center while the ATDC Director was in China at the specific time. The Center has been mainly focusing on rice cultivation so far, despite producing maize, grain, and other vegetables. Their biggest attempt has been to test over ten hybrid varieties of rice coming from the Chongqing seeds Ltd. However, at the time of my field research, the Chinese hybrid seeds were not yet approved for commercialization thus the Center was collaborating with TARI-DAKAWA to improve the productivity of the SARO5¹.

¹ SARO 5 (TXD 306) is an improved local seed variety developed by TARI-DAKAWA



Source: GISLAB-PADOVA
 Fig.1 Map of Tanzania and ATDC location



Fig.2 Me and the director of TARI-Dakawa

5. Methodology and materials

Having outlined the key field and theoretical discussion that guided the analysis in this thesis, I introduce the qualitative methodology, and discuss the ways in which data were collected and analyzed. First, my research has been highly affected by the outbreak of Covid-19 that led to rethinking the process of data collection, since the planned field research was not feasible anymore. In other words, throughout the research process, I had to readjust the methods that I had structured initially. In this section, I will point out chronologically the challenges and limitations of the used methodologies. Moreover, I will discuss how ethical considerations and positionality have played a central role throughout the research: emotions shaped my fieldwork as well as my research perspective and my positionality influenced the construction of my research project.

5.1 Qualitative research methods on China-Africa agricultural cooperation

This study is qualitative in nature and the methodologies have been adopted concerning the multiple territories I visited and the research challenges I encountered. The choice of qualitative methods resulted from different observations. First, it is difficult to access official data both in China and Africa, and sometimes official data does not capture the reality on the ground. Second, despite China-Africa agricultural cooperation having attracted international attention, little grounded research has been conducted, and grassroots voices have been scantily reported. However, the impossibility to conduct extensive fieldwork in Tanzania did not allow the investigation of the spatial and territorial changes linked with the establishment of the Chinese ATDC in Dakawa. Thus, I conducted an interpretative analysis of official documents and expert interviews, as well as discourse analysis of Chinese official documentation.

During the three years of research, I have alternated periods of documentary analysis, literature review, interviews, participant observation, and data analysis. In the first year, I conducted an extensive literature review in Italy, and then in China. Indeed, I spent two months (May-July 2019) as a Visiting Fellow at the Center of African Studies at Peking University. During this visiting, I could discuss my research project with Chinese experts and conduct several interviews. After China, I spent 4 months as a Visiting Researcher at the Department of Global Development Studies at Helsinki University under the supervision of Prof. Obeng-Odoom. During this time, I analyzed the materials I collected in China, and I draft Article II.

Following my research visit in Helsinki, I was supposed to spend nearly one year in Tanzania and conduct an internship at SAIIA in South Africa, one of the leading China-Africa think tanks. Although I arranged my plan in Tanzania and prepared for fieldwork, I spent only one month in the country due to the outbreak of Covid-19. After I returned to Italy, I analyzed the data collected, and I reflected on how to continue the research project without access to the field.

In my view, it is important to highlight that the spread of Covid-19 has impacted the way how qualitative research is conducted, especially in terms of observations, interviews, and conversations. Given the circumstances, I had to rely on extensive use of digital technologies to conduct remote interviews and maintain discussions vivid through internet platforms, notwithstanding all the critical issues and limitations of these types of contacts (Ansoms et al., 2021; Kagoyire, 2021). Yet, after returning from Tanzania in March 2020, in the wake of Covid-19, I decided to complete the final remote interviews, which contributed to integrating the data for Article III. After that, I decided not to continue adopting remote interviews, but to work more closely on official documentation produced by Chinese public institutions for international cooperation, adopting discourse analysis as a qualitative research methodology.

This choice resulted from different ethical and research considerations. Since I could not predict the evolution of the pandemic situation in Tanzania, and I had to quickly rethink the project, I did not want to expose researchers in the field to risks. Second, with my emergency flight ticket to Italy, I finished all the research budget and I was not able to economically sustain a research assistant. Indeed, in Tanzania, I agreed with different NGOs to help with annual reports and other volunteer activities in exchange for help with Swahili translation and access to the field in rural Morogoro. Yet, when I returned to Italy I could not continue these collaborations. Moreover, from my personal experience in China, the majority of relevant discussions were beyond the scenes or informal conversations. This is also due to the tight control of the Chinese government around sensitive topics, a similar control that I also found in Tanzania. Without being in the field, I could not grasp what is often unseen and unsaid. For instance, from the Chinese director of the ATDC in Dakawa I received standards answer to my remote interviews that could have not supported my critical reflection, or advance my project.

5.2 Fieldwork, data collection, analysis

Data were collected during field research in China and Tanzania. During my time as a Visiting Fellow at the Center of African Studies at Peking University, I could get access to Chinese

academic journals and printed books of difficult reach in Europe. Moreover, I collected gray literature in the form of brochures and technical reports released by Chinese Universities and Institutions. My fieldwork in China has been crucial to conduct interviews with Chinese academics, governmental actors, civil society organizations, and members of international organizations. I conducted 10 interviews with Chinese experts in Peking, Nanjing, and Shanghai. I interviewed one government official of the Ministry of Agriculture and one ex government official. Moreover, I interviewed members of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and of the Germany Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) in Beijing. On several occasions, I had the opportunity to interviewed Chinese students that took part in research exchanges in Tanzania, and 4 Chinese Ph.D. candidates that have researched China-Africa agricultural cooperation, or more broadly on China-Tanzania relations.

I supposed that several formal/informal interviews I conducted were not feasible without the fieldwork in China. Indeed, rather than emails, I used WeChat all the time to arrange appointments, however, the WeChat contact cards were shared with me interview after interview and depend upon the networking I establish during the field trip. Furthermore, I joined several seminars organized by China Agricultural University, Peking University, and Chinese think tanks, where I collected different data. However, despite several attempts to interview other Chinese governmental members or get in touch with the China International Cooperation Agency, I did not receive any response from these institutions. In my experience, conducting interviews with Chinese governmental officials has been quite challenging, if not impossible. Overall, the access to the networking that my position as Visiting Fellow at Peking University provided has been crucial to advance the research project.

In Tanzania, I visited the region of Morogoro for one month in March 2020. However, before starting the Ph.D. I spent two months in 2018 as an independent volunteer in Tanzania and I was quite familiar with the context and the region. This has been one of the main reason I decided to conduct research in Tanzania, among the relevance of the case study and the peculiarity of Tanzania-China relations. Indeed, since I already lived in the country I felt more confident to conduct fieldwork: I knew in Morogoro I could count on a network of care. My previous experience in the country facilitated my arrangement in Morogoro, indeed, I lived close to Morogoro City with a Tanzanian family that I met in my previous trip and that facilitated my access to the field. During my time in Tanzania, I initially spent one week in Dar Es Salaam, a trip which provided me the

opportunity to visit Dar Es Salaam University, and to conduct a preliminary interview with a Tanzanian academic. After that, I moved to Morogoro where I spent the rest of my research time.

Yet, when I arrived in Morogoro there were some restrictions due to the spread of Covid-19. This highly affected my previous arrangement with the Chinese director of the ATDC in Dakawa. My original plan was to spend around two months living inside the ATDC with the Chinese experts; this final arrangement resulted after over a year of conversation around my research project with the ATDC Director. However, just when I arrived in Tanzania the ATDC Director communicated that the Center was unable to host me because they decided to close it to the public until the Covid-19 situation was improved. Nevertheless, the Tanzanian institutions have remained opened, and I visited Sokoine University and Mzumbe University in Morogoro.

Overall, my research in Tanzania was authorized by the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH), and my research permit was supported by the Confucius Institute (CI) at Dar Es Salaam University and the Tanzania Agricultural Research Institute in Dakawa (TARI-Dakawa). Although the CI at Dar Es Salaam University has sponsored my research permit, I never get the opportunity to meet the members of the CI during the fieldwork trip.

5.2.1 Data collection and analysis

The data I collected included outputs of semi-structured interviews, qualitative interviews, observations as well as informal conversations. In Tanzania, my main informant throughout the research process has been the Director of TARI-Dakawa, this is also because my research permit has been supported by this institute. Interviews and discussions with the Chinese experts living in Dakawa and with the Director of the ATDC (that at the time of my visit was back in China) never happened in person but always using WeChat. Indeed, WeChat is the most popular and widely used free messaging and calling app in China, as well as one of the few communication applications authorized by the Chinese government and usable in China without the use of a virtual private network (VPN). Google, Facebook, WhatsApp have been banned by the Chinese Government and cannot be used in China unless you subscribed to a VPN service. Overall, WeChat has been a central platform both for my exchanges with the Chinese experts living in Tanzania since the Center closed to the public during my field research, and foremost during all fieldwork in China. Likewise, calls and interviews with the director of TARI Dakawa have happened mostly through WhatsApp. Yet, I had the opportunity to interview the TARI director during my time in Morogoro City. Moreover, the data included interviews and informal discussions with Tanzanian academics,

members of civil society organizations such as local and international NGOs, and community members.

Therefore, the interviews were transcribed, and I triangulate materials both concerning academic literature on critical geography, development studies, and international relation and also with other material I collected during my field trips. I adopted an interpretive analysis of official documents and of experts interviews I collected in China and Tanzania. Hence, I cross-checked information, especially about the most recent activities of the ATDC in Dakawa since little research has been conducted following 2015, however, with some exception (see Makundi, 2017). Furthermore, I cross-checked data collected during field research in China with the ones collected in Tanzania. Moreover, to double-check some materials and missing information from the previous interviews, when I came back to Italy at the end of March 2020, I arranged remote interviews. Overall, the analysis of data collected is discussed in details in Article III.

The outbreak of Covid-19, limited the opportunity to interview a variety of actors crucial for the spatial understanding of the ATDC in Dakawa. I did not have the opportunity, as I originally planned, to interview the local community, as well as those who received training from the Center or that apply Chinese agricultural techniques. At the same time, I could not interview governmental members from the Tanzanian Ministry of Agriculture, as well as local chefs. I made arrangements to visit other Chinese agricultural projects in Morogoro, such as the Pea Pea Village, but I was not able to visit them. This has limited a comparative perspective of different Chinese agricultural cooperation projects, and also of non-Chinese cooperation projects in the same area. Overall, the pandemic excluded the opportunity to adopt participatory research methods that I designed for the research. For instance, I was not able to organize focus groups either with the ATDC Chinese experts or with the local community. Participatory mappings, such as resource mapping, could have represented another useful tool to understand the conflicts over resources that remain crucial in Dakawa.

5.2.2 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis informed by Michel Foucault (1980; 1982) laid the ground for Article IV. Foucauldian discourse analysis intends to go beyond the text to uncover power/knowledge relations (Waitt, 2010). According to Foucault, “there can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourse” (1980: 93). Drawn on Foucault’s key theoretical arguments, Article IV is

motivated by an interest in discursive structure, genealogy, the regime of truths, and power/knowledge relations (Dittmer, 2005). Discourse analysis considers the social context that has enframed the production of particular discourse, yet it also addresses the invisibilization in discourses and their produced effects of truth. Moreover, discourse analysis is intertwined with the productivity of power in creating spaces of resistance (Rose, 2001).

In this study, however, I am particularly interested in the contribution of discourse analysis to development studies, hence, in the potential in deconstructing the complexity of development discourse (Cornwall & Eade, 2010; Ziai, 2016). In doing so, I refer to Ziai (2015) features of development discourse: naturalization, othering, legitimization, hierarchization, depoliticization, and appropriation (Ziai, 2015). In this respect, analysis of development discourse intends to challenge the naturalization of discourses (e.g., developed/less developed) contesting the centrality of historical-geopolitical context in development assumption. Therefore, perspectives on development strategies are far from being natural, and the deconstruction of imaginative geographies contributes to the problematization of the Self and the construction of binaries (e.g., us/them). Moreover, the legitimization of development has been sustained by discourses based upon the promise of betterment and centered on the assumption that certain development interventions are indeed necessary. This contributed to the hierarchization of knowledge that underpinned the mainstream development apparatus. Over time, the depoliticization of development has been reinforced by development discourse that presents e.g., food insecurity, hunger, and poverty as technical problems that required technical solutions (Ferguson, 2006; Ziai, 2016). In light of the above, discourse analysis has the potential to unsettle development discourse while seeking political alternatives (Ziai, 2015).

Article IV comprises a discourse analysis of 17 official documents issued from the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation between the 2000s and FOCAC 2018. Three main types of documents have been analyzed with a specific focus on the 'Agriculture and Food Security' subsection: the opening speech of China's president or prime minister, the official joint declaration, and the action plans. Particularly, 6 Declarations, 7 Action Plans, and 4 opening speech have been analyzed. The key themes that emerged are modernization and technology, and green development. These critical concepts have been challenged by adopting a discourse analysis that pays attention to the features of development discourse as previously discussed referring to Ziai (2015; 2016).

Overall, in the wake of Covid-19, discourse analysis has represented a strategic methodology. The uncertainty related to the global transmission of Covid-19 contributed to the disruptions to

fieldwork (Burman et al., 2020). Throughout the emotional instability of Covid-19, rethinking methods and data sources have been central in this research together with all the ethical questions it delivered, and with the urgency, especially for Ph.D. students, to rethink plans as quickly as possible.

5.3 Ethical considerations, positionality, and emotionality

Soon after I started my Ph.D. I have realized how sensitive was my research topic both academically, institutionally, and foremost for the people I interviewed and potentially for the people that hosted me during my fieldwork. This led to ethical considerations which include reflections on my positionality as a Northern researcher working in the so-called Global South. In the study, I have always have tried to protect the informant's anonymity in any case they told me they preferred to remain anonymous, and the interviews are based on informed consent. Yet, I ask permission for the picture and informant's details that I provide in this work, and particularly in this synopsis. I have been transparent with the people I interviewed about my research topic and questions, and I share with them the results of my academic articles. Notwithstanding, I present my research mostly in academic circles either in seminars, conferences, summer school, and this has represented a limitation of this work.

With the outbreak of Covid-19, I reflect on how to increase information and debate around China-Africa relations that in Italy have remained an unstudied topic dominated by Western rhetoric. With this in mind, I had the opportunity to organize a one year cycle of seminar (AA. 2020/2021) on China-Africa relations for the Master's in Local Development at Padua University. Beside my seminars, I have attempted to bring voices of young academics from China, Africa, and the West to discuss their research findings.

In this study, I understand research as a process rather than just an end product. Part of this process implies reflection, self-discovery, and accepting the embodied experience of the fieldwork together with the emotionally and physical challenges this could bring (Bondi, 2005; England, 1994; Sharp, 2009). The whole research process led to the necessity of situating my person, in other words, to be aware of my place of enunciation (Hooks, 1984). This led me to situate myself as a western, white, women who grow up in Italy and was mostly educated in Western universities with Western curricula. Yet, this imply that the university courses I attended in Italy around development and cooperation were mostly centered on North-South dichotomies and a western-dominated lens that have influenced my research perspectives in this work, despite my attempts to decentralize my view. So, my subjectivity as well as my biography influenced my field research (England, 1994). In

this work, reflexivity has been central and led to critically re-think past research experiences, and re-evaluate the research project, and accept the partial failure of my project. Yet, accepting the messy reality of fieldwork also means to me to be honest about research, its emotionality, and challenges (Harrowell et al., 2018).

The remainder of Stanley & Wise (1993) “Whether we like it or not, researchers remain human beings complete with all the usual assembly of feelings, failings, and moods” (1993: 157), and the contribution of feminist work has been central in accepting the role of emotions as part of my research process, as in being honest about anxiousness and mental distress related with academic spaces (Todd, 2021). I started to speak openly with my colleagues, with students, with my family and friends about how I was feeling within academia. Moreover, in July 2021 I participated in the EADI ISS Conference and I presented a paper on *Emotions as part of the research process* in the panel *Emotionally engaged: reflecting upon researchers’ positionality* convened by Prof. An Ansoms. This provided a space to debate about emotionality in research and reflect with other colleagues about our positionality.

Recognizing and accepting that my life as a researcher and my political and personal life are not separated and that emotions are part of this, has been itself a process that surely does not end with this Ph.D. thesis, instead, it is a continuous process of self-discovering. Yet, in neoliberal academia there is no space for our emotions, indeed, we should first take action as researchers to rethink academia as a whole.

Most of the challenges with my study have arrived with the outbreak of Covid-19, a time where we have been asked by the University to rethink our research project as quickly as possible. At that the time, I felt anxious about the impossibility to complete my work, I felt sad because all my effort in obtaining a research permit for Tanzania and arranging safely my fieldwork together with the research I conducted in previous years seemed pointless. Yet, after over a year of bureaucratic issues, I obtained a one-year resident permit to live in Tanzania and I ended up spending one month in the country. I also felt emotionally attached to the family I was living in Morogoro, and I felt anxious when I explained to them that I had to leave their country because it was supposedly not safe, and they were keeping telling me “But here is safer than Italy”. I felt anxious when I realized that all the flights back to Europe were canceled and there was just one expensive flight available, and I had to decide in a few hours what to do. At that time, without the care of my friends back to Italy it would have been impossible to arrange my travel since in the village I was living in we did not have electricity and internet connection during those days. When I arrived in Italy at the end of

March 2020, the country was in total lockdown, so I passed from living with more than 10 people in Morogoro to staying alone in my apartment for over two months. That was the time, according to University, I should rethink my research project. Yet, for me has been a time of enormous stress, panic attacks, and constant distress caused by the partial ‘failure’ of my project.

Apart from Covid-19 challenges, other limitations are related to my little knowledge of Chinese and Swahili. For sure, this has limited exchanges with the local communities and with academics in the field. Overall, it has been quite challenging to either receive a Tanzanian affiliation necessary for the research permit or to receive an invitation letter from Chinese institutions because of the sensibility and political relevance of the research topic and questions.

6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the main insights of the study and I answer the research questions already introduced in section 1.1. First, I look at some challenges of the South-South Cooperation under the consolidation of Sino-African relations. Subsequently, I examine the challenges of Chinese ATDCs in Africa as a model of SSC, and as the flagship project of China-Africa agricultural cooperation. Then, I look at the case of the ATDC in Tanzania, and I claim that ATDC perpetuates dependency relations on China. Third, I discuss the changes in discourses and practices of China-Africa agricultural cooperation, and I suggest that despite China's agricultural aid in African states having largely changed since the 1950s, agriculture has remained a priority sector.

6.1 China-Africa relations and South-South Cooperation

In Article I, I suggest that the expansion of South-South cooperation and the consolidation of China-Africa relations is central for discussing the future of international development cooperation. Indeed, the rise of BRICS countries and especially of China-in-Africa led to a rupture of the North-South framework that has dominated the mainstream development landscape post-1945 era (Sidaway, 2011). Hence, these changing dynamics have contributed to the urgent necessity to move towards a critical theory of development that reflects the reality of the 21st century (Ziai, 2019). However, the expansion of South-South Cooperation and China's presence in Africa is not without challenges, especially, as noted in Article I, in the case of the principle of non-interference. This principle lay the foundation both of SSC and China's foreign aid, indeed, China-Africa relations are frequently used to examine practices and modalities of SSC (Huang et al., 2019).

Following the Bandung Conference in 1955, South-South Cooperation emerges in opposition to North-dominated systems. Nevertheless, SSC has radically changed since the mid-1950s. The evolution of SSC could be divided into three periods that are central to the discussion of current dynamics: SSC 1.0, SSC 2.0, SSC 3.0 (Mawdsley, 2019). During the SSC 1.0 (1950-2005), SSC resembles the solidarity spirit of Bandung, however, with a less geopolitical influence compared to current SSC geoeconomic and geostrategic power. The shift from SSC 1.0 to SSC 2.0 (2000-2015) is related to a political and economic expansion that has resulted in the establishment of international forums such as the BRICS forum in 2009, and FOCAC in 2000 (Article IV). However, greater visibility led to major operational challenges especially in maintaining the mutuality and 'win-win' discourses which have traditionally characterized SSC 1.0. Importantly, this expansion has converged in three trends in SSC 3.0 (2015->). First, SSC discursive frames have become more

pragmatic and less ideological. Second, the economic and resource expansion led to urgently ‘intervene’ in other countries' affairs to protect geostrategic interests, in other words, challenging the principle of non-interference. Third, it will be difficult for Southern partners to maintain an ideological distinction in terms of binary construction with Northern actors (e.g., North-South/ Developed-Underdeveloped).

The lines between Northern and Southern approaches are increasingly blurred with a convergence, co-optation, and competition of practices (Mawdsley, 2018). The rapid development of China and SSC has re-articulated the global development regime with increasing hybridity between Northern and Southern approaches (Mawdsley & Taggart, 2022). Importantly, the convergence and co-optation of practices is mutual, this is to say that the ‘*southernization*’ of development is congruent with Southern development partners being influenced by Northern approaches (Ibid.). However, apart from the hybridization of practices, we cannot reduce SSC to a monolithic entity. The differences within Southern partners in terms of actors, political, and economic interests should be key in the discussion (Gray & Gills, 2016). For instance, as noted in Article IV, the geoeconomic agricultural interests of African and Chinese governmental actors differed from the ones of non-state actors and grassroots organizations. Indeed, the rise of BRICS countries has not happened without contestation, yet, it has been underpinned by rising global activism, mobilization, and resistance (Nilsen & Holdt, 2021).

In the last years, China seems to converge with political framings and practices that are more typical of the traditional North-South relations (Lisimba e Parashar, 2020; Sindzingre, 2016). However, the Chinese government has continued to refuse the ‘donor’ label and China’s definition of aid does not resemble the concept of ODA as defined by the OECD/DAC. One of the important aspects is to capture the difference in definition and practices between China and traditional donors to understand China’s foreign aid in Africa (Article II). Indeed, countries such as China, India, Brazil while rejecting OECD/DAC definitions of aid “Have instead sustained and defended the idea and practice of d-D as a blurred and blended set of flows and practices” (Mawdsley & Taggart, 2022: 10). As suggested in this study, the ‘rise’ of the South and the rapid development of China is key in discussing transformations in the global development landscape. Yet, Afro-Chinese relations are also representative of the challenges of SSC in the ground (Mawdsley, 2019).

China’s foreign aid and SSC rely on the five principles of peaceful coexistence: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal

affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (Huang et al., 2019). Article I shows that China's rhetoric of non-interference in African countries sustains Chinese intervention in Africa as purely technical and supposedly neutral (Ferguson, 1994). The Chinese development discourse contributes to the depoliticization of Chinese agricultural technology transfer (Article IV). However, the rapid expansion of China-in-Africa has urged the Chinese government to intervene to protect its economic interest, and, overall, ensure control over Africa's natural resources, raw materials, and energies. Moreover, African market spaces are crucial to 'fix' China's internal overaccumulation and overcapacity (Taylor & Zajontz, 2020).

Importantly, China's interference in African states seems to depend upon China's geoeconomics interest in specific countries especially in terms of natural resources (Hodzi, 2019). China's intervention in Africa also results from the consistent number of Chinese migrants in the continent. Indeed, in 2019 the SAIS-CARI estimated that 182,745 Chinese workers were living in African states. Moreover, this set of data does not include informal workers or Chinese workers who have decided independently to remain in African states at the end of contracted projects. Yet, the rise of Chinese migrants living in Africa has resulted in increasing attacks and contestation towards the competition of Chinese products in local markets and Chinese illegal activities (Aidoo, 2017; Alden & Jiang, 2019). As a result, China's presence is consolidating in African peace and security cooperation areas (Alden & Jiang, 2019). The establishment of the Chinese military base in Djibouti in 2017 is representative of China's changing foreign politics as well of the unsustainability of the principle of non-interference beyond rhetoric.

As Article I shows, the expansion of SSC and Sino-African relations led to question the sustainability of the founding principle of non-interference. China's dominant South-South rhetoric contributes to the depoliticization of international development cooperation. Besides rhetoric, the case of China-Africa relations suggests the erosion of the principle of non-interference in *realpolitik*. Indeed, it is crucial to go over-simplistic narratives of mutuality and win-win that have characterized the Chinese official development discourses and uncover hidden power relations that are central in Afro-Chinese relations. Moreover, the erosion of the principle of non-interference reduces the ideologically and rhetorically the image of China as an alternative non-Western partner. Overall, these dynamics represent a convergence between Northern and Southern practices considering the interference in other countries internal affairs.

6.2 Rethinking Chinese ATDCs in Africa

In Article II, I examine the case of the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers as a model of South-South Cooperation and China's foreign aid. ATDCs are representative of the 'aid+business' model which is central to understanding China's foreign aid in Africa (Jiang et al., 2016). As shown in Article II, the ATDCs are not that successful as officially promoted by the Chinese governments. Indeed, despite these Centers have attracted international attention since their establishment in 2006, the ATDCs are facing several challenges (Jiang, 2020). The major challenges of the ATDCs are related to language, cultural barriers, and a low level of cooperation with local institutions and partners. Moreover, from the literature review emerged that Chinese and African actors have different expectations around the role played by ATDCs in the ground. Indeed, Chinese experts believed the Centers should work as platforms to transfer Chinese experience in agriculture, yet, African local actors claimed that the impact in terms of technology transfer is limited (Xu et al., 2016). In addition, the blurred line between aid and business exacerbates the tensions between Chinese and local actors around the objectives of the Center (Tang et al., 2018). Moreover, ATDCs have tended to ignore local farming techniques and local suitability. Thus, even if Chinese techniques could increase productivity they do not necessarily fix the local market and suitability (Jiang, 2020; Makundi, 2017). Overall, many of the challenges of ATDCs are related to a lack of consideration of the local environment both in the design and implementation of the projects.

In Article II, I suggest gaps in ATDCs research. Indeed, current research does not take into consideration the indirect impact that the Centers have on the socio-economic, political, and ecological spheres. Yet, ATDCs are not developing in a vacuum and geography matters in the understanding of these dynamics. Moreover, the limitations in understanding Chinese technology transfer relevance are related to the fact that the same farmers received training in similar topics from different international organizations (e.g., USAID, JICA). Hence, there are several aspects such as the role of non-Chinese actors that need to be reconsidered. Moreover, gender issues have been ignored in ATDCs design, as overall has happened in the case of other China-Africa agricultural cooperation projects (Article IV). Importantly, research on ATDCs have taken for granted the concept of food security. However, I claim that other concepts should be adopted such as the one of food sovereignty as propelled by La Via Campesina (2007). In addition, the question of land has not been discussed in previous research. Yet, ATDCs are commercial platforms aiming to attract Chinese investors, indeed, future requests for land and changing land use planning should be key in the discussion.

Overall, ATDCs resemble the experience of foreign actors and economic models that continue to be designed outside of the continent contributing to the need to decolonize African studies (Obeng-Odoom, 2018). Furthermore, gaps in ATDCs research should reconsider the role of place/space and spatial relations in further research, indeed, ATDCs are embedded in specific geographies which existed long before the establishment of the Center.

6.2.1 ATDC and the diversification of dependency

In Article III, I examine the case of the ATDC in Tanzania under China-Tanzania relations. The analysis revealed that ATDCs are far from being innovative technical centers or alternative agricultural cooperation projects to North-South traditional programme. Indeed, Article III describes how the ATDC in Dakawa contributes to the reproduction of dependency. Yet, even if China frame itself as a developing country, outside of the North-South axis, the case of ATDCs contribute to the academic debate that China is reproducing well-known patterns of economic imbalances which have characterized North-South relations (Carmody, 2013; Gonzalez-Vicente, 2017; Lisimba e Parashar, 2020).

The analysis of the ATDC in Dakawa suggests that through the Center the Chinese companies have advanced the introduction of agricultural machinery, pesticides, fertilizers, and home seeds. For instance, the Chongqing seeds Ltd. Have tested over ten varieties of hybrid rice in the Tanzanian ATDC. However, the finding of this study aligned with Makundi (2017) claims that Chinese hybrid seeds did not suit the local taste. Indeed, the local variety of rice SARO5 developed by TARI-Dakawa and largely use by local farmers was preferred over the Chinese hybrid varieties because the Chinese hybrid rice 'has no taste'. There are cultural resistances that were not considered in the design of the ATDC that could be key in the success of the Center.

However, the introduction of Chinese hybrid seed, machinery, and agricultural inputs could contribute to exacerbating the dependency on Chinese companies and Chinese suppliers. Importantly, this contributes to creating a dependency on Chinese capital, know-how, and Chinese technology transfer in agriculture. Yet, technology transfer is far from being neutral and encompassed a transfer of political and cultural values and a certain vision of how agriculture should be carried out and from whom. The model of agriculture which is transferred under the ATDCs is one based upon modernization, commercialization, hybridization, and private-public partnership.

On the one hand, the ATDC model aligns with the objectives of the Tanzanian government of modernizing agriculture. On the other hand, the ATDC in Dakawa ignores the local farming knowledge system and neglects the centrality of local seeds. Moreover, in the region of Morogoro where the ATDC is located there are many valid experiences of regenerative agriculture that could instead be adopted as a ‘sustainable’ agricultural model. For instance, in the city of Morogoro, I visited the local NGO Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania (SAT) that promotes agroecological dissemination and participatory methods. This is to say, that there are different local projects close to the ATDC in Dakawa that are centered on the use of local inputs and local knowledge in agriculture.

As noted in Article III, ATDCs seem to create new forms of economic dependency on China. The Centers are far from being alternatives to Western cooperation projects, yet, they both Southern and Northern aid projects have ignored the centrality of territory in the implementation and design of local projects. Besides the South-South rhetoric, China’s ATDCs in African states are driven by the question: What can Africa learn from China? This unidirectional question is not much different from drivers that have underpinned the interventions of Northern actors in African agriculture. This contribute to challenging the ideological discourse which has supported SSC and China’s foreign aid in the last decades (Article I).

Southern and Northern actors have implemented agricultural cooperation projects that maintain dependency relations rather than foster ‘sustainability’. Moreover, despite the ecological degradation should urge us to intervene, agricultural cooperation projects continue to ignore the relations between human and more than humans and questions of class and gender (Moore, 2017). As shown in Article III, China-Africa relations create new forms of dependency on Chinese capital, as noted in the case of the Tanzanian ATDC. This contributes to the diversification of African dependency on traditional Western actors and in creating new forms of dependency on China, and more broadly on BRICS countries (Taylor, 2014; Taylor & Zajontz, 2020).

6.3 Past and present of China-Africa agricultural cooperation discourse

In Article IV, I examine the changes of narrations and practices of China’s agricultural politics in Africa based on discourse analysis of FOCAC official documents from the 2000s to FOCAC 2018. In particular, I question how these development discourses have evolved in a time of multiple

crises. Since the mid-1950s, agriculture has remained a priority sector in China-Africa relations, however, modalities, practices, and objectives have radically changed. Starting from the 2000s, China-Africa relations are driven by commercial interests and this is reflected in the agricultural cooperation sector as noted in the case of the ATDCs (Article II, III). As shown in Article IV, the key themes recurrent in FOCAC official documents on agricultural cooperation are modernization and technology, and more recently green development.

Since the launch of FOCAC in the early 2000s, China-Africa agricultural cooperation is represented in FOCAC official documents as crucial to contributing to Africa's food security. This construction together with an enduring South-South narrative, as a soft-power tool, has legitimized China's intervention in African agriculture. Yet, this representation has contributed to the depoliticization of China's technology transfer such as in the case of the ATDCs. Modernization and technological narratives are central in FOCAC documents and have contribute to reinforcing the modernization-development nexus (Cabral et al., 2021). However, the logic of modernization in agriculture based on commercialization, hybridization, mechanization, and use of pesticides is not different from these programme transferred to Africa under the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and supported by green philanthocapitalist organizations such as the Bill and Gates Foundation. This appear to reinforce the introduction of economic development models which are designed and conceived for a particular geography and are transferred in a different one: a dynamic that has underpinned Western interventions in African states for decades.

The Chinese official discourses at FOCAC have contributed to legitimizing China's intervention in African agriculture and reducing agricultural challenges into technical problems that can be fixed by science and technology (Ziai, 2016). These narratives ignore the socio-economic, political, ecological complexity of agriculture and questions of gender and class. Overall, China's development discourse has contributed to hiding power relations. Moreover, FOCAC documents excluded from the discourse the role of peasant farming, indigenous knowledge system, and local practices, as well as the role of African women farmers (Boafo & Lyons, 2021; Tsikata & Pereira, 2021). However, in a time of multiple crises, the role of traditional knowledge is key for the regeneration of livelihood and agriculture.

As shown in Article IV, the Chinese discourses on China-Africa agricultural cooperation have changed in the last two decades also concerning Western criticisms towards China's presence in Africa and its environmental impact (Tan-Mullins, 2017). In Article IV, I suggest that China's geostrategic discourses on agricultural cooperation have evolved according to global climate change

concerns. Since FOCAC 2015 there is rising attention on sustainable development, and the ‘green’ rhetoric has remained central in FOCAC 2018, and FOCAC 2021. For instance, during FOCAC 2018 President Xi Jinping claimed “The Earth is the only place which we mankind call home. China will work with Africa to pursue green, low-carbon, circular and sustainable development and protect our lush mountains and lucid waters and all living beings on our planet”. However, in Article IV, I question how the ‘green’ development in agriculture could be carried out with China major plans of agricultural modernization, and overall what is the meaning of ‘green’ in China-Africa relations remained highly questionable. Indeed, even if China's geostrategic narratives accommodate global concerns around climate change, the green footprint in local practices have remained limited.

One important aspect I have raised in Article IV is the increasing resistance and mobilization towards Chinese presence in Africa (Aidoo, 2017; Wameru, 2020; Yi, 2021). The Chinese official discourses are not unquestioned from below, and African resistance movements are consolidating. Besides the voices and experience of grassroots organizations and non-state actors are not included in the FOCAC consultation mechanisms (Folashadé, 2021), the role of African food sovereignty and resistance movements is at the front of contestation. Indeed, African resistance movements are consolidating in the wake of environmental degradation recognizing the relation between agriculture/climate change, the importance of African environmental ethics, and the centrality of peasant farming and the role of women (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021). Overall resistance movement call for decolonial and transformative agendas (Tamale, 2020).

In the last two decades, China’s discourse at FOCAC has evolved according to China’s geoeconomics and geopolitical interest. Yet, areas of cooperation in agriculture expanded to trade policies, e-commerce of Africa agricultural products, and contract farming in specific sectors. Most importantly, agriculture has remained a top priority sector in China-Africa relations and the importance of agricultural aid is more than even crucial due to China’s domestic food security concerns and the increase China-US war trade. However, the impact and gains of Africa at FOCAC remain highly questionable, and this should remain a focus of future research due to the consolidation of China-Africa relations.

ARTICLES I-IV

I

Cina-Africa e le sfide della Cooperazione Sud-Sud: l'erosione del principio di non-intervento

Mariasole Pepa

Cina-Africa e le sfide della Cooperazione Sud-Sud: l'erosione del principio di non-intervento

Parole chiave: Cooperazione Sud-Sud; Cina-Africa; Geografia dello sviluppo; SSC

L'articolo riflette sul futuro della cooperazione internazionale interrogando il consolidamento della cooperazione Sud-Sud e in particolare delle relazioni Cina-Africa. L'espansione della cooperazione Sud-Sud, in termini di risorse e legittimità, ha portato a sfide operative che mettono in discussione la continuità del principio di non-interferenza, il principio celebrativo tanto della cooperazione Sud-Sud che della politica estera cinese in Africa. L'articolo intende quindi andare oltre la retorica dominante della non-interferenza nelle politiche locali, esplorando il caso delle relazioni Cina-Africa come rappresentative di pratiche e modalità della cooperazione Sud-Sud, contribuendo al dibattito sulla neutralità della cooperazione messa in atto dallo Stato Cinese.

China-Africa and the challenges of South-South Cooperation: the erosion of the non-intervention principle

Keywords: South-South Cooperation; China-Africa; Development geography; SSC

This paper reflects on the future of international cooperation analysing the consolidation of South-South cooperation and particularly of China-Africa relations. The expansion of South-South cooperation, in terms of resources and legitimacy, has led to operational challenges that question the continuity of the principle of non-interference, the foundational principle both of South-South cooperation and China's foreign policy in Africa. Finally, the article aims to move beyond the dominant rhetoric of non-interference in local politics, exploring the case of China-Africa relations as representative of practices and modalities of South-South cooperation, contributing to the debate on the neutrality of cooperation propelled by the Chinese government.

1. INTRODUZIONE- Riflettere sul futuro della cooperazione internazionale, in un particolare momento di sfide culturali, politiche e operative, conduce all'urgenza di interrogare i distinti immaginari geografici, e il mutevole significato dello stesso sviluppo e del ruolo della cooperazione.

A questo proposito, le critiche di Ferguson (1994) al processo di sviluppo sono tutt'oggi rilevanti per discutere la presunta neutralità degli interventi esterni nei paesi del 'Sud globale'. Secondo Ferguson, lo sviluppo sostiene gli interessi geopolitici attraverso interventi tecnici che perpetuano una depoliticizzazione della cooperazione. Le critiche di Ferguson emergono per condannare gli interventi infrastrutturali di sviluppo occidentali, tuttavia, rimangono particolarmente utili per decostruire tanto la retorica di non-intervento della politica estera cinese in Africa, e più in generale della cooperazione Sud-Sud (Bachmann, 2017).

Certamente, negli ultimi decenni i maggiori cambiamenti nella geografia dello sviluppo globale sono stati relativi al consolidamento della cooperazione Sud-Sud (SSC) e del Brasile, Russia, India, Cina, Sudafrica (BRICS), in particolare della Cina in Africa. Questo ha portato ad una rottura dell'asse Nord-Sud che ha dominato le strutture, le istituzioni e le norme della Cooperazione Internazionale, aprendo una discussione critica sulla necessità di andare oltre ai paradigmi tradizionali (Kothari et al., 2019; Ziai, 2019). Le relazioni Cina-Africa vengono frequentemente utilizzate come arena di esplorazione di pratiche e modalità della cooperazione Sud-Sud. L'intervento cinese in Africa rispecchia, almeno nella retorica dominante, i cinque principi della coesistenza pacifica: il rispetto reciproco per l'integrità territoriale e la sovranità, la non aggressione reciproca, la non interferenza negli affari interni dell'altro, l'uguaglianza e il beneficio reciproco, la coesistenza pacifica (Huang, Xu, Mao 2019). Questi principi sostengono la retorica della politica estera cinese in Africa, tuttavia, sono varie le sfide contemporanee che ne ostacolano la reale applicabilità sul campo.

Emma Mawdsley (2019) esplorando l'evoluzione della cooperazione Sud-Sud (SSC) propone tre sfide dell'attuale SSC utili per interrogare le relazioni Sino-Africane: un maggiore pragmatismo, la difficoltà nel mantenere il principio di non-intervento e una distinzione ideologica dagli attori occidentali. Sulla base di tale premessa, il contributo offre una prospettiva di ragionamento sull'impossibilità di osservare il principio celebrativo della SSC, ossia il principio di non-intervento, utilizzando come caso di studio le relazioni Cina-Africa. Questo permette di andare oltre le retoriche dominanti sulla cooperazione Sud-Sud e discutere il futuro delle relazioni sino-africane che riflettono i cambiamenti in atto nella geografia dello sviluppo.

L'articolazione del lavoro prevede dapprima l'inquadramento della cooperazione Sud-Sud e delle sue sfide attuali, in particolare relative all'erosione del principio di non-intervento; successivamente, viene illustrato il caso delle relazioni Cina-Africa utilizzate in questo articolo come spazio di esplorazione di pratiche e modalità della cooperazione Sud-Sud. Segue la discussione sull'erosione del principio di non intervento nel quadro delle relazioni sino-africane in seno al crescente interesse economico della Cina in Africa. L'obiettivo dell'articolo è quello di contribuire criticamente, attraverso il caso delle relazioni Cina-Africa, al dibattito sul futuro della cooperazione internazionale.

2. LE SFIDE DELLA COOPERAZIONE SUD-SUD- Negli ultimi decenni, i maggiori cambiamenti nell'architettura della cooperazione internazionale sono relativi al consolidamento della cooperazione Sud-Sud materialmente, ontologicamente e ideologicamente (Mawdsley, 2015). La Conferenza Afroasiatica di Bandung del 1955 rappresenta uno dei pilastri per lo sviluppo della cooperazione Sud-Sud e per il consolidamento delle relazioni Cina-Africa. A Bandung, infatti, si riunirono ventinove nazioni dell'Africa, Asia, e Medio Oriente che condannano il colonialismo, il razzismo ed esprimono le loro preoccupazioni sulla crescente guerra fredda tra Stati Uniti e Unione Sovietica. La cooperazione Sud-Sud, radicata nello spirito di solidarietà tra i paesi del sud globale (Gray e Gills, 2016), evolve in opposizione alle relazioni verticali Nord-Sud/centro-periferia. Il Movimento dei Non Allineati, che si costituì il 1961 come evoluzione pratica del primo incontro di Bandung, racchiude chiaramente la promozione di due principi cardine: il principio di non-intervento e di non-allineamento. Sebbene la SSC sia nata come progetto contro-egemonico, la sua espansione, in particolare nel nuovo millennio, ha condotto ad una agenda depoliticizzata e tecnica che sempre più converge con le pratiche di aiuto tradizionali (Morvaridi e Hughes, 2018). In altre parole, l'attenzione originale della SSC sulla cooperazione culturale e la creazione di strutture di governance globale alternative per contrastare l'egemonia del Nord è stata persa (Engel, 2019).

Emma Mawdsley (2019) cattura e interroga l'evoluzione della Cooperazione Sud-Sud proponendo una divisione tra la SSC 1.0, SSC 2.0, SSC 3.0 non come periodizzazione statica bensì come strumento analitico di riflessione. Mawdsley suggerisce che nella sua prima fase la SSC (1950-2005) rifletteva i principi di solidarietà e fratellanza dello "spirito di Bandung" ma rappresentava uno strumento geo-strategico meno potente rispetto all'influenza economica nel nuovo millennio. Negli anni successivi si è potuto assistere ad una forte espansione della SSC in termini di risorse, visibilità e legittimità. Il passaggio dunque dalla SSC 1.0 alla SSC 2.0 (2000-2015), è stato accompagnato dalla creazione di nuovi forum e istituzioni come il Forum dei BRICS nel 2009. Un altro esempio è rappresentato dal Forum della Cooperazione Cina-Africa (FOCAC) lanciato dal governo cinese dagli anni 2000 per istituzionalizzare le relazioni tra la Cina e i 53 paesi africani che hanno stabilito relazioni diplomatiche con lo Stato Cinese. In questo senso, l'espansione della SSC ha portato ad una crescente attenzione politica e mediatica oltre a maggiori difficoltà nel mantenere il linguaggio incentrato sulla solidarietà, sulla fratellanza, e sul mutuo beneficio che hanno caratterizzato la SSC nella sua prima fase.

Questa espansione conduce a tre sfide della SSC 3.0 che va dal 2015 ai giorni nostri. Primo, l'inquadratura discorsiva della SSC viene narrata come più pragmatica e orientata al risultato e all'efficienza. Secondo, la crescita dei rapporti economici e degli investimenti, di cui le relazioni

Cina-Africa sono l'esempio rappresentativo, hanno portato ad una urgente necessità di intervento. Terzo, sarà sempre più difficile per i paesi del Sud Globale supportare una differenza ideologica in termini binari Nord-Sud/DAC-Non-DAC. Questo è parallelo alla convergenza, competizione e cooptazione tra il Nord e il Sud: una “*southernization*” dello sviluppo (Mawdsley, 2018). La presenza cinese in Africa è un caso rappresentativo per interrogare l'espansione della SSC e, in particolare, le sfide che emergono e che caratterizzano pratiche, modalità, e narrazione attuali. L'articolo pone particolare attenzione alla continuità del principio di non-intervento nel quadro delle relazioni sino-africane che vengono brevemente introdotte nel paragrafo successivo. In seguito, verrà discussa l'erosione del principio di non-intervento nel quadro delle relazioni Cina-Africa. L'articolo si basa sulla revisione della letteratura accademica di geografia critica, studi dello sviluppo e relazioni internazionali, e di *working papers* prodotti da istituti di ricerca rilevanti per le relazioni Cina-Africa. Inoltre, per interrogare il principio di non-intervento nelle relazioni Cina-Africa è stata condotta un'analisi dei piani di azione dei FOCAC e dei libri bianchi della Cina, oltre a un'analisi dei discorsi ufficiali di Xi Jinping. L'analisi della letteratura e del discorso hanno permesso di andare oltre la retorica dominante e criticamente discutere la continuità del principio di non-interferenza nel caso delle relazioni sino-africane.

3. RELAZIONI CINA-AFRICA- L'Africa è oggi spesso considerata il secondo continente della Cina (French, 2014). L'interesse internazionale circa la presenza cinese in Africa è stato relativo alla crisi finanziaria e alimentare del 2008 e al dibattito sul *land grabbing* che ha portato ad una proliferazione di pubblicazioni accademiche ed un interesse mediatico intorno alle relazioni sino-africane (Alden e Large, 2018; Anshan, 2020; GRAIN, 2008; Lee, 2018; Pepa, 2021). Questo crescente interesse, che ha particolarmente catturato l'Occidente, è chiaramente connesso alla centralità che la Cina sta assumendo in Africa sia come partner commerciale sia come attore della cooperazione internazionale. In altre parole, dal 2009 la Cina è il principale partner commerciale del continente africano con un volume di interscambio pari a 192 miliardi di dollari nel 2019 dai 10,8 miliardi di dollari nel 2000 (SAIS-CARI, 2021). Secondo una ricerca condotta dal *Global Development Policy Center* dell'Università di Boston, la *China Development Bank* e la *Export-Import Bank of China* hanno eguagliato la Banca Mondiale in termini di finanziamenti ai paesi in via di sviluppo (Gallagher et al., 2019). Nelle parole di Gallagher “La Cina è diventata la più grande banca di sviluppo mondiale” (Gallagher, 2018).

Negli ultimi anni abbiamo assistito ad una importante produzione accademica sulle relazioni sino-africane, sebbene la presenza cinese in Africa è tutt'altro che nuova (Anshan, 2007). Tuttavia, le pratiche e le modalità che hanno caratterizzato le relazioni sino-africane sono cambiate ed evolute nel

tempo. Solitamente si discute di un passaggio da un supporto ideologico ad un supporto guidato da interessi economici nel nuovo millennio. In seguito alla Conferenza di Bandung, la Cina ha supportato i movimenti indipendentisti in Africa con un'attenzione particolare alle relazioni con i regimi socialisti. Tuttavia, l'ascesa e le riforme di Deng Xiaoping e l'apertura della Cina dal 1978 (*Open Door Policy*) hanno influito sulle priorità della politica cinese, che quindi si è concentrata sullo sviluppo economico interno, piuttosto che sulla politica estera. Questo passaggio è stato definito da David Harvey come l'inizio del "Neoliberalismo con caratteristiche cinesi" (Harvey, 2005). La rapida espansione economica in Cina in seguito all'apertura del paese ha conseguentemente portato ad un riemergere degli interessi economici e politici in Africa (Hodzi, 2020): interessi che sono fortemente connessi alla necessità di risorse naturali e materie prime per far fronte alla crescita economica. Il consolidamento degli interessi economici cinesi in Africa risulta chiaro dall'inizio del nuovo millennio.

Negli ultimi due decenni, le relazioni Cina-Africa sono cresciute rapidamente attraverso la creazione di forum bilaterali e il supporto delle compagnie cinesi ad investire in Africa attraverso ad esempio la *Go Out Strategy*, una politica introdotta dal governo di Pechino alla fine degli anni novanta con l'obiettivo di incentivare le aziende cinesi ad entrare in nuovi mercati. L'istituzione nel 2018 della prima agenzia di cooperazione per lo sviluppo cinese (CIDCA), il lancio della *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) da parte di Xi Jinping nel 2013 e nel 2014 della Banca Asiatica d'Investimento per le infrastrutture (AIIB) come alternativa alla Banca Mondiale e al Fondo Monetario Internazionale, sono chiari segnali del ruolo che la Cina vuole giocare come nuovo leader della cooperazione internazionale (Vitale, 2020). La Cina rappresenta il maggior contribuente e promotore della cooperazione Sud-Sud e le relazioni Cina-Africa vengono frequentemente utilizzate come arena di esplorazione di pratiche e modalità della SSC. L'analisi che segue interroga la difficoltà nel mantenere il principio di non-intervento, celebrativo della SSC, nel quadro delle relazioni Cina-Africa.

4. CINA-AFRICA: NON-INTERVENTO?- Dall'introduzione, agli inizi degli anni Cinquanta, dei Cinque Principi della Coesistenza Pacifica di Zhou Enlai, la politica estera degli aiuti cinesi si basa su alcuni principi, quali il rispetto della sovranità e dell'integrità territoriale, la non aggressione reciproca, la non interferenza negli affari interni dell'altro, uguaglianza, beneficio reciproco, e coesistenza pacifica [già citati. Togliarli nell'introduzione?]: principi che sono normalmente dichiarati alla base della cooperazione Sud-Sud, ad esempio dall'Ufficio delle Nazioni Unite per la cooperazione Sud-Sud (Huang, Xu, Mao 2019; UNOSSC, 2021). I discorsi ufficiali e la diplomazia

del governo cinese perpetuano la retorica della non-condizionalità dell'aiuto e del non-intervento. Un esempio recente è il discorso di Xi Jinping al FOCAC del 2018:

“Noi rispettiamo l'Africa, amiamo l'Africa e sosteniamo l'Africa. Seguiamo l'approccio dei "cinque no" nelle nostre relazioni con l'Africa: nessuna interferenza con la ricerca da parte dei paesi africani di percorsi di sviluppo adatti alle loro condizioni nazionali; nessuna interferenza negli affari interni dei paesi africani; nessuna imposizione della nostra volontà sui paesi africani; nessun vincolo politico all'assistenza all'Africa; e nessuna ricerca di vantaggi politici egoistici negli investimenti e nella cooperazione finanziaria con l'Africa” (Xinhua, 2018).

La retorica del governo cinese di non-intervento, della non-condizionalità dell'aiuto e della cooperazione *win-win* sostiene la narrazione dell'intervento cinese in Africa come puramente tecnico e presumibilmente neutrale (Ferguson, 1994). Tuttavia, sono vari i dibattiti recenti che mettono in dubbio il principio di non-interferenza (Zheng, 2016). I principi che guidano la politica estera cinese emergono negli anni cinquanta quando gli interessi economici della Cina in Africa, come precedentemente discusso, erano limitati. Dall'inizio del nuovo millennio, l'espansione economica della Cina ha portato ad un incremento degli interessi economici in Africa con oltre diecimila imprese cinesi presenti nel continente (Xinhua, 2017). Oltre agli interessi di carattere economico, la presenza cinese in Africa è connessa all'urgente necessità di materie prime, energia e allo stesso tempo di nuovi mercati per far fronte alla sovraccumulazione interna di capitale in Cina (Taylor e Zajontz, 2020).

Questa espansione economica ha portato anche ad un numero rilevante di cittadini cinesi che vivono in altri paesi. Secondo l'istituto nazionale di statistica della Cina, il numero di lavoratori cinesi in Africa alla fine del 2019 era di 182.745, un dato che non include i migranti informali e coloro che decidono di rimanere nel continente africano in seguito alla fine dei progetti per i quali erano stati assunti, oltre ai cittadini cinesi che si recano in Africa in cerca di fortuna (SAIS- CARI, 2021). Il progressivo insediamento dei cittadini cinesi in Africa ha portato anche ad una maggiore tensione tra i migranti cinesi e i cittadini africani, in particolare in termini di conflitti di natura economica. Ad esempio, la tensione tra i migranti cinesi in Zambia e gli zambiani si è evoluta anche a causa del fatto che gli imprenditori cinesi si concentrano nelle aree urbane dove la disoccupazione è particolarmente diffusa contribuendo alla competizione nel mercato locale (Matambo, 2020).

Inoltre, sono sempre più frequenti i casi in cui i cittadini cinesi sono soggetti a furti o rapimenti poiché percepiti come bersagli facili (Grimm, 2012). I crimini contro le imprese e i migranti cinesi si sono verificati specialmente in Angola, Ghana, Kenya e Sudafrica dove si è registrato un aumento dei residenti cinesi (Alden & Jiang, 2019). L'aumento degli attacchi verso i migranti cinesi nel continente africano insieme all'aumento degli interessi cinesi in Africa dovuti all'espansione

economica hanno portato il governo di Pechino ad adottare azioni che contraddicono il principio di non-interferenza negli affari interni di altri paesi. La sostenibilità del principio di non-interferenza in Africa riflette un dibattito più ampio sulla strategia internazionale di Pechino e sul futuro della politica estera cinese (Zheng, 2016).

La presunta neutralità del principio di non-intervento della Cina può essere catturata attraverso differenti livelli di interferenza. Obert Hodzi (2019) interroga l'intervento della Cina in tre conflitti armati interstatali in Libia, Mali, e Sud-Sudan mettendo quindi in discussione il principio di non-intervento in Africa. Dall'analisi di Hodzi emerge che l'intervento della Cina è correlato alla protezione dei propri interessi economici e nazionali che vengono minati dai conflitti armati, interessi che sono strettamente collegati alle risorse naturali presenti in questi paesi. Ad esempio, la Cina è il maggiore investitore nel settore petrolifero in Sudan oltre ad essere il principale acquirente di petrolio dal Sud Sudan (Cheng, 2016). In altre parole, maggiore è la partecipazione economica della Cina in Africa, maggiore è l'interesse del governo cinese di proteggere i propri investimenti, al punto da intervenire in conflitti armati (Hodzi, 2108).

I confini sul tema della sicurezza nelle relazioni Africa-Cina sono quindi sempre più labili. Ciò ha portato ad un maggior intervento della Cina nell'area della cooperazione multilaterale per il mantenimento della pace e della sicurezza in Africa, ufficializzato dal FOCAC del 2012 con una serie di iniziative politiche (Alden e Jiang, 2019). Successivamente, l'apertura della base militare cinese a Gibuti nel 2017 ha ulteriormente permesso la creazione di un'area strategica per difendere gli interessi della Cina in Africa e Medio Oriente (Cabestan, 2020). Inoltre, durante la riunione del FOCAC del 2017 è stata annunciata la creazione del *China-Africa Law Enforcement and Security Forum* con l'obiettivo di "proteggere la sicurezza dei cittadini cinesi, delle aziende cinesi e dei grandi progetti" attraverso il miglioramento delle capacità gestionali dei governi africani (Alden, 2018). Se, da un lato, queste iniziative rappresentano un maggior coinvolgimento della Cina nelle questioni di pace e sicurezza in Africa, dall'altro, esse marciano un cambiamento della politica estera cinese in Africa, contraddicendo la retorica dominante del governo cinese della non-interferenza nella politica interna di altri paesi.

La continuità del principio di non-ingerenza negli affari interni degli altri paesi è vacillata in varie occasioni in seno ai contenuti dei piani di azione degli ultimi FOCAC e dei libri bianchi sulle relazioni Cina-Africa (Mawdsley, 2019). L'evoluzione dei FOCAC rivela un passaggio dalla promozione di relazioni bilaterali in ambito agricolo, industriale, e infrastrutturale ad una cooperazione orientata all'integrazione del mercato e della produzione. Ad esempio, il piano di azione del FOCAC del 2012 coinvolge nuove aree di cooperazione come la tassazione e l'ispezione sanitaria dei prodotti importati

e esportati (Ibid.). Nel libro bianco “La cooperazione internazionale allo sviluppo della Cina nella nuova era” pubblicato nel 2021, viene posta nuovamente enfasi su una cooperazione allo sviluppo *people-to-people/people-oriented* che ha l’obiettivo di migliorare la vita delle persone attraverso “alloggi, approvvigionamento idrico, assistenza sanitaria, istruzione, strade rurali e assistenza ai gruppi vulnerabili, contribuendo a colmare le lacune nelle infrastrutture e nei servizi pubblici di base” (Xinhua, 2021). Queste iniziative vengono proposte, nel quadro del nuovo libro bianco, come meccanismi per potenziare la cooperazione allo sviluppo nei paesi della *Belt and Road Initiative*. L’incertezza intorno ad una definizione della BRI o a cosa comprendi, tuttavia, non ha fermato la sua espansione e il coinvolgimento delle compagnie cinese nella costruzione dei corridoi di trasporto africani (Gambino, in corso di pubblicazione). Nei prossimi anni, sarà centrale osservare come la presunta neutralità del principio di non-interferenza dialoghi con la promozione della BRI come veicolo della cooperazione allo sviluppo.

5. CONCLUSIONI- Negli ultimi decenni, il consolidamento della cooperazione Sud-Sud, dei paesi BRICS e in particolare della Cina in Africa, hanno rappresentato le maggiori novità nella geografia della cooperazione interstatale nel mondo. Tuttavia, l’espansione della cooperazione Sud-Sud, materialmente e ideologicamente, e la crescita degli interessi economici cinesi in Africa, hanno messo in discussione la continuità del principio di non-intervento. Sebbene la non-interferenza rimanga centrale nei discorsi ufficiali della cooperazione Sud-Sud e del governo cinese, l’analisi delle relazioni Cina-Africa dimostra l’erosione di questo principio nella *realpolitik*. Non solo il crescente interesse della Cina in Africa contraddice il principio di non-intervento, ma mette anche in discussione la non-condizionalità dell’aiuto cinese in Africa e la retorica del mutuo beneficio (Mohan e Tan-Mullins, 2019).

Infatti, era inevitabile che il crescente interesse economico della Cina in Africa avesse portato ad un’urgente necessità del governo cinese di difendere i propri interessi economici. Il coinvolgimento cinese in conflitti armati in Libia, Mali, e Sud-Sudan, e nella difesa ad attacchi ai propri cittadini presenti nel continente africano, dimostrano la natura politica dell’azione, accanto a quella economica. La difficoltà a mantenere il principio di non-intervento era stata ben colta da Mawdsley (2019) nell’esplorazione della SSC e delle sue sfide attuali. Se, da un lato, l’espansione della cooperazione Sud-Sud e delle relazioni Cina-Africa preconfigurano un cambiamento nello sviluppo globale, dall’altro, è necessario cogliere i cambiamenti in atto e andare oltre la narrazione dominante sulla cooperazione *win-win*. La retorica di non-intervento promossa dalla Cina supporta la narrazione dell’impegno cinese in Africa come puramente tecnico o progettuale, e quindi dello sviluppo come una macchina antipolitica (Ferguson, 1994). La depoliticizzazione degli interventi tecnici e

presuntamente neutrali ignora la capacità dello sviluppo di riorganizzare le relazioni di potere (Ferguson, 2005). Per concludere, gli interventi cinesi in Africa sono lontani dall'essere politicamente neutrali bensì, coinvolgono relazioni di potere che caratterizzano e caratterizzeranno i mutamenti della geografia dello sviluppo.

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II

Rethink the political economy of Chinese-African
agricultural cooperation: the Chinese Agricultural
Technology Demonstration Centers

RETHINKING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CHINESE-AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATION: THE CHINESE AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY DEMONSTRATION CENTERS

This paper explores the Chinese agricultural technology demonstration centers (ATDCs) in Africa, a recent evolution of Chinese-African agricultural cooperation often recognized as a representative example of South-South cooperation. More specifically, the study observes the development of the ATDCs in Africa, through a literature review, and indicates major limitations in ATDCs research. This paper proposes a new political economy approach that accounts for place and space, which are crucial lenses for the analysis of ATDCs in Africa. The reconsideration of spatial relations takes into account the importance of the local territory, where operations are based, as an active constituent in China-Africa agricultural cooperation.

KEY WORDS: SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION, AGRICULTURE, DEVELOPMENT, CHINA, AFRICA

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Introduction

Africa is now considered China's second continent. In 2018, fifty-three African countries attended the Beijing Summit and the seventh ministerial conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Under the last Beijing Action Plan the two sides strengthened in-depth cooperation for areas that range from agriculture, trade, education to military, police and anti-terrorism (Forum, 2018). President Xi Jinping illustrated this point clearly at the opening ceremony of the 2018 FOCAC: "China will do more to help Africa alleviate poverty, pursue development, increase employment and income" (Xinhua, 2018). The paucity of data represents a challenge for a nuanced estimation of China's presence in Africa. Despite that, the Chinese involvement in the continent is still visible in terms of China's top official visits in Africa or by Beijing-funded architectural projects (Amoah, 2016).

The rapid development of the Sino-African agricultural relations has been a hotly debated issue following the 2006 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation during the 2007-08 food and financial crisis. International institutions, government officials, and scholars have tried to unpack the strong Chinese involvement in Africa, attempting to understand the real objectives of Beijing. However, despite a large number of studies that have focused on the relationship between China and Africa (e.g. Alden, 2013; Brautigam, 2011, 2015; Buckley, 2013), this topic remains highly debated.

On the one hand, Chinese involvement in Africa has been described as 'the new scramble for Africa'. According to this view, the growing role that Africa will play in the future is acknowledged by foreign governments and businesses. They are now attempting to strengthened diplomatic and economic relations with the continent; China seems to be driving this 'renewed' interest in Africa (The Economist, 2019). As a matter of fact, China-Africa total trade volume reached \$170 billion in 2017, making China the biggest trading partner of Africa.

On the other hand, there are benign views that regard China as an alternative, non-Western partner, to Africa. Amin (2016) argued that the 'international aid' to Africa from the United States, the European Union or other Western agencies "is not genuine development aid" (Amin, 2016: 155). Indeed, it is a financial support that intends to reinforce and reproduce the subordination and underdevelopment of Southern countries. The witnessed cooperation between China and Africa during the last FOCAC could represent an alternative for Africa. However, African countries should know their prerogatives before opening such negotiations (Amin, 2016).

This debate on China-Africa relations, however, is the product of a flawed mechanistic ontology, that is "not intellectually productive" (Lee, 2018) and misleading. One concern about China's

presence in Africa is that it is a zero-sum game. A dialectical approach offers a more useful framework: China can be both benign and problematic in the same project. Moreover, the presence of China in Africa has been over reported while Africa's agency is often only passively considered. Africa's political systems, regulations, actors can affect the results of the Chinese involvement at different levels. African civil society can both enhance Chinese presence or pose challenges, and resistance is always a possibility - as in the case of the Hubei-Gaza friendship farm in Mozambique (Chichava, 2014). Reconsidering Africa agency shows that China-Africa relations are more locally-driven compared to conventional assumptions, and that negotiations are taking place at different levels (Alden & Large, 2018; Mohan & Lampert, 2013; Odoom, 2016). Further concerns are related to the rhetoric behind the existence of a "Chinese model". China's involvement has changed overtime and evidence suggests that the Chinese strategy differs based on which African countries it is dealing with. Moreover, China's trade pattern with Sub-Saharan African countries converges with the commodities-export pattern shared by Western countries. This convergence could reproduce the already existing negative patterns of commodity-based trade and limit the possibility for structural changes (Sindzingre, 2016). This debate has lacked a comparative analysis of Chinese and non-Chinese involvement in Africa, or in Lee's words, between China's state capital and the global private capital (Lee, 2018).

These issues are all the more striking when we consider China-Africa agricultural cooperation. China reshaped the geographies of international development and challenged the monopoly of Western agencies. The involvement of China in African agriculture has often been reported as a case of land grabbing. The Chinese government has been blamed of being interested in Africa's abundant arable land due to China's food insecurity and land degradation (Delang, 2018). Some of these claims have been proven wrong, e.g. by Brautigam (2013, 2015). However, the influence of China's presence in African agriculture is to a large extent still unclear. Since the mid-1950s, China's involvement in African agriculture has been changing and evolving. China's cooperation with Africa is dynamic and reflects China's own development patterns, which are not linear. Sino-African relations are in fact central to the role of agriculture in African economies. The agricultural sector is one of the primary sources of employment for the African population. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) database, agriculture employed over 50% of the total population in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2019 (Data World-bank, 2020). Despite the detrimental effects of climate change, agriculture has remained the main source of income for people living in rural areas.

This paper focuses on a specific modality of Chinese cooperation in Africa based on technological transfer: the Chinese agricultural technology demonstration centers (ATDCs). The ATDCs were

designed to ensure food security in Africa while acting as a platform to facilitate Chinese investors in establishing new businesses.

This paper consists of three parts. First, it will discuss the relation between Chinese foreign aid and the South-South cooperation framework. Second, aid and investment are explored to facilitate the understanding of these concepts in the ATDCs. Third, the paper discusses mechanism, actors, and the evolution of the Chinese ATDCs in Africa. It then offers a review of the academic literature, pointing out a gap in ATDCs research and highlighting further limitations that have not yet been considered. The paper argues that the ATDCs are central to the impact of Chinese technology transfer on Africa agriculture, and on land use and management. The ATDCs also have direct/indirect effects on local economies and societies. Due to the recent establishment of these centers in more than twenty African countries, these implications should be urgently addressed.

Chinese foreign aid and South-South cooperation

Agricultural technology demonstration centers (ATDCs) were launched in 2006 and are considered a model of South-South cooperation and Chinese foreign aid. The principle of Chinese foreign aid resembled the South-South principles (Huang et al., 2019). The eight principles of China's foreign aid are based on mutual benefits, equity, non-interference in the political sphere, and free interests in economic loans, as introduced as early as 1963 by the late Premier Zhou Enlai in Accra. They still represent the pillars of China's aid involvement in foreign countries today (Brautigam, 2011).

However, China's own developmental trajectory, especially in the field of agriculture, played a big role in shaping China's foreign aid strategy. Since China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and endorsed the "Going Global/Going Out" Policy, that encouraged Chinese companies to invest abroad, agriculture has become one of the greatest concerns. The Going Global Policy linked aid with other forms of economic engagement and encouraged the entrance of Chinese firms into the global market (Brautigam & Xiaoyang, 2009). Under the agricultural 'Going Out' strategy, the Chinese government has supported overseas farming as one of its main pillars. The old Chinese saying "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime" (Huang et al., 2019: 56) is the rhetoric behind China's aid strategy in the Mainland and in foreign countries.

Chinese Agricultural technology demonstration centers in Africa represent the opportunity to bridge aid and business, aiming to solve the economic sustainability of aid projects and fulfill the mutual benefit principle. ATDCs blend, on the one hand, China's attempt to export its model of

agricultural development, through technical assistance and demonstration centers, with the Chinese “win-win” principle of cooperation as a developing country itself. On the other hand, behind the mainstream assumptions of China’s win-win cooperation and mutual benefit, there are alternative narratives. Buckley (2013) explored different discourses on the effectiveness of China-Africa agricultural cooperation from the perspective of different Chinese practitioners. More critical perspectives have claimed that the experience of the Chinese is not appropriate for African agriculture, and questioned the environmental implications of China’s foreign aid (Urban, Mohan & Cook, 2013). China’s rural development has been driven primarily by land tenure re- form; hence, technology transfer could be irrelevant if a broader political transformation does not take place in Africa. Furthermore, suspicion also relates to the sustainability of China’s agricultural modernization, as China’s land is highly polluted and in rural areas poverty remains high. Finally, critics argue that similar detrimental effects could be transferred to Africa.

The in-betweenness: aid or business?

In analyzing Chinese foreign aid projects in Africa, it is important to understand what falls under this category and how definitions and measures between Chinese and traditional donors have differed. According to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the Official Development Assistance (ODA) is defined as government aid, with the main objective of promoting the economic development and welfare of developing countries. The ODA flows are provided by official agencies and are concessional (OECD, 2019). However, China is a non-member of the OECD and does not use the definition of the OECD-DAC. According to China’s 2011 Foreign Aid White paper, Beijing delivered foreign aid in the form of grants, interest-free loans, and concessional loans. Officially, China provides aid through eight principal forms: complete projects, goods and mate- rials, technical cooperation, human resource development cooperation, medical assistance, emergency humanitarian aid, volunteer programs, and debt relief (Xinhua, 2011). Formally, China’s aid to Africa is not constrained by any conditionality, aside from the engagement in the “One China” policy, which states that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is the only legal government representing all China, thus excluding the prospect of diplomatic relationships with Taiwan. China does not refer to any political conditions in terms of good governance or respect for human rights as conceived by Western donors. However, the ‘unconditionality’ and non-interference of China's involvement needs to be critically analyzed as Mohan and Tan-Mullins (2019) and Alden and Jiang (2019) do, and Large (2008) observed in the case of China’s relations with Sudan. Aid and investment are not two separate spheres as is the case in the United States where the development finance process is under the Agency for International development and

separate from the Foreign Affairs offices. In China, until recently, the Ministry of Commerce managed most of China's aid programme, and objectives were not transparent. The year 2018 marked a change, as China established the first international development cooperation agency

'CIDCA' (Chinese: 国家国际发展合作署), which aims to enhance the planning and coordination of foreign aid. At the moment, it seems that the CIDCA does not hold significant responsibilities, and the number of members is small. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), still retain more decision-making powers and have specific units that support the agricultural Going Out policy. However, the establishment of the China International Development Cooperation Agency, could represent a turning point in the role that Beijing wants to play in the international development community, and the attempt to align the domestic agenda with foreign policy goals.

The link between aid and investment is crucial for understanding China's foreign aid in Africa. Aid plays a major role in mobilizing investment and enhancing economic development, and historical relations are crucial in enhancing favorable conditions for the effectiveness of aid and investment, both at the macro and micro-level (Morgan, 2019). The role of aid in mobilizing investment underpinned the Realpolitik of both Western and Chinese aid. Right now, there seems to be a convergence of China's foreign aid with already well-known Western self-interested cooperation models.

Agricultural technology demonstration centers (ATDCs): History, mechanisms, and actors

Agricultural technology demonstration centers represented an evolution and a shift in China's foreign aid approach. China launched the establishment of the first 10 ATDCs in Africa during the 2006 FOCAC. Since then, ten more centers have been established in Africa, and five additional centers are under construction. The ATDC model was designed to overcome the problem of economic sustainability of aid projects and, as a win-win tool to ensure food security in Africa and to encourage Chinese companies to invest abroad under the "Agriculture going out" policy. The ATDCs are based on a bilateral agreement between the Chinese and African governments. The centers are presented as a Chinese state-led aid project but are operated by Chinese companies. The companies can either be private, state-owned firms, or research institutes and universities. The selection of the companies resembled the "One Province, one Country" model. In broader terms, each province of China is responsible for a Chinese cooperation project in an African country. This model, advocated in recent years by the Foreign Economic Cooperation Center (FECC), became

popular in China's agricultural aid but also in other sectors of aid delivery (Gu, Zhang, Vaz & Mukwereza, 2016). This also reflects the relevance of provincial governments in China's State capitalism.

ATDCs can be visualized as being composed of two different parts: aid and business. According to the official 'ATDC Guidelines' (MOC & MOA, 2011), the centers are intended to serve four main goals. First, ATDCs serve to promote bilateral agreements and China's foreign strategy in recipient countries. Second, the centers aim to promote innovative agricultural practices and modern technology to enhance food security. Third, the centers are designed to be a privileged platform for Chinese companies to invest in Africa, explore new markets in line with China's 'Agriculture Going Out' policy. Fourth, ATDCs serve as a base for research, demonstration, training, and display (Jiang, 2020).

Mechanism and actors

The ATDCs are an attractive soft power tool for diplomatic and political achievements, although the business and market-oriented forces are the main drivers of the centers. The centers represent an attempt not only to bridge aid and business but also public and private actors. For instance, the construction of the center is financed by the Chinese government but the management is carried out by either private or state-owned Chinese companies. ATDCs are presented as a Chinese governmental aid project and there is vigilant control by Beijing. The Chinese government set up a bidding process for subcontracting the project but this ultimately did not appear to be open and competitive; local and central Chinese governments certainly took a major role in the decision-making. The establishment of the centers comprises three different stages: construction, technical cooperation, and sustainable or business development (Jiang, 2020). During the construction and technical cooperation phases, the majority of expenses are covered by the Chinese government. The construction of the infrastructure is usually completed in about one year, while the technical cooperation stage is carried out in three years. When the construction of the center is complete, it becomes a public asset of the recipient government. A common feature of all ATDCs is that the land-use rights of the center are donated by the host African state. However, the ownership of the land remains under the control of the recipient countries. So far, on average, 100 hectares of land have been donated for each ATDC. During the technical cooperation stage, the Chinese companies in charge of the management of the center should conduct research, test selected Chinese varieties, and disseminate relevant techniques.

ATDCs serve both as a research and training station and as a base for Chinese companies to invest abroad (MOC & MOA, 2011). Hence, Beijing aimed to solve, through an “aid + business” model, the sustainability of aid projects. During the technical cooperation phase, Chinese techniques and seeds are tested and when they are found to be successful, demonstration and training take place. During this phase, the Chinese companies in charge of the center also develop business activities able to attract Chinese investment in the project. When the three-year technical cooperation is completed, the center enters the last stage: business or sustainability phase. The peculiarity of this last phase is that by then the center should have developed an agribusiness value chain. The market-oriented activities are supposed to allow the ATDC to cover the running cost and ensure research, demonstration, training, and display. During the business phase, the Chinese government is not supposed to make financial contributions to the centers. Indeed, the achievement of sustainable development in ATDCs accounts for 45 percent in the evaluation system (Jiang, 2020). The reality appears to be different; in fact, several countries still receive funding either directly from the Chinese government or privately through a partnership with entities such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Despite the central focus of project sustainability, the long term economic sustainability of the ATDCs has remained a major concern (Jiang et al., 2016). Some centers have introduced agribusiness activities but the financial return has not fully covered the running costs of the center (Jiang, 2020). Economically, the major challenges of the centers begins when technical cooperation ends, so with the end of Chinese governmental financial support. At this point, it is interesting to explore the sustainable feasibility of the projects when business operations start, and how aid and business are carried out on the ground. However, the majority of centers entered the business operation phase around 2015. As a consequence, this last phase has been poorly reported and in-depth fieldwork is certainly necessary.

Due to the different objectives behind the design of the ATDCs, it is necessary to seriously consider the possible implications of the centers. For instance, the ATDCs aim to introduce Chinese technology to African agriculture. This has raised questions about the applicability of these techniques in Africa, and their environmental sustainability. Land and water management is a sensitive issue in Africa, and Chinese competitiveness and the local response need to be explored. Moreover, the ATDCs were designed to be a platform to attract Chinese investment. The impact that the introduction of new business activities can have on already existing local businesses needs to be taken into account, as well as the opportunities that this could represent. Overall, the ATDCs are established in a territory where agriculture is already an important existing economic sector, and this will naturally have direct and indirect implications on the societies, economies, and environment. Many of these questions remain unanswered.

Existing research and emerging gaps

The ATDCs still represent the flagship project of China-Africa agricultural cooperation, and its establishment in over twenty African countries has attracted international attention.

This section explores the academic literature on ATDCs published in English from 2013 until 2020. The geographic area of the authors is not homogenous: authors are from Africa, China, and the West. However, Chinese academics are the most committed to ATDCs research. This could also be related to the challenges, for a non-Chinese researcher, to get in contact with Chinese companies. In analyzing the content, articles of authors coming from different geographic areas have been cross-checked to avoid and overcome a single perspective. The literature review identified three recurrent themes, which facilitated the analysis of the challenges faced by ATDCs. This paper aligned with Nalwimba et al. (2019) recognizing a gap in ATDCs research. However, the purpose of this article is to point out further limitations that have not been considered in previous research on ATDCs.

Positioning ATDCs in the academic debate

The establishment of ATDCs has attracted the attention of academics both in China, Africa and from the West (Scoones et al., 2013; Chichava et al., 2014; Chichava & Fingerhann, 2015; Zhang et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2016; Alden & Large, 2018; Jiang, 2015, 2020). The existing research on ATDCs can be summarized into three themes. The first is centered on understanding how China's own experience in agriculture and how the historical evolution of Chinese aid in agriculture led to the design of ATDCs. This body of work has explored

China's own development in agriculture through science and technology, and how this was transferred to Africa through the ATDCs. China's success in agriculture has been attained by a large investment in research which has supported the high yield of staple crops, e.g., the hybrid rice (Xu et al., 2016). As a result, a key element in China-Africa agricultural cooperation is technology transfer. Research and dissemination are central to the operation of ATDCs. Moreover, the ATDC model was designed to overcome the problem of sustainability of aid projects, and this reflects China's past experiences and ideology (Jiang, 2020).

The second theme is centered on the mechanism and actors of the centers. These studies describe the different stages of the centers and deal with more specific questions such as locality, construction, and technical cooperation exploring in more detail the physical characteristics of the centers, the modality of training and demonstrations, the Chinese actors and local partners involved.

For instance, Xu et al. (2016) have previously observed how macro-level policy encounters micro-level implementations.

The third theme attempts to capture local encounters and negotiations through an ethnographic lens of analysis. The mismatch between the expected design of ATDCs and local realities is recurrent (Jiang, 2020). These works reveal that there are different perceptions around the role of the ATDCs between the African and the Chinese actors (Tang, Lu & Mukwereza, 2018). Great expectations behind the inception of the ATDCs have been confronted by the local reality, which is much more complex, for instance in the area of technology transfers or market access (Zhang, Li, Qi & Wang, 2015). This body of literature provides a point of departure for the understanding of emerging critics and challenges.

Emerging challenges

Chinese and African actors have appeared to have different understandings of the AT-DC's role in extensions and demonstrations. Chinese experts supposed that the center served as a platform to show China's best practices in agriculture, and how they can be transferred to Africa. Despite that, local partners in Africa perceived that a small role is performed by the center in terms of technology transfer (Xu et al., 2016). The Chinese experts believed that the process of the extension would have been facilitated by local partners, while the cooperation seemed limited. The intrinsic nature of ATDCs is also misleading for local partners, who are used to a more paternalistic delivery of aid. The blurred line between aid and business that characterizes ATDCs is reflected in the daily tensions within business and aid activities that Chinese experts must carry out. Tang et al. (2018) argued that, in the case of Zimbabwe, the blurred line between aid and business led to a growing misunderstanding between the different Chinese and Zimbabwean actors. The Chinese actors on the ground needed to simultaneously play the roles of technicians and aid workers. However, the background of the Chinese staff at the ATDCs is not of professional aid workers. Usually, the staff comes from agricultural research institutes, universities, or state farms. The Chinese staff is overloaded with work which is not related to the actual management of the ATDCs, and this affects the performance of the centers. Different ideas around the role of ATDCs as well as general conceptions about development have led to a growing misunderstanding between the Chinese and local partners (Tang et al., 2018; Qi, Yu, Alemu, Cook & Li, 2015).

Other major challenges of the centers relate to language, cultural barriers, and a low level of cooperation with local institutions and partners. Chinese technicians aimed to introduce intensive farming techniques and seed varieties that were instrumental in their own successful agricultural

development. Local farmers rely on traditional farming and it may take a long time before they become used to the Chinese labor-intensive management method. Frequently, local farmers are not even interested in the introduction of labor-intensive techniques. ATDCs aim to introduce high-yielding Chinese varieties, but behind the rhetoric of “mutual benefit and win-win cooperation”, the Chinese tend to impose their expertise and selected varieties, neglecting the local suitability. Even if Chinese varieties could increase productivity, it does not follow that they suit the local market. This tendency has been common in Mozambique, but also in the ATDCs in South Africa and Tanzania (Jiang, 2020; Makundi, 2017). These challenges should be considered seriously. Even if it is the case that the Chinese aim at enhancing food security in Africa through the introduction of selected high-yield varieties, this does not imply that these varieties are appropriate to local farming systems. In Tanzania, Makundi (2017) explored the challenges faced by local farmers in applying Chinese rice technologies. Obstacles are common even in other cases and are related to language barriers, attachment to traditional practices, financial limitations, and limited access to knowledge. These challenges have been experienced by several different ATDCs (Xiuli et al., 2016). Thus, given the specificity of each country, it is interesting to note that there are common barriers across multiple cases. These barriers are strictly related to the local beneficiaries of the ATDC. High yield techniques, big investments in infrastructure, and extension do not seem to deliver the expected results if projects do not consider the local environment.

Beside academic literature

In addition to the academic literature, ATDCs have raised the attention of Chinese and African media and have been the focus of different research reports. Overall, the media have reported that Chinese ATDCs in Africa enhance agricultural production. For instance, Xinhua claimed that “Chinese agricultural technology boosts Tanzania’s farming”, and that since 2012 around 1,100 farmers and agricultural officials have been trained by the center (Xinhua, 2015). A report on the ATDC in Mozambique has been recently jointly published by the CIDCA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNPD). The report represented the first attempt to evaluate the ATDCs through criteria such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, results, sustainability, and partnership-cooperation which are usually adopted by international development agencies. The ATDCs are presented as an innovative approach that links public and private partners and that has the potential to redefine traditional models and practices of international development assistance. The novelty of this first attempt of convergence towards international evaluation standards for a Chinese aid project should not be underestimated.

Reflections and limitations

Much of the previous research on ATDCs has been based on qualitative methods and ethnographic approaches that have provided a better understanding of the Chinese AT-DCs in Africa. However, there are a few limitations. A recent systematic scope review (Nalwimba & Mudimu, 2019) investigated the gaps in ATDCs research and called for a framework to better understand the centers. The authors concluded that future studies on ATDCs should consider the gender dimension and farmers' abilities, elaborate a scale of adaptation for technology relevancy, consider the political economy, and discuss how the ATDCs can strike a balance between aid and business. This article agreed with an earlier finding by Nalwimba et al. (2019) of an existing gap in ATDC research, and the little consideration given to the impact of ATDCs on local communities and gender dimensions. Although the immediate implications of ATDCs directly affect technology transfer and farmers, they also have an indirect impact on the economy of the territory, local societies, and the environment. These aspects should also be taken into consideration. For instance, Nalwimba et al. (2019) suggested the introduction of a 'graduate scale of adoption' (from lower to high-level adoption) to overcome the duality of relevance or non-relevance of the new technologies introduced. However, as Makundi (2017) pointed out, the limited understanding of ATDC's impact on the adoption of farming technology is related to the fact that the same farmers received similar training by different agencies. The relevance of technology adoption goes behind Chinese influence. For example, if USAID provides loans for local farmers to buy fertilizers while the Chinese do not, the farmers will probably adopt the technique displayed by USAID. This is to say, if the objective is to provide a better understanding of ATDCs, then there are additional aspects that need to be taken into consideration. Surely there is a lack of consideration for the gender dimension, as argued by Nalwimba et al. (2019), and explaining the gender configuration could be appropriate for developing future training. However, there is also an urgent need to integrate new methodologies that not only entail the gender dimensions but the intersectionality of gender (Bastia, 2014).

There are broader limitations and challenges in studying the ATDCs that the framework proposed by Nalwimba et al. (2019) does not critically address. In the existing literature, the agency of African countries has hardly been considered. The concept of food security which underpins the entire model of the ATDCs has been accepted uncritically. Definitions of food security refer to the availability of food but do not take into consideration how food is produced and its social components. As Raj Patel observed: "It is entirely possible for people to be food secure in prison or under a dictatorship" (Patel, 2009: 665). The key issue is not just the availability of food, but as the broader concept of food sovereignty suggests, peasants have to determine their food and agricultural

system (La Via Campesina, 2007). The role of farmers has not been fully taken into account. Observations are limited to the role of the states, Chinese experts, and local partners. This restricts the understanding of the nature of the limitations and challenges that ATDCs are facing with technology transfer. The centers do not exist in a vacuum. Geographical, social, and cultural factors play a crucial role in the introduction of new methods, especially when agriculture is an important part of the existing economy. The lack of comparison with non-Chinese actors poses a major limitation to the analysis of the challenges faced by the Chinese, and the Chinese influence in Africa. The exploration of non-Chinese agricultural interventions located in the same geographic area could provide a lens for a nuanced exploration of China's presence. The use of ethnographic methods is necessary for country-level projects; however, micro-analysis should be interlinked with a political and economic analysis of China and Africa. If these limitations are not addressed, the understanding of the impact that Chinese ATDCs have on small-scale livelihoods remains limited.

Finally, in the existing academic literature, the land is not considered an issue in ATDCs. However, now that the majority of centers have been established for over ten years, some consideration of the role of land in this project can be made. ATDCs are driven by market-oriented forces; one of the objectives of the center is to promote Chinese companies to go global. What does this imply? If Chinese companies or other foreign actors invest in ATDCs, a larger amount of land is needed. Whether the land will be leased or bought, or subcontracted from local farmers, is still not clear. Some attempts to increase the amount of land allocated to ATDCs have already been made. For instance, in Zimbabwe, the Chinese ATDC team leader argued that to achieve the economic sustainability of the center at least another 600 hectares were necessary (Tang et al., 2018). The implications of the diverse land use planning and management models should be taken into consideration.

Challenges and call for new perspectives

Researching sensitive topics is a worldwide challenge. In the last decade, China-Africa relations have been both a hot and a sensitive topic, and they have posed challenges in terms of academic freedom (Svensson & Pils, 2019, n.p). Access to data is limited both in China and in Africa, and data is not always accurate (Plekhanov, 2017). Nevertheless, the quality of data is not the main challenge.

Economic models for Africa's growth are still designed outside the continent and resemble the experiences of foreign actors. Economists have assumed that the rise of Africa is related to better quality data, but Africa's economic growth is not a new experience, and economists should consider

that this is not a new rise in the continent but a recurrent rise. This more founded interpretation would be beneficial also in terms of policy implementations (Obeng-Odoom, 2017). Moreover, data-analyses are historical and measures of GDP do not capture the reality of Africa on the ground. Informal economies, commons accumulation, gender inequalities within Africa and other global powers are important aspects that are not reflected by GDP. Hence, GDP-based analyses should include a more critical perspective of the African political economy if economists want to grasp a holistic understanding of Africa's growth. Mainstream development economics has failed to design appropriate development policies for Africa and this might have contributed to worsening social and economic conditions in the continent. In challenging mainstream approaches, African political economists called for stratification economics which goes beyond neoclassical and Marxist development economics, and presents an urgent need for the decolonization of African studies (Obeng-Odoom, 2018). These methodological and ontological questions regarding China, Africa, and Africa-China relations are serious and must be considered in contemporary studies.

Developing a critical political economy of the Sino-African relations is necessary, and different disciplines and theoretical perspectives need to be combined (Mohan, 2013; Power & Mohan, 2010). China should not be explored for the novelty, rather the underlying similarities and connections with well-established patterns of global capitalism should be explored. Mohan (2013) maintains that ethnographic studies illuminate interconnections of spatiality and refute static interpretations of space. The role of the space/place and spatial relations have not been considered in the previous exploration of ATDCs. Doreen Massey reminds us that "geography matters" too (Peet & Thrift, 1989). For instance, ATDCs are embedded in specific geographies and spatial relations that existed before the Chinese established the centers. This study assumes that the Chinese presence and implications cannot be explained if geography is not considered as a pre-existing condition, and as constitutive of the social and economic world. Massey notably observed that "It is not just that the spatial is socially constructed: the social is spatially constructed too" (Massey, 1994). This study assumes that a critical political economic and comparative analysis of China-Africa agricultural cooperation is necessarily interrelated with a reconsideration of the territory as an active constituent. The urgent need for Africa's radical transformation of agriculture calls for further attention towards China-Africa agricultural cooperation and a better understanding of the direct or indirect implications. The reconsideration of place/space allows us to go beyond mechanist analyses of the ATDCs and to deeply explore the impact on agricultural production, societies, and economies. Finally, it leads to a better understanding of the extent to which ATDCs embrace the win-win scenario.

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III

Cooperazione agricola Cina-Tanzania: innovazione o dipendenza?

Mariasole Pepa*

Cooperazione agricola Cina-Tanzania: innovazione o dipendenza?

Parole Chiave: cooperazione Sud-Sud; geografia dello sviluppo; Cina-Africa; cooperazione agricola

Negli ultimi decenni i maggiori cambiamenti nella geografia dello sviluppo sono relativi all'ascesa dei paesi BRICS e in particolare alla Cina in Africa. L'articolo - servendosi dell'esempio fornito dal Centro di dimostrazione tecnologica dell'agricoltura in Tanzania - si propone di esaminare l'evoluzione della cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa come rappresentativa di pratiche e modalità della cooperazione Sud-Sud. Partendo dalle teorie della dipendenza e del sistema-mondo, il contributo interroga la presenza della Cina in Africa come elemento di diversificazione di esistenti relazioni di dipendenza. L'articolo intende quindi stimolare una riflessione critica sulla cooperazione agricola Sino-Africana, contribuendo al dibattito geografico circa lo sviluppo delle relazioni BRICS-Sud.

China-Tanzania agricultural cooperation: innovation or dependency?

Key words: South-South cooperation; development Geography; China-Africa; agricultural cooperation

In recent decades, the major changes in the geography of development have been related to the rise of the BRICS countries; in particular, Chinese engagement in Africa. This article - using the example of the Agriculture Technology Demonstration Center in Tanzania - aims to examine the evolution of China-Africa agricultural cooperation as representative of the practices and modalities of South-South cooperation. Dependency theory and World-Systems analysis allows for the exploration of Sino-African agricultural cooperation from a perspective that interrogates the diversification from existing relations of dependency. Finally, this paper aims to stimulate a critical reflection on Sino-African agricultural cooperation, contributing to the ongoing debate regarding BRICS-South development geography.

* Dipartimento di Scienze storiche, geografiche e dell'antichità, Università di Padova, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, Università di Verona, Via del Santo 26, 35123, Padova; mariasole.pepa@phd.unipd.it. L'autrice ringrazia i revisori per gli utili commenti che hanno migliorato la qualità dell'articolo.

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Introduzione. – In seguito al forum sulla cooperazione Cina-Africa (FOCAC) del 2006 e alla crisi alimentare e finanziaria del 2007/08, la partecipazione della Cina nell'agricoltura africana ha

rappresentato un tema di interesse internazionale. Questa crescente attenzione ha generato un'intensa produzione accademica sulle relazioni sino-africane (Alden e Large, 2018; Anshan, 2020; Jiang, 2020; Lee, 2018).

Il rapporto agricolo Cina-Africa è oggetto di una duplice interpretazione: da un lato la Cina è percepita come il maggiore land grabber in Africa (GRAIN, 2008); dall'altro l'esperienza cinese viene esplorata come potenziale per lo sviluppo del settore agricolo africano (Li *et al.*, 2012., Li *et al.*, 2013). La complessità della cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa richiede un'analisi storica e contemporanea delle relazioni sino-africane. Risulta necessario situare tali relazioni nella mutevolezza della politica economica globale persistentemente guidata dalla crescita economica e dall'estrattivismo (Taylor, 2014). Allo stesso tempo, la peculiarità delle relazioni bilaterali della Cina con i differenti paesi africani necessita di uno studio che proceda prendendo in considerazione le particolarità di ognuno di essi (Tan-Mullins *et al.*, 2010). Per questo, l'articolo esplora gli interventi di cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa in una prospettiva storica utilizzando il caso di studio della Tanzania e del Centro di dimostrazione tecnologica dell'agricoltura a Dakawa.

La crescente cooperazione agricola Africa-Cina rispecchia i cambiamenti in atto nella geografia del potere e degli aiuti (Mawdsley, 2007; 2015; Mohan and Power, 2009). L'influenza economica dei paesi BRICS, in particolare della Cina in Africa, ha portato ad una rottura del sistema egemonico e ad un conseguente declino della sovranità occidentale in quella che Amin (2016) ha definito una "globalizzazione negoziata". I BRICS non solo rappresentano un nuovo gruppo di attori economici nel sistema internazionale, ma anche paesi donatori 'emergenti' nell'arena della cooperazione internazionale allo sviluppo (Mawdsley, 2012). L'insorgere di queste nuove potenze ha portato ad un cambiamento fondamentale nelle relazioni tra il Nord e il Sud del mondo, aprendo una discussione sul riemergere dello 'spirito di Bandung' (Arrighi e Zheng, 2010; Gray e Gills, 2016).

La crescita di nuove economie e di nuovi attori nella cooperazione Sud-Sud, come i paesi BRICS e in particolare la Cina in Africa, non solo mette in discussione le modalità di cooperazione allo sviluppo, ma anche il paradigma dello sviluppo nella sua totalità (Mawdsley, 2018; 2019); un paradigma a lungo guidato da relazioni coloniali di potere, da una specifica interpretazione della storia, dei suoi attori e delle loro relazioni (Six, 2009). La retorica della politica cinese in Africa costruisce un vocabolario alternativo a quello dell'Occidente, distinguendosi dalla formazione sviluppato/sottosviluppato (*ibidem*).

La Cina ha assunto il ruolo di protagonista nella promozione della cooperazione Sud-Sud incentrata sui principi della conferenza afroasiatica di Bandung che retoricamente promuove uno sviluppo

win-win (Huang *et al.*, 2019). In principio, la cooperazione Sud-Sud emerge in antitesi alla cooperazione classica Nord-Sud basata sui principi e sulle condizionalità dell'OCSE-DAC. Il rapporto BRICS- Sud, tuttavia, continua ad essere caratterizzato da relazioni di potere gerarchizzate e asimmetriche che hanno classicamente definito le relazioni coloniali Nord-Sud (Carmody, 2013).

La Cina è il maggior contribuente della cooperazione Sud-Sud e uno dei nuovi attori centrali nella geografia dello sviluppo mondiale (Kitano, 2019). L'istituzione nel 2018 della prima agenzia di cooperazione per lo sviluppo cinese (CIDCA), il lancio della *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) da parte di Xi Jinping nel 2013 e nel 2014 della Banca asiatica d'investimento per le infrastrutture (AIIB) come alternativa alla Banca mondiale e al Fondo monetario internazionale sono chiari segnali del ruolo che la Cina vuole giocare come nuovo leader della cooperazione internazionale (Vitale, 2020). La Cina in Africa rappresenta quindi un esempio tangibile per l'esplorazione di pratiche e di modalità della cooperazione Sud-Sud.

Il ruolo della Cina risulta centrale nelle discussioni sul futuro della geografia dello sviluppo e sull'impatto che la cooperazione Cina-Africa ha e avrà sui paesi africani. L'articolo, esplorando la cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa, si pone due domande che si prestano come base per ulteriori ricerche comparative. La prima si interroga su come sia cambiata la cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa, mentre la successiva si chiede se le modalità contemporanee della cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa siano differenti dalla classica cooperazione Nord-Sud.

Per tentare di rispondere a queste due domande l'articolo si articola in differenti sezioni: il prossimo paragrafo esplora le teorie della dipendenza e del sistema-mondo come chiavi di lettura dell'emergere di nuovi attori nella geografia dello sviluppo e in particolare della Cina in Africa. Successivamente saranno presentati, nel terzo paragrafo, gli aspetti metodologici della ricerca, mentre nella quarta sezione sarà delineata una prospettiva storica della cooperazione agricola sino-africana. La quinta sezione introduce più specificatamente alle relazioni Cina-Tanzania e al focus sul Centro di dimostrazione tecnologica dell'agricoltura a Dakawa. In particolare, con riferimento a questo caso di studio, nel sesto paragrafo l'attenzione sarà posta alla creazione di nuove reti di dipendenza. Infine, le conclusioni discutono le criticità della cooperazione agricola Africa-Cina per la geografia dello sviluppo.

2. Ripartire dalla teoria della dipendenza. – L'emergere di nuovi attori economici come i paesi BRICS e in particolare la Cina in Africa ha portato ad una ridefinizione della gerarchizzazione del sistema mondo. Le teorie della dipendenza e del sistema-mondo (Dos Santos, 1970; Frank, 1966;

Amin, 1972; Arrighi, 1990; Wallerstein, 1974) nascono come chiavi interpretative di matrice marxista in anti-tesi alla teoria della modernizzazione.

La teoria della modernizzazione che emerse negli Stati Uniti in seguito alla Seconda guerra mondiale vedeva lo sviluppo come un unicum che replicava le fasi di sviluppo occidentale. Gli stadi di sviluppo di Rostow sono un esempio rappresentativo di come lo sviluppo veniva inteso come un processo lineare, unico e riproducibile in luoghi differenti (Rostow, 1959). La teoria della dipendenza (Frank, 1966) emerge come critica ai presupposti della teoria della modernizzazione. Secondo la teoria della dipendenza i paesi si possono dividere in due categorie: il centro nei paesi colonizzatori e sviluppati; la periferia nei paesi in via di sviluppo e colonizzati. Questa divisione perpetua il metodo attraverso cui i paesi postcoloniali sono rimasti soggiogati da una incessante globalizzazione economica e da un eccessivo capitalismo controllato dal Nord. Tale dinamica non ha permesso lo sviluppo economico dei paesi della periferia, i quali hanno però permesso i processi di sviluppo del centro.

La globalizzazione, il colonialismo, l'imperialismo non vengono quindi letti come momenti differenti della storia ma come co-costituiti dal processo di dipendenza (Lisimba e Parashar, 2020). La critica della teoria del sistema-mondo mira ad interpretare i sistemi-mondo come caratterizzati da una divisione del lavoro gerarchicamente organizzata su tre livelli: il centro, la periferia e la semi-periferia. Il centro si determina attraverso un costante afflusso di ricchezza che viene sottratta alle aree periferiche attraverso asimmetrie negli scambi commerciali delle economie-mondo.

La teoria della dipendenza e del sistema-mondo rappresentano una chiave interpretativa per guardare alla rottura di un sistema a lungo caratterizzato da una centralità unica e all'emergere di una policentralità (Caria e Giunta, 2020). L'ascesa di nuovi attori come i BRICS e in particolare la Cina produce uno squilibrio nelle relazioni di potere Nord-Sud e un declino della superiorità occidentale. Nonostante la Cina rimanga una semi-periferia per il centro che è l'Occidente, questa certamente assumendo un ruolo di centro per i paesi periferici e in particolare per l'Africa, oltre a rappresentare l'unico paese che in questo momento può sfidare l'ordine egemonico mondiale. Naturalmente l'ascesa economica della Cina non conduce ad una semplice sostituzione del centro con la semi-periferia o del Nord con il Sud, ma porta sicuramente ad una maggiore attenzione alla complessità dell'analisi del sistema-mondo e ad una maggiore enfasi sul mezzo (Raghuram *et al.*, 2014).

La teoria della dipendenza è influente per screditare le teorie dello sviluppo prodotte dall'Occidente per il Terzo mondo e questo può essere connesso alla popolarità della cooperazione Sud-Sud che

implicitamente si pone in antitesi alla cooperazione classica Nord-Sud (Amanor, 2013). La cooperazione Sud-Sud e i suoi attori come i paesi BRICS e in particolare la Cina si pongono in opposizione ai modelli economici e di cooperazione dei paesi occidentali. Tuttavia, nonostante la retorica di *win-win* e solidarietà, i BRICS e la Cina perpetuano modelli economici e investimenti che hanno caratterizzato i paesi del centro (Lisimba e Parashar, 2020; Sindzingre, 2016). La Cina, assieme ai paesi del centro, perpetua infatti uno scambio ineguale basato sull'importazione di materie prime e risorse naturali dai paesi africani e allo stesso tempo sull'esportazione di beni finiti e di prodotti di consumo (*ibidem*). Sfruttamento e espropriazione sostengono tanto le relazioni Nord-Sud che le interazioni tra i paesi tradizionalmente considerati appartenenti al 'Sud' (Gonzalez-Vicente, 2017). Questa dinamica contribuisce quindi al rafforzamento della dipendenza economica dei paesi periferici, non soltanto dal centro, ma anche da quelle che sono le semi-periferie con il risultato di una 'diversificazione della dipendenza' (Taylor, 2014). In altre parole, la Cina sfrutta esistenti relazioni di ineguaglianza diversificando la dipendenza ideologica dall'Occidente, ma non modificandone le relazioni ineguali di scambio (Gonzalez-Vicente, 2019).

Mentre la dipendenza nelle relazioni Cina-Africa è stata esplorata da una prospettiva incentrata sui rapporti economici e sulle infrastrutture (Agbebi e Virtanen, 2017; Lisimba e Parashar, 2020), molta meno attenzione è stata posta al caso degli aiuti e della cooperazione. Nei prossimi paragrafi si esplorerà la cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa attraverso il caso della Tanzania per interrogare le relazioni di dipendenza che la cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa genera.

3. Metodi di ricerca. – L'articolo utilizza la revisione della letteratura e l'osservazione partecipante in Tanzania e in Cina come metodi qualitativi di investigazione. Da un lato, l'articolo si basa sulla revisione della letteratura accademica di geografia critica, studi dello sviluppo e relazioni internazionali, e di *working papers* prodotti da istituti di ricerca rilevanti per le relazioni Cina-Africa. In particolare, sono stati revisionati i contributi del *China-Africa research initiative della Johns Hopkins school of advanced international studies* (SAIS-CARI) e del gruppo di ricerca *Future Agricultures* che ha lavorato al progetto *China and Brazil in african agriculture*. Specificamente, il periodo di visita a Pechino ha permesso la raccolta della letteratura grigia, in particolare brochure e pubblicazioni interne del *China Institute for South-South Cooperation in Agriculture* (CISSCA) e del *China Belt and Road Institute for Agricultural Cooperation* (BRIAC). La missione a Pechino, oltre alla raccolta di letteratura grigia, ha favorito discussioni informali con i principali rappresentanti del team di ricerca di questi istituti e la partecipazione a vari seminari organizzati da questi centri di ricerca.

Dall'altro lato, l'articolo si basa sull'osservazione partecipante in Tanzania e in Cina. Il periodo come *visiting fellow* al Centro di studi africani dell'Università di Pechino da maggio a luglio del 2019 ha permesso il confronto con esperti sulle relazioni agricole sino-africane, facilitando il contatto con esperti accademici e attori governativi. La missione a Pechino ha permesso di costruire la base delle relazioni per la seguente missione in Tanzania nel marzo del 2020, interrotta dalla diffusione del Covid-19. Il periodo in Tanzania ha permesso la visita di esperti delle relazioni sino-africane nell'Università di Dar es Salaam e in due Università presenti nella regione di Morogoro. Il breve lavoro sul campo è stato facilitato dall'affiliazione con l'Istituto Confucio dell'Università di Dar Es Salaam e il *Tanzania agricultural research institute-Dakawa* (TARI-Dakawa) che hanno sostenuto l'approvazione del permesso di ricerca. In particolare, il direttore del TARI-Dakawa ha facilitato la raccolta di informazioni anche dopo il rientro in Italia attraverso scambi telefonici costanti. Inoltre, data l'impossibilità di visitare il Centro di Dakawa che al momento dell'arrivo in Tanzania è stato chiuso alle visite per la diffusione del Covid-19, le interviste e gli scambi con i responsabili cinesi sono avvenuti attraverso l'utilizzo di *WeChat*². Al momento della mia visita, a marzo del 2020, il Centro era gestito da due soli responsabili cinesi, mentre il direttore del Centro si trovava in Cina. Le comunicazioni con il direttore del Centro che ha favorito la mia interazione con gli altri membri, tuttavia, sono avvenute e continuano ad avvenire tramite *WeChat* e scambio di email.

4. Cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa: una prospettiva storica. – Dalla metà degli anni cinquanta, l'agricoltura è un settore prioritario nelle relazioni Africa-Cina. Le pratiche, le modalità e gli obiettivi della cooperazione agricola cinese in Africa hanno però subito cambiamenti sostanziali. Questo paragrafo esplora l'evoluzione storica per comprendere le modalità contemporanee. Il cambiamento nella politica estera degli aiuti cinesi in Africa riflette i cambiamenti politici e le strategie di sviluppo interne alla Cina (Adejumobi e Jalata, 2018; Morgan, 2019). L'Africa ha spesso rappresentato un 'terreno di prova' per testare nuove politiche estere (Warmerdam e De Haan, 2015).

Dalla metà degli anni cinquanta, l'assistenza estera cinese è guidata dai cinque principi della coesistenza pacifica di Zhou Enlai (Brautigam, 1998; Warmerdam e De Haan, 2015). I cinque

² WeChat è l'applicazione di messaggistica più diffusa e utilizzata in Cina, oltre a rappresentare una delle poche applicazioni di comunicazione autorizzata dal governo cinese e utilizzabile in Cina senza l'utilizzo di una rete privata virtuale (VPN).

principi: il rispetto della sovranità e dell'integrità territoriale, la non aggressione reciproca, la non interferenza negli affari interni dell'altro, l'uguaglianza, il beneficio reciproco, e la coesistenza pacifica, vengono presentati in particolare dagli accademici cinesi come la formula vincente della Cina per raggiungere una cooperazione *win-win* ovvero un rapporto reciproco e vantaggioso sia per la Cina che per i paesi africani (Anshan, 2017; Zhang *et al.*, 2018).

Sono varie le periodizzazioni che vengono utilizzate per esplorare l'evoluzione delle relazioni Cina-Africa (Anshan, 2006; Mawdsley, 2007); in questo articolo viene suggerita la periodizzazione proposta da Lu Jiang (2020) per catturare la storicità della cooperazione allo sviluppo agricolo della Cina con l'Africa: una fase iniziale 1960-1980, la fase di transizione 1980-2000 e la fase attuale dal nuovo millennio. Questa evoluzione viene identificata come un passaggio da un supporto ideologico parallelo alla conferenza di Bandung del 1955 a un supporto guidato da interessi economici all'inizio del nuovo millennio.

La prima fase (1960-1980) riflette l'esigenza della nascente Repubblica Popolare Cinese di ottenere riconoscimento a livello internazionale. L'alleanza con i paesi africani risulta quindi cruciale dato il deterioramento delle relazioni con il blocco sovietico e con l'Occidente. Allo stesso tempo le relazioni con i paesi africani sono anche il terreno di competizione con Taiwan, al quale la Cina subentra con un programma di sostituzione degli aiuti dal 1970 al 1983 (*ibidem*). L'aiuto internazionale della Cina è quindi in questa prima fase un chiaro strumento politico che si materializza nel supporto di grandi fattorie statali, come ad esempio la fattoria Mbrali in Tanzania, o Kapatwee in Liberia (Brautigam e Tang, 2009). Questi progetti agricoli erano 'completi': il governo cinese si occupava di costruzione, fornitura di servizi, servizi post-costruzione e si basavano principalmente su sovvenzioni e prestiti senza interessi che non presentavano elementi di investimento o commercio e venivano finanziati dalle agenzie governative cinesi. Questa prima fase riflette chiaramente la necessità di riconoscimento internazionale della Repubblica Popolare Cinese e del bisogno del supporto dei paesi africani. L'ammissione nel 1971 della Cina alle Nazioni Unite, largamente supportata dai governi africani, è un esempio rappresentativo della rilevanza geopolitica dei paesi africani per la Cina.

La seconda fase (1980-2000) riflette il periodo delle riforme e di apertura del 1978 di Deng Xiaoping e l'inizio di quello che David Harvey ha definito come "Neoliberalismo con caratteristiche cinesi" (Harvey, 2005: capitolo 5). Le riforme interne, incentrate sullo sviluppo economico nazionale cinese, riflettono anche le riforme degli aiuti e del commercio estero. Questa fase di transizione è infatti caratterizzata da un'enfasi posta sui benefici reciproci, in particolare

quelli relativi agli interessi commerciali. Il supporto di grandi fattorie statali viene gradualmente sostituito negli anni ottanta con progetti di piccola-media scala. Questa riduzione della scala di aiuto è parallela a una maggiore inclusione delle imprese di proprietà statale cinesi (SOEs) e di istituzioni affiliate al governo (Jiang, 2020). Il governo di Pechino inizia quindi a porre particolare enfasi sulla combinazione di elementi di aiuto, investimenti, commercio; quello che verrà definito come il nuovo business dello sviluppo e di cui i centri cinesi di dimostrazione tecnologica dell'agricoltura (*Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers* 'ATDC' o i Centri) in Africa sono il caso indicativo (Jiang *et al.*, 2016; Xu *et al.*, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2018).

Le riforme interne e relative alle politiche estere insieme al crescente ruolo del capitale di mercato nell'arena della cooperazione internazionale sono cambiamenti gradualmente visibili a partire dagli anni 2000.

Dal nuovo millennio, l'integrazione di elementi di aiuto, investimenti e commercio sono centrali nelle politiche e piattaforme che alimentano la cooperazione sino-africana. L'introduzione di politiche come la *Going out policy*, che supporta le imprese cinesi ad entrare in nuovi mercati, ha largamente interessato l'Africa. La creazione del Forum della cooperazione Cina-Africa (FOCAC) nel 2000 come strumento diplomatico per promuovere le relazioni sino-africane e la pubblicazione nel 2006 del primo libro bianco della Cina (*China White Paper*) sulla politica africana sono segnali rappresentativi delle intenzioni del governo cinese di ricoprire un ruolo maggiore in Africa.

L'agricoltura ha rappresentato il settore prioritario alla base di queste nuove iniziative. Il settore agricolo in Africa è centrale nella *Agriculture going out policy* che ha favorito il commercio di prodotti agricoli tra Cina e Africa (Fiorentini, 2016); allo stesso modo, a partire dal FOCAC del 2006, l'agricoltura è diventata un'area di cooperazione prioritaria. Durante il FOCAC del 2006 è stata annunciata la creazione degli ATDC che verranno discussi nei paragrafi successivi.

Il crescente sviluppo della cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa è anche relativo alla narrazione secondo la quale l'esperienza cinese in campo agricolo può rappresentare un modello per lo sviluppo del settore in Africa (Li *et al.*, 2013). L'enfasi sulla dimensione economica e tecnologica, quindi sul trasferimento tecnologico, è la chiave della cooperazione agricola sino-africana (Anshan, 2016). La Cina non solo trasferisce un modello tecnologico di sviluppo agricolo in Africa, ma anche la propria esperienza in agricoltura. Il trasferimento tecnologico coinvolge quindi anche dimensioni politiche e ideologiche (Xu *et al.*, 2016). Le strategie cinesi in agricoltura, tuttavia, possono variare a seconda del paese con cui la Cina si confronta, essendo le relazioni bilaterali influenzate dall'ambiente politico e dalle relazioni storiche su cui si fonda la narrazione del governo cinese

(Alden e Alves, 2008). Risulta quindi impossibile generalizzare sulla cooperazione agricola cinese in Africa e interpretare la Cina come attore monolitico e l’Africa come un singolo paese (Mohan, 2021; Power e Mohan, 2010). Questo conduce nello spazio di questo articolo a restringere il focus sulla Tanzania e sulla cooperazione agricola Cina-Tanzania.

Se, da un alto, l’evoluzione storica permette di analizzare come le modalità e i principi della cooperazione e dello sviluppo agricolo della Cina in Africa siano cambiati nel tempo e come questa presenza non sia nuova (Anshan, 2006), dall’altro, il caso della Tanzania permette di esplorare come queste modalità si siano evolute in un territorio specifico, in particolare nelle sua forma più recente.

5. Relazioni Cina-Tanzania: dall’UJAAMA agli ATDC. – Le relazioni Cina- Tanzania sono considerate per diversi aspetti peculiari (Cabestan e Chaponnière, 2016). Le prime relazioni Tanzania-Cina iniziano negli anni sessanta e da allora le relazioni diplomatiche, politiche, militari ed economiche tra i due paesi sono cresciute (Xia, 2019). La Tanzania è uno dei paesi ad avere ricevuto il maggior flusso di aiuti esteri dalla Cina e la costruzione della *Tanzania-Zambia railway* (TAZARA), finanziata dal governo cinese e completata nel 1976, rappresenta ancora oggi la massima espressione fisica delle relazioni sino-africane (Amoah, 2016; Haifang e Monson, 2011). Le relazioni Tanzania-Cina sono state caratterizzate nell’era di Mao Zedong e Julius Nyerere da un forte elemento socialista che trova espressione nella dichiarazione di Arusha del 1967, in cui Nyerere espone il concetto di *ujaama* (termine swahili che può essere tradotto con familiarità, fratellanza, comunità), come base del possesso collettivo delle risorse, primariamente fondiarie. L’affinità politica e ideologica nell’era di Mao e Nyerere è oggetto di particolare interesse per l’influenza che la Cina ha sul modello di sviluppo in Tanzania (Kinyondo, 2020). Le relazioni Tanzania-Cina sono oggi caratterizzate da una forte relazione tra il partito Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Partito della rivoluzione) e il Partito comunista cinese. Il fatto che la Tanzania sia stato il primo paese africano ad essere visitato da Xi Jinping nel 2013 e dal ministro degli esteri Wang Xi nel 2021 è esplicativo dell’importanza del paese per la strategia geopolitica della Cina. Allo stesso modo, gli strumenti di *soft power* della Cina in Tanzania stanno crescendo insieme alle infrastrutture cinesi nel paese; ad esempio, la nuova biblioteca dell’Università di Dar Es Salaam e lo Stadio Nazionale sono stati finanziati dalla Cina (Shangwe, 2017). La presenza cinese in Tanzania è anche viva in progetti infrastrutturali connessi all’economia internazionale. Rappresentativo è il coinvolgimento della Cina nella costruzione della zona economica speciale (SEZ) e del porto di Baga- moyo (Gambino, 2021), oltre alla partecipazione della *China National Offshore Oil Corporation* (CNOOC) nella realizzazione dell’*East African Crude Oil Pipe Line* (ECOAP), un

oleodotto tra Tanzania e Uganda che ha già attirato l'interesse internazionale per gli impatti degenerativi del progetto sui territori che attraversa e su chi li abita (FIDH, 2020; Oxfam, 2020).

La cooperazione agricola è stata centrale nelle relazioni Tanzania-Cina. La Tanzania è uno dei principali paesi beneficiari di aiuti pubblici dalla Cina, anche nel settore agricolo. Dal 1964 al 1970, la Cina ha finanziato grandi fattorie statali come la *Ruvu state farm*, la *Upenga state farm*, la *Ubungu farm* e la *Mbarali state farm* che rappresenta il più esteso progetto agricolo cinese in Tanzania (Brautigam e Tang, 2012). Il supporto di grandi fattorie statali nella prima fase di aiuto è stato parallelo al finanziamento di stazioni per la formazione agricola in diverse regioni della Tanzania e alla distribuzione di aiuti alimentari (Yu, 1975). Alcune delle fattorie statali sono state poi privatizzate, acquistate dalle compagnie cinesi o ridistribuite ai piccoli agricoltori locali.

Dagli anni 2000, l'approccio pragmatico della politica estera degli aiuti cinesi, che si identifica nel combinare elementi di aiuto, investimenti e commercio, si riflette nei progetti di cooperazione agricola in Tanzania. Il Centro di dimostrazione tecnologica dell'agricoltura a Dakawa, nella regione di Morogoro, è il progetto governativo rappresentativo della cooperazione agricola Tanzania-Cina.

Gli ATDC sono stati annunciati per la prima volta nel FOCAC del 2006 e da allora oltre 25 centri sono stati stabiliti in differenti paesi africani. Gli ATDC rappresentano il progetto faro della cooperazione agricola sino-africana e per questo hanno attirato l'interesse internazionale (Xu *et al.*, 2016; Chichava *et al.*, 2013). I Centri hanno l'obiettivo di promuovere le relazioni bilaterali per favorire la strategia estera cinese; aiutare ad assicurare la sicurezza alimentare attraverso il trasferimento dell'esperienza cinese in agricoltura; fornire una base per le compagnie cinesi per promuovere la *Agriculture going out policy*; diventare una base agro- tecnologica per la ricerca, la dimostrazione e la formazione (Jiang *et al.*, 2016).

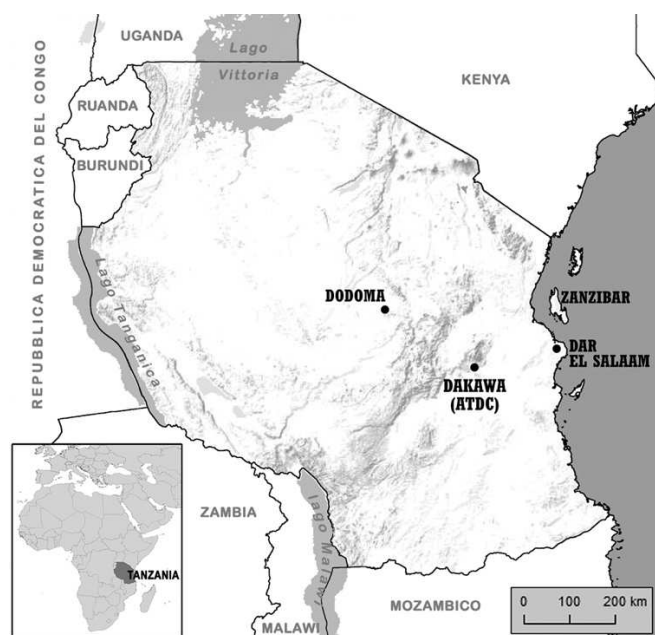
I Centri rappresentano prima uno strumento diplomatico e politico esemplificativo dell'aiuto governativo cinese e in secondo luogo una piattaforma per il trasferimento tecnologico in agricoltura attraverso le dimostrazioni e i training agli agricoltori locali. Gli ATDC sono stati oggetto di particolare interesse perché sono caratterizzati da una componente fortemente commerciale che li distingue dai progetti agricoli finanziati dal governo cinese prima dell'era delle riforme.

Gli ATDC si basano su un accordo bilaterale tra il governo cinese e il governo africano. I Centri vengono presentati come un progetto governativo cinese ma sono in realtà gestiti da compagnie

cinesi (private, statali, università) e per questo caratterizzati da un partenariato pubblico-privato. È interessante notare come ogni ATDC in Africa sia gestito da una differente provincia in Cina. Questo riflette il principio ‘una provincia, un paese’ promosso dal Centro di cooperazione economica estera cinese (FECC). Il ruolo delle provincie cinesi negli ATDC in Africa è esemplificativo del ruolo dei governi provinciali al di là del capitalismo di stato cinese (Gu *et al.*, 2016). Il partenariato pubblico-privato che riflette il modello degli ATDC evidenzia il ruolo centrale degli investitori privati cinesi che in molti casi sono fuori dal controllo del governo di Pechino, come dimostra il fatto che spesso non risultano nelle liste del Ministero del commercio cinese (MOFCOM) (Xia, 2019).

Tutti i Centri sono caratterizzati da tre fasi: costruzione, cooperazione tecnica, e sostenibilità commerciale (Jiang, 2020). Le fasi di costruzione e di cooperazione tecnologica vengono quasi completamente finanziate dal governo di Pechino mentre nell’ultima fase, i centri dovrebbero aver raggiunto la sostenibilità economica. Questo modello *aid+business* riassume quello che nella narrativa promossa dal governo cinese è la cooperazione *win-win*: da un lato, la Cina offre la tecnologia e il *know-how* per la modernizzazione dell’agricoltura del paese partner, dall’altro, favorisce l’entrata delle compagnie cinesi nel mercato agricolo dello stesso. Sebbene gli ATDC siano il progetto di cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa che ha ricevuto maggiore interesse a livello internazionale e vengono presentati dal governo di Pechino come un’alternativa agli interventi di cooperazione agricola Nord-Sud sono varie le criticità operative e concettuali dei Centri (Pepa, 2020). Nel prossimo paragrafo, prendendo in considerazione il caso di studio dell’ATDC a Dakawa, spiegherò i risultati dell’analisi attraverso le mie osservazioni e le interviste.

6. Sul campo: il Centro di dimostrazione tecnologica agricola di Dakawa. – L’ATDC in Tanzania si trova a Dakawa nella regione di Morogoro (Fig. 1). Dakawa è un piccolo villaggio a circa 40 Km dalla città di Morogoro ed è caratterizzato da condizioni geografiche particolarmente favorevoli per la coltivazione del riso. A Dakawa si trova uno dei più ampi schemi di irrigazione di riso della Tanzania e proprio per la prossimità allo schema di irrigazione ha rappresentato un ambito luogo per interventi agricoli da parte di diverse agenzie internazionali come USAID, la Cina e in passato JICA (Mdee *et al.*, 2014). Il Centro è gestito dall’impresa cinese *Sino-Tanzania agricultural development Co. Ltd.* e dall’Accademia delle scienze agricole di Chongqing in Cina, in collaborazione con il Ministero dell’agricoltura, della sicurezza alimentare e delle cooperative (MAFC) della Tanzania e il *Tanzania agricultural research institute* a Dakawa (TARI-Dakawa) (Mgendi *et al.*, 2019).



Fonte: GISlab-DiSSGeA.

Fig. 1 - Mappa della Tanzania e posizione dell'ATDC Dakawa

L'ATDC a Dakawa è stato completato nel 2010 e nel 2015 è entrato nella fase di sostenibilità economica. Attraverso le attività commerciali, il Centro dovrebbe riuscire ad essere economicamente sostenibile, senza più dipendere dal governo di Pechino. Le attività commerciali del Centro sembrano però limitate e quindi anche la possibilità di gestire il Centro al pieno delle sue potenzialità (Intervista, marzo 2020). Mentre non ci sono problemi nelle prime due fasi, finanziate dal governo cinese, i problemi sono evidenti nella terza fase di sostenibilità commerciale: “per sopravvivere i centri hanno bisogno di attrarre le aziende, altrimenti falliranno” (Intervista, luglio 2019). L'ATDC a Dakawa si concentra specialmente sulla coltivazione di riso. Il Centro ha testato l'utilizzo di tecnologie e macchinari cinesi sulla varietà locale SARO5³ sviluppata da TARI-Dakawa e ampiamente utilizzata dagli agricoltori locali. Allo stesso tempo, oltre dieci varietà di semi ibridi della *Chongqing seeds Ltd.* sono stati testati. Dato che le sementi ibride della *Chongqing Academy* devono ancora essere approvate per la commercializzazione in Tanzania, il Centro di Dakawa si concentra particolarmente sulla coltivazione del SARO5 collaborando con il TARI-

³ La varietà di riso TXD306 (Tanzania cross Dakawa), conosciuta come SARO5, è una qualità di riso semi-aromatica con alte rese e resistente alla siccità sviluppata dal centro di ricerca sull'agricoltura TARI-Dakawa.

Dakawa per l'aumento della produzione del raccolto attraverso il *know-how* cinese nelle tecniche di piantagione ad alto rendimento (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 - Semina della varietà di riso SARO5 a TARI-Dakawa durante il mese di marzo 2020

Oltre alla coltivazione di riso, il Centro si occupa in maniera marginale della coltivazione di mais, verdure e frutta. Secondo il direttore cinese dell'ATDC a Dakawa, i prodotti che vengono coltivati nel Centro non hanno un fine commerciale, bensì vengono distribuiti gratuitamente ai partecipanti dei training, allo staff del Centro o distribuiti per il consumo delle comunità cinesi locali (Intervista, dicembre 2020). Tuttavia, Makundi (2017) evidenzia come in realtà i prodotti del Centro vengano venduti a Dakawa, così come in altri villaggi anche se i lavoratori cinesi presenti nella regione di Morogoro e Dodoma rappresentano i maggiori acquirenti dei prodotti del Centro.

La commercializzazione delle sementi ibride non è stata ancora approvata dal governo della Tanzania, e questo evidenzia uno dei limiti legati alla sostenibilità economica del Centro. Prima che i nuovi semi vengano approvati, questi necessitano di vari test in ambienti ecologici differenti, il che richiede un processo lungo (Intervista, marzo 2020). Allo stesso tempo, il governo della Tanzania non ha influito sull'accelerazione della commercializzazione delle sementi di riso ibride cinesi, non facilitando l'entrata delle compagnie cinesi nel mercato locale; contrariamente alle previsioni del governo di Pechino. Inoltre, secondo il direttore del Centro il problema non è solo relativo alla commercializzazione delle sementi ibride ma si collega anche alla situazione interna della nazione: "la Tanzania ha una popolazione piccola e un potere d'acquisto insufficiente, rendendo le operazioni commerciali semplicemente irrealistiche" (Intervista, dicembre 2020).

Ad ogni modo, vanno considerate anche le resistenze di carattere culturale e sociale al consolidamento dell'utilizzo di semi ibridi cinesi, per quanto ad alta produttività. Infatti, il riso ha un particolare valore culturale in Tanzania, e le varietà di riso cinesi sono considerate senza sapore (Makundi, 2017). Simili perplessità sono espresse anche da un intervistato, per il quale la varietà cinese "non ha aroma, mentre il SARO5 (autoctono) è una qualità di semi aromatica" (Intervista, marzo 2020).

In ogni caso, l'introduzione nel mercato agricolo in Tanzania di semi di riso ibridi cinesi, unito all'utilizzo di conoscenza, tecnologie, fertilizzanti e macchinari cinesi, potrebbe condurre a nuove forme di dipendenza da compagnie fornitrici della Cina. Le sementi ibride non possono essere riutilizzate negli anni successivi e quindi devono essere riacquistate ogni anno. Al contrario, una valorizzazione di semi autoctoni e tecniche locali permetterebbe una maggiore sicurezza produttiva e alimentare, dato che i semi del SARO5 possono essere riutilizzati per almeno tre anni (Intervista, marzo 2020). Un altro problema deriva dal forte utilizzo di fertilizzanti promosso dai tecnici cinesi, pari a circa 20 pacchi per 2 acri, per stagione (Makundi, 2017). I fertilizzanti, a loro volta, vengono importati dalla Cina. Già a livello nazionale, la Tanzania ha una forte dipendenza dalla Cina per tali prodotti: nel 2017 il paese ha importato il 43.9% di pesticidi dalla Cina sul totale dei pesticidi importati dalla Tanzania. Infine, la collaborazione dell'ATDC con la Cina è esclusiva, mentre le relazioni con altre entità locali, come università, autorità locali, istituti di microfinanza e altri potenziali donatori, sono limitate (Lawther, 2017; Intervista-marzo, 2020). Persino le comunicazioni tra i responsabili cinesi del Centro e gli agricoltori locali appaiono limitate dalle difficoltà linguistiche, e dall'assenza di un sistema formale di *feedback* tra gli esperti cinesi del Centro e gli agricoltori che ricevono i training (Mgendi *et al.*, 2021). Non avendo creato nuove reti di collaborazioni, tecnici ed esperti cinesi del Centro tendono a rimanere autoreferenziali, e isolati dal contesto locale favorendo la formazione di un'enclave territoriale (Mohan, 2013).

Una prima iniziativa per ovviare alla persistenza dei problemi linguistici e culturali si è basata sull'organizzazione nel 2019 di un *workshop* di formazione sulla tecnologia agricola cinese. Il training è stato organizzato congiuntamente dall'Istituto Confucio dell'Università di Dar Es Salaam e dal Centro di dimostrazione tecnologica dell'agricoltura di Dakawa (UDSM, 2019). Il corso, rivolto agli studenti tanzaniani, aveva l'obiettivo di favorire il trasferimento delle innovazioni agricole cinesi. In particolare, il corso prevedeva l'insegnamento in lingua cinese dei nomi delle sementi e delle tecniche utilizzate nel Centro di Dakawa. Nonostante questa prima iniziativa, le barriere linguistiche e culturali richiedono molto più tempo per essere arginate; allo stesso modo, richiedono una conoscenza del territorio pregressa che il Centro non sembrava aver sviluppato.

Il Centro non ha condotto attività alternative in seguito alla pandemia di Covid-19 come invece hanno fatto diverse associazioni presenti nella regione di Morogoro. Ad esempio, poco prima del rientro in Italia ho avuto modo di visitare l'ONG *Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania* (SAT), nella città di Morogoro. SAT aveva riorganizzato le attività previste in modo tale da poter promuovere programmi di sensibilizzazione ai piccoli contadini sul virus Covid-19. Inoltre, l'organizzazione offriva consulenza per far fronte alla sicurezza alimentare durante la crisi pandemica. Tuttavia, simili attività non sono state programmate dal Centro che è rimasto temporaneamente chiuso durante la crisi.

7. Discussione: nuovi attori, stesse modalità? – L'analisi presentata ha mostrato molte criticità rispetto alla narrazione degli ATDC come centri innovativi e alternativi ai modelli tradizionali di cooperazione Nord-Sud. Al contrario, il Centro riproduce numerose dinamiche di dipendenza. Il caso dell'ATDC di Dakawa è importante, poiché funge da azienda modello di altri ATDC presenti in oltre 25 paesi africani. Quindi, nonostante gli attori coinvolti in questa cooperazione si posizionino al di fuori delle classiche relazioni Nord-Sud, si osservano elementi di similitudine, anche nella costruzione di relazioni di dipendenza economica.

Infatti, attraverso gli ATDC, la Cina ha aperto nuovi mercati ai propri investitori nazionali, in competizione con gli attori locali, sia in termini produttivi e commerciali, sia come pressione all'accumulazione fondiaria.

Tuttavia, a tutt'oggi, l'impatto degli ATDC sull'economia locale rimane limitato (Jiang, 2020). Il Centro a Dakawa non ha dinamizzato l'economia locale, nemmeno in termini di creazione di impiego. Simili dinamiche sono state individuate anche nel caso del settore delle infrastrutture. I progetti cinesi in Africa tendono alla creazione di posti di lavoro non qualificati, precari, senza alcun tipo di assicurazioni o possibilità di avanzamento (Gambino, 2020). Nonostante il limitato impatto economico che attualmente i Centri hanno sull'economia locale si potrebbe verificare un'evoluzione del sistema produttivo, che è ciò a cui i Centri auspicano, nel caso in cui gli ATDC risultassero di interesse per nuovi investitori cinesi e stranieri. In caso di un maggiore interesse nella fase di consolidamento produttivo e sviluppo commerciale del riso ibrido, nuove terre dovrebbero essere messe a coltura, a svantaggio dell'accesso alla terra locale (Pepa, 2020). Lo stesso problema si è già verificato nel caso dell'ATDC in Zimbabwe (Tang *et al.*, 2018).

Oltre al limitato impatto sull'economia locale, i macchinari, i semi e i prodotti fertilizzanti utilizzati nel Centro a Dakawa vengono importati dalla Cina con lo scopo di favorire l'importazione di prodotti agricoli cinesi. I centri non solo creano una dipendenza dal capitale cinese, ma anche una

subordinazione dalla conoscenza tecnologica e ideologica. Attraverso l'introduzione delle tecniche di coltivazione risultato dell'esperienza cinese, si perpetua una dipendenza dalla conoscenza degli esperti cinesi. Infatti gli esperti cinesi diventano indispensabili per lo stesso funzionamento dei Centri e per il futuro dello sviluppo del settore agricolo, che riflette il modello di sviluppo agricolo in Cina, più che aderire alle caratteristiche e ai bisogni dell'agricoltura della Tanzania.

Similmente agli interventi occidentali di cooperazione agricola in Africa, la cooperazione cinese attraverso il sistema degli ATDC tende ad imporre la propria competenza e le proprie varietà selezionate, trascurando i bisogni, le identità e le conoscenze del territorio (Bertoncin e Pase, 2011). Per quanto il modello sperimentale degli ATDC sia solitamente ben accolto dai paesi africani, per la facilità di applicazione delle tecnologie cinesi, e per il prezzo competitivo delle agro-tecnologie cinesi rispetto a quelle occidentali, i centri non rappresentano uno spazio in cui gli agricoltori locali possano sperimentare modelli di sviluppo agricolo alternativi, ma si presentano, piuttosto, come piattaforme commerciali e politiche per la Cina (Lawther, 2017).

8. Conclusioni. – Per concludere, l'ascesa di nuovi attori economici e della cooperazione internazionale come i BRICS e in particolare la Cina in Africa hanno profondamente modificato la geografia dello sviluppo e l'ordine globale. Le relazioni Cina-Africa sono centrali per il futuro dello sviluppo dei paesi africani, ma per questo non meno asimmetriche delle relazioni neo-coloniali prodotte dall'imperialismo (Garcia, 2017). La prospettiva storica della cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa permette di osservare come i principi e le pratiche si siano evolute assumendo un carattere intrinsecamente commerciale. I progetti faro della cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa, come gli ATDC, sono interventi agricoli che ciclicamente ripetono approcci di dipendenza. Mentre gli ATDC vengono presentati come modelli alternativi, dall'articolo emerge che questi non siano vere alternative, bensì condividano la cecità territoriale della cooperazione Nord-Sud. Nonostante la cooperazione agricola Cina-Africa sia retoricamente sostenuta dai principi della cooperazione Sud-Sud di sviluppo reciproco, i progetti della cooperazione agricola cinese in Africa restano legati alla domanda: 'Cosa può l'Africa imparare dalla Cina?'

Nel caso della Tanzania, il governo considera il settore agricolo centrale per la crescita economica del paese, infatti, nella seconda fase della strategia nazionale per la crescita e per la riduzione della povertà, conosciuta come Mkukuta II, il ruolo dell'agricoltura è predominante. In linea con questa strategia, dal 2009 la Tanzania ha promosso la politica agricola Kilimo Kwanza (*Agriculture first*) e numerosi piani per un corridoio di crescita agricola nel sud della Tanzania (SAGCOT), un nuovo

partenariato pubblico-privato. All'interno di questo quadro si inseriscono i progetti di cooperazione agricola Cina-Tanzania e di altri paesi come gli Stati Uniti.

L'attuale politica agricola in Tanzania prevede l'industrializzazione, la modernizzazione e la commercializzazione del suo sistema alimentare, nonostante le ingiustizie sociali e ecologiche che questo modello di agricoltura industriale moderna produce. Come emerge nei casi degli ATDC in Rwanda e Uganda (Lawther, 2017), anche in Tanzania fin quando gli obiettivi di sviluppo si basano su politiche agricole nazionali incentrate sulla modernizzazione dell'agricoltura e sul trasferimento tecnologico, ci sarà spazio tanto per gli investitori cinesi nel mercato agricolo che per altri attori. Nonostante la crescente importanza dell'idea di *partnership* tra i vari attori a livelli distinti, in realtà un partenariato incentrato sullo sviluppo reciproco, paritario e sostenibile rimane limitato (Schech *et al.*, 2015). Gli attori del Nord come del Sud riproducono interventi di cooperazione agricola che non hanno come fine ultimo la sostenibilità ma la dipendenza. Sistemi di intervento che perpetuano lo sfruttamento delle risorse locali ignorando la connessione tra società/natura e le questioni di classe e di genere (Moore, 2017).

Concludendo, l'ascesa della Cina in Africa ha prodotto una diversificazione della dipendenza africana e una nuova dipendenza dalla Cina. In ultimo, le relazioni Cina-Africa perpetuano lo sfruttamento e i rapporti di scambio che accomunano l'Africa con il resto del mondo (Taylor e Zajontz, 2020). Resta quindi centrale il ruolo che la geografia ha nell'osservare l'azione territoriale della Cina in Africa e gli effetti nelle relazioni di cooperazione e sviluppo.

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IV

The power of the Chinese discourses in China-Africa agricultural cooperation

Mariasole Pepa & Paola Minoia (unpublished)

The power of the Chinese discourses on China-Africa agricultural cooperation

Agriculture has been central in China-Africa relations since the mid-1950s, with changing modalities, practices, and political discourses. Based on a discourse analysis of official documents issued by the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) between 2000 and 2018, this article explores changes of narrations and practices of China's agricultural politics in Africa. Drawing from discourse analysis and critical geopolitical theory of China, the article aims to uncover power relations within China's official discourses and to illuminate what is invisible, and often unsaid, about the interest of China for its presence in Africa. To clarify the social context in which discourses are produced, as well as their effects, we will explore China's strategies of food security and the going-out policy of agricultural production in Africa. China's discursive formations of its relations with the African continent, as a tool of *soft power*, contribute to 'naturalize' China's interventions in Africa's agriculture while temporally fixing meanings for specific economic and strategic purposes. Nevertheless, China's developmental discourses concerning Africa's agriculture are far from being technical or neutral. The analysis reveals that China is constantly increasing its involvement through the support of Chinese companies in public-private partnerships, their involvement in trade and export policies, and, more recently, through an emphasis on agricultural 'modernization', which implies a Chinese technology transfer in agriculture. China's geographic expansion in Africa enables China to "fix" the rural space through Chinese agricultural projects such as the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers, at the same time fostering the continent's dependency on Chinese capital and technical knowledge. Finally, this article aims to complement reflections on the future of China-Africa relations, and on current debates on the contributions of discourse analysis in global development studies.

Keywords: China-Africa; agricultural cooperation; discourse analysis; Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)

1. Introduction

Unsettling China's engagement in African agriculture amid the complex socio-ecological, political, economic crisis, exacerbated by the transmission of Covid-19, is a timely discussion (Carmody, 2021). For the African continent, this debate unfolded in a moment of multiple crises underwritten by rising social inequalities, extractivism, and increasing violence against women (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021). China's agricultural engagement in Africa has raised particular attention following

the 2007-08 food and financial crisis that has represented a crucial moment for China's economic expansion (Brautigam 2015; Jiang, 2020; Tang et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2016; Zajontz, 2020). In many cases, debates on Chinese engagement in African agriculture, fall under the framework of the 'scramble for Africa', neocolonization, or as an opportunity for the African continent in terms of diversification from traditional partnerships deriving from colonial relations (Moyo, 2016). Overall, the China-in-Africa discourse is complex and controversial (Sautman & Hairong, 2008).

This study intends to explore China's geostrategic interests on African agriculture as presented in the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) that convenes the People's Republic of China and African states in the coordination of investments and activities for the economic and social development of Africa. As a key multilateral forum, FOCAC represents the main institutional mechanism for China's Africa discussion and a manifestation of the Chinese *soft power* (Power & Mohan, 2010). Our analysis is interested in how discourses and practices of the China-Africa agricultural cooperation are articulated at FOCAC since the time of its inception, in 2000, until FOCAC 2018. Methodologically, this study is informed by discourse analysis of FOCAC's official documents (Foucault, 1980, 1982; Waitt, 2010), and, more specifically on development discourses (Ziai, 2016).

In China, food is a sensitive issue and Beijing's food security concerns increased with the outbreak of Covid-19 (Johnson et al., 2021). China's domestic challenges are related with soil contamination, pollution, degradation of farmland, which resulted from the last decades of rapid industrialization, intensive agricultural practices and use of inorganic chemicals (Zhang, 2019; Huang et al., 2017; Wan et al., 2018). China's industrial pollution is forcing villagers' expulsion from land and farming (Li & Pan, 2020), which contributed to hidden forms of dispossession compared to traditional land grabs (Oliveira et al., 2020). Moreover, China's agricultural production has been damaged by climate change effects (Yu & Zhai, 2020), as it is happening globally. These detrimental dynamics led China since 2013 to shifts its food security strategy into one driven by domestic supply with moderate imports, through technological investments, and active use of foreign agricultural resources (Zhang, 2019).

Following the outbreak of Covid-19, agricultural and food concerns are even more central for the Chinese government. Indeed, in April 2021 China launched the first Anti Food Waste Law that was anticipated by the Clean Plate Campaign announced by President Xi Jinping in August 2020 (Westcott & Gan, 2020; Xinhua, 2021b). The urgency and centrality of these issues are addressed by the Chinese Five Year Plan (2021-2025) that for the first time has included a food security

strategy (Johnston et al., 2021). Moreover, this includes an Agricultural Green Development Plan that contains measures around ecological restoration and the decrease in the use of pesticides and chemicals to maintain China's 'red line' of 1.8 mu of arable land (USDA, 2021).

China's food security concerns are driven by a strategy to reduce dependency on external suppliers through Chinese global agribusiness development (Zheng, 2019). Indeed, China aims to contrast the power of the group composed by the US Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge, Cargill, and Netherlands-based Louis Dreyfus, the four biggest controllers of agricultural commodities (Ibid.). Moreover, already in the early 2000s, China launched the 'Agriculture going out policy' that encouraged Chinese enterprises to invest abroad in agriculture, and Africa has been largely involved in this strategy (Fiorentini, 2016). For instance, China's changing reforms in terms of pesticides and fertilizers' reduction has contributed to China's overcapacity of these agricultural inputs. Indeed, China encourages the Chinese fertilizers companies to invest overseas reducing export taxes on fertilizers (Zheng, 2019).

The changes in China's food strategy have produced effects beyond its borders, restructuring the productive system where it intervenes through, for instance, the impact of the "Go-out strategy", and infrastructural projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Green, 2021; McMichael, 2020; Tortajada & Zhang, 2021). Indeed, the role of BRI, a transcontinental investment programme of infrastructural and economic development, is central in the re-articulation of China's food security strategy despite its food and agricultural cooperation components received lower attention (Ibid.). Under BRI, China attempts to strengthening a 'Food Silk Road' based on technology transfer, agricultural infrastructural expansion, agricultural investment and a space of coordinates policies which intends to restructure global food supply chains (Ibid.).

China's food security concerns and its internationalization attempts open risks and opportunities for African states. On the one hand, in the wake of the China-United States (US) trade war, African countries could represent alternative agricultural suppliers to China, limiting the US hegemony in the global food supply (Ndzendze, 2020). However, the extent to which this represents an opportunities depends upon African stakeholder power to negotiate the best conditions with China. On the other hand, as previously discussed, China farmland degradation resulted from decades of rapid industrialization and agriculture modernization. Yet, China's experience in agriculture is transferred to Africa as a solution for Africa's food security, and similar detrimental effects could

be transferred to African states (Buckley, 2013). Chinese agro-technology transfer in Africa and its spillover effects are crucial to examine China's agricultural engagement.

Our research is guided by the following question: How does China's discourse on Africa agriculture has evolved in the current times of ecological crises? How have cooperation discourses at FOCAC changed over time according to China's geostrategic interests? Which voices and issues have been silenced in these discourses?

In this paper, first, we discuss China's geopolitics of African agriculture and its use of soft tools that open promises of modernization and technological progress as means to solve problems of ecological degradation. Second, we present an overview of almost two decades of operations of FOCAC. Subsequently, we introduce the research methodology adopted in this study, and finally, we will present some key findings of the discourse analysis and conclusions.

2. Africa in China's geopolitics and modernization project

The geopolitical relation between China and Africa is key in discussing China's foreign geopolitical strategies based on the increasing use of soft and hard power in African states (An et al., 2020). The rapid development of China has challenged geopolitical representations and linear narratives rooted in the Euro-American scientific analyses dominated by Western authors (Agnew, 2010; Kong, 2021). Yet, Chinese and non-Chinese scholars literature on Chinese geopolitics still reflect Western theories and terminologies (An & Zhu, 2018). The multipolarity of the geopolitical arena should be reflected in a non-Western geopolitical research agenda (An et al., 2021b), and critical geopolitics that account for the role of the South in altering Western geographic imaginaries (Cheng & Liu, 2021). The dominance of European and American geopolitical studies have ignored the possibilities for alternative geopolitical world maps (Kong, 2021). In this respect, An et al. (2021a) contribute to open debates on the need to decentralizing geopolitical research. Indeed, the consolidation of China-Africa relations together with the launch of the BRI has represented key moments for the resurgence of the concepts of geopolitics within and beyond China (An et al., 2017; Power & Mohan, 2010; Sidaway & Woon, 2017; Woon, 2018). Yet, An et al. (2017) claimed that an epistemological gap between internal and external voices on China's geopolitics is persistent. According to these authors, external voices (non-Chinese, overseas Chinese scholars) despite their relevant contributions, do not reflect China's socio-political and cultural contextual explanations (Ibid.). To close this gap, An et al. (2021a) suggest moving 'towards a Confucian geopolitics' in which cultural analyses may offer more adapted interpretative lens for China's contemporary

geopolitics. Despite various critiques that this proposal has received (Gonzalez-Vicente, 2021; Liu, 2021), especially since Confucian geopolitics could potentially contribute to made invisible power and class struggles, there is a general agreement on the relevance of Chinese culture and traditions for understanding the Chinese geopolitics.

Soft power has represented one of the instruments to foster China's geopolitical interests and strategies in Africa (Amoah, 2016; Tsikudo, 2021). Nye's conceptualization of soft power indicates a non-coercive power based on a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye, 2004). Representative examples are the widespread establishment of Confucius Institutes and of China's media voice in Africa (Jiang et al., 2016); and larger programmes of aid, investment, economic activities, and trade (Shangwe, 2017). China's selective narratives on win-win and mutuality consolidate the foundation of Beijing's soft power in Africa (Wilson Center, 2021), based upon Zhou Enlai's five principles of peaceful coexistence: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (Shangwe, 2017). These narratives support a legitimization of China's foreign policy in the African continent, and contribute to the depoliticization and invisibilization of power relations in the Chinese intervention (Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2019; Power & Mohan, 2010). African leaders have also enforced a narration of bilateral interest (Carrozza, 2021; Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2019) based on the idea of China as a developing country whose domestic development experience can be useful for Africa (Mohan, 2016); therefore, welcoming China's partnership in agriculture (Lawther, 2017). China's official discourses remain anchored to South-South narratives that lay on the principle of non-interference (Carrozza, 2021), although the leadership of President Xi Jinping is promoting China as a 'major country' that deserves a hegemonic role in the world system and in the relations of international development (Cheng & Liu, 2021; Wang, 2018).

According to these development narratives, China's peculiar experience in agriculture can be shared with African countries, to reverse a long history of adoption of Western development models (Buckley, 2013; Huang et al., 2019; Li et al., 2013; Scoones et al., 2016). In fact, from the mid-1950s, China has advanced official offers of foreign assistance as an alternative partner to the West and its colonial past, and to defying the conditionalities of the Bretton Woods institutions (Manji and Marks, 2007).

However, China's investments in African agriculture revolves around development conceptualizations based on modernization and technology, similarly to the Western global project (Power, 2019). According to President Xi Jinping, "the key to modernizing agriculture lies in

science and technology progress and innovation” (Zhang, 2017), presenting modernization as a technological ‘fix’ (Harvey, 2003). Fundamentally, Chinese agricultural engagement in Africa is based upon the transfer of China’s agro-technologies (Buckley, 2013). Technology transfer (TT) is a central feature of China-Africa relations either in the form of technical assistance, knowledge transfer, or knowledge sharing (Anshan, 2016). However, agriculture is a much more complex reality, concerning rights to land, resources, and labour, capacity of investments and access to markets, and distribution of revenues: all sectoral components that are intertwined with power relations, in which the intersection of class, race, gender, and other socio-economic constraints, amplified by environmental erosion and socio-ecological crises, shape the sustainability and justice of food economies (Autio et al., 2021; Ossome, 2020; Pereira & Tsikata, 2021; Prugl et al., 2021). In other words, it is misleading to presume that science and technology can alone address efficiently complex production changes (Pereira, 2021).

Importantly, agricultural practices are impacted by climate change and consistent extractivism, based on commodification and exploitation of nature (Tamale, 2020; Terblanché-Greef, 2019); while the spread of Covid-19 has exacerbated the already fragile food systems, causing an ‘unprecedented politico-economic crisis’ (Ploeg, 2020: 944).

African agrarian and food sovereignty movements have been at the forefront of anti-land grabs and extractivism contestations resisting, and offering alternatives (Jacobos, 2013; see for example AFSA, 2021; The WoMin Collective, 2017; the Rural Women Assembly). Rural women movements have been central in the defense of the environmental commons, through land struggles and the conservation of seed biodiversity (Andrews, 2019). For instance, the Green Belt Movement founded by Wangari Maathai, and the WoMIN ecofeminist alliance, represent important movements of afro eco-feminism, linking gender with ecological justice and challenging the very foundation of hegemonic models based on capitalism exploitation by foreign investors (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021; Kelleher, 2019). Other movements have responded with calls for alternative approaches based on Afrocentric ecological practices (Chemhuru, 2019; Pereira & Tsikata, 2021; Tamale, 2020), some of them based on local philosophies that maintain the principle of close relationality between human and more-than-human beings (Gwaravanda, 2019). These diverse movements, based on specific cultural contexts, challenge the economic development and modernity principles that have been adopted as primary goals by African State institutions and local elites, together with transnational/national corporations and BRICS countries that are key actors in African extractivism (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021; Bond, 2017). In fact, China-Africa relations seem to follow a well-known pattern of asymmetric power imbalance that has traditionally underpinned the North-South axis

(Carmody, 2013), thus contributing to a diversification of the African dependency rather than propelling a real alternative model of international relations (Pepa, 2021; Taylor, 2014; Taylor & Zajontz, 2020).

In light of the above, it is clear that “there is no social movement and political space that does not include food” (Andrew & Lewis, 2017: 9). Hence, access to resources, control over land and struggles against extractivism and environmental degradation are crucial in sustainable food productions. In this context, China has a growing role in this crisis, due to a recurrent acquisition or leasing of land in Africa and South America (McMichael, 2018). Researchers have illustrated different forms of dispossession occurring in rural China as well as in Africa, beyond a direct control or acquisition of the land, through contract farming (Martiniello, 2020), and ‘expulsion by pollution’ (Li & Pan, 2020), producing unseen socio-ecological impacts for those living in proximity of new investments and development projects (Gustavo et al., 2020).

3. Setting the context: The Forum on China-Africa cooperation (FOCAC)

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is the main multilateral cooperation mechanism involving actors from China and Africa (Taylor, 2011). Overtime, FOCAC has represented a crucial soft power tool to boost China’s geostrategic interests on the continent (Nantulya, 2018), and is presented as “a pacesetter for international cooperation with Africa in the new era” (Xinhua, 2021a: 32). The great involvement of the West in Africa since the post-cold war period, together with the opportunities provided by the economic globalization and the interest of China in ‘Going out’, represented the momentum for institutionalizing relations with African countries (Anshan et al., 2012). Started in the 2000s, FOCAC has been held every three years, hosted alternatively by China and African countries. The 2006 FOCAC represented the turning point for China’s commitment in Africa, and the year in which international attention moved towards China-in-Africa (Alden & Large, 2018). Interestingly, FOCAC 2006 together with the 2007-2008 food and financial crisis represented key geopolitical moments for the consolidation of international development cooperation studies in China in parallel with the growing international criticism and accusation of neocolonialism from the West (Cheng & Liu, 2021). Since the 2006, the centrality of FOCAC in China-Africa relations has grown extensively, despite the challenges of Africa’s gains in FOCAC (Ibonye, 2020).

As a multilateral forum, FOCAC includes areas of economic cooperation in sectors like transports, agriculture, and education, to a more recent assertive engagement in security areas, with the establishment in 2017 of the first China’s military base in Djibouti (Alden & Jiang, 2019).

Moreover, areas of cooperation have broadened to digital and health cooperation fueled by the spread of Covid-19 (Van Staden, 2021). At the same time, the actors involved in FOCAC mechanism have extensively increased. Among them, the official incorporation of the African Union (AU) in FOCAC is meaningful, as remarked by the Chinese Ambassador to the AU Liu Yuxi (Chinafrica, 2021). Yet, FOCAC has echoed the AU's Agenda 2063 with respect to industrialization, agricultural modernization, peace, and security. However, despite FOCAC's presentation as a general China-Africa platform, not all African countries are equal partners, and access to China's economic resources and investment differ according to China's geopolitical priorities (Benabdallah, 2021). In addition, even if FOCAC provides a diplomatic space of negotiation at the national and regional levels, non-state actors and their agendas were not included. In this perspective, it has been argued that a "more hybrid and inclusive form of summitry that involves civil society actors" (Folashadé, 2021: 19) is necessary.

FOCAC reflects China's determination to play a prominent role in development cooperation and finance (Kring & Gallagher, 2019), to legitimize its role as an alternative to the West under the umbrella of South-South cooperation. Nevertheless, China's relations with African countries have intensified, not only in competition with traditional Western donors, but even through growing cooperation with them (Mawdsley, 2015).

In the last few years, a growing academic scholarship has interrogated the role of FOCAC and its narratives. For instance, Cheng (2016) using critical discourse analysis, has explored FOCAC as a site of power. Delgado (2015) has analyzed FOCAC's discourse on cooperation as a reflection of the relations between discourse and identity and argued that FOCAC represents "a privileged space for creating or straightening socially constructed identities at the discursive level" (Delgado, 2015:10). More recently, Carrozza (2021) has explored the role played by China's official Africa discourses "in maintaining continuity throughout shifts in policy" (Carrozza, 2021: 19) in the context of the security-development nexus. Despite these valuable contributions, discourse analysis of FOCAC official documents has paid little attention to the strategic sector of agriculture (Cheru & Modi, 2013).

4. Research Methodology

Our research has focused on FOCAC's policy documents and their discourses on agricultural cooperation. Discourse analysis in geography and development studies reveal implicit power relations (Waite, 2010; Rose, 2001; Ziai, 2016), and specific conceptual features such as naturalization of political-economic interventions, othering, legitimization, hierarchization,

depoliticization, and appropriation (Ziai, 2015). Discourse analysis has challenged the naturalization of development perspectives and pointed out how development's assumptions are contingent to particular historical and geopolitical context. The naturalization of discourses has enabled the problematization of the Other and the construction of binaries, e.g., us/them, developed/underdeveloped. Yet, development discourse based on the promise of betterment adopted the polysemy of development for the legitimization of development intervention and hierarchization (Ziai, 2016). This discourse has contributed to the depoliticization of development, as the development discourse is framed as a solution against poverty, hunger, food insecurity, conceptualized as technical problems that only require technical solutions (Ferguson, 1994; 2006). However, development discourse concerns the question of agency and the appropriation of discourse of claims (Ziai, 2015). Hence, it can be said that discourse analysis has a potential in deconstructing the development discourse (Cornwall & Eade, 2010).

In this study, our discourse analysis of FOCAC official documents is guided by Michel Foucault's principle for "Relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourse" (Foucault, 1980: 93). Indeed, Foucauldian discourse analysis focuses on uncovering power relationships beyond textual analysis (Waite, 2010). Drawn on Foucault's key theoretical arguments (Dittmer, 2010), the analysis is moved by an investigation of discursive structures, and how these formations allow perpetuating regime of truth in the framework of China's official discourse. A Foucauldian discourse analysis opens "opportunities for investigating how discursive formations articulate regimes of truths that naturalise particular 'ways of seeing' social difference (gender, ethnicity, class, or sexuality), places, or bio-physical opposition" (Waite, 2005: 175-176). In our discourse analysis, the ways in which China's foreign policies and practices 'fix' particular meanings and maintain discourse in circulation in African states has been central.

This study comprises 17 documents issued by FOCAC from 2000 to 2018 (Tab. 1). Given the centrality of FOCAC in Sino-African relations, this set of records appear crucial in questioning China's official discourse on its agricultural development cooperation in Africa. Three types of FOCAC materials have been central in our analysis: the opening speech of China's president or Prime Minister, the official joint declarations, and the action plans released after each conference. Particularly, 6 Declarations, 7 Action Plans, and 4 opening speech have been analyzed in this article. The official English version of FOCAC's documents were retrieved from the website of the

Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. With a focus on agricultural cooperation, we have identified the following key themes: modernization and technology, and green agriculture. Discourse analysis allows dismantling development discourses around these critical concepts and helping to reveal how they contribute to the naturalization, depoliticization, and legitimation (Ziai, 2015) of China's discourses at FOCAC. Indeed, discourse analysis serves to illuminate how these concepts are intertwined with China's geopolitics and contributes to uncover the presumed technical neutrality (depoliticization) that has underpinned China's agricultural discourses. Moreover, we look for spaces of agency and resistance that the development discourse has opened, and for invisibilizations (Rose, 2001), facilitated by the generality and vagueness of FOCAC's documents, typical of most diplomatic documents (Alves & Lee, 2022).

5. Analyzing discourses in FOCAC's documents

Agriculture is considered a priority area in China-Africa relations since the beginning of the FOCAC's meetings and growing in recent years. China's engagement in Africa agriculture ranges from involvement in agricultural infrastructure related to BRI, support of Chinese investors, and, more recently, in land and agricultural policies. The great involvement in agricultural and land policies challenges the rhetoric of China's non-interference in Africa. Moreover, from FOCAC 2015 there is a great emphasis on trade of agricultural products between China and Africa, and on African regional trade. Probably, China's greater interest into African regional market is linked to the announcement of the African Continental free trade area. In 2019, China launched the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Agriculture (FOCACA), while the Action Plan 2019-2021 elaborated 11 points in the areas of Food security and Food safety and established a China-Africa Research Center for the Development of Green Agriculture (3.1.8). Furthermore, the same Action Plan has enhanced trade cooperation on specific products such as cotton and sugar (3.1.9; 3.1.10). Contract farming has also increased in the context of Africa-China relations. Overall, due to the rising tension between China and US, Africa could represent a space of diversification for agricultural products. Yet, the power/agency of African countries have remained central in advancing their interest at FOCAC.

Throughout all FOCAC's Action Plans, China-Africa agricultural cooperation has been framed as a crucial relation aiming to achieve Africa's food security. Since the early 2000s, this self-legitimizing discursive formation has naturalized China's presence in African agriculture and its technological transfer that has included, more recently, the "green" option. These key themes:

modernization and technology, and green development, are reflected in FOCAC documents, as presented in the following sections.

Modernization and technology

Technological narratives are central in China's agricultural discourse at FOCAC. Yet, China's discourse reduced the challenges of African agriculture into technical problems that require technical solution, thus contributing both to the depoliticization of agriculture and of technical knowledge. Starting by the Action Plan (2004-2006) China has introduced 'agro-technological cooperation' as a key element in China-Africa relations. Technology transfer in agriculture has been expanded through technical assistance, skills transfer, and the dispatch of Chinese agricultural experts. In the 2006 FOCAC, China announced the establishment of ten Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers (ATDCs). These Centers reflect an 'aid+business' model where technology transfer is linked with business opportunities for Chinese enterprises (Jiang, 2020). Indeed, ATDCs represented commercial platforms, currently established in over 25 African countries, to attract Chinese investors and facilitate their entrance into African markets (Pepa, 2020; 2021). The role of agro-technology has been central in China's own agricultural development and related practices are transferred to Africa.

The 2015 FOCAC, the first under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, represented a shift in China's discourses on African agriculture: agricultural modernization. The change of presidency has represented a turning point in changing narratives and commitment. A striking example is President Xi's 2015 keynote speech at FOCAC on the theme "*Working Together to Write a New Chapter in China-Africa Cooperation*" that introduced new narratives on Africa's industrialization, through capacity building in technological modernization.

This strategy is offered as a way to overcome the problem of food poverty in Africa, as it is mentioned in the Action Plan 2016-2018: "*The two sides agree that realizing agriculture modernization in Africa by strengthening China-Africa agricultural cooperation is an important way to contribute to food security in Africa and should be given priority in the context of China-Africa cooperation projects*" (3.1.1); and in a following section: "*In view of the challenges in Africa on food security (...) China supports Africa in enhancing productive capacity in agriculture which comprises promotion of high-tech food production and agro-processing*" (3.1.4).

The agricultural plan includes the implementation of the “Agriculture leads to prosperity” project in 100 African villages and the establishment of cooperation mechanism between African and Chinese agricultural research institutes (Huang et al., 2019).

However, in the African context, technology transfer appears more as a commercial instrument than a mean to contribute to Africa’s food security. Technological transfer mainly revolved around the promotion of Chinese hybrid seeds, Chinese machinery, and Chinese agricultural technologies. Technological narratives in FOCAC documents contributed to reduce agriculture into a technical problem hiding uneven power relations.

With reference to capacity building and research, the Action Plan 2016-18 proposes ATDCs as center “*focusing on agricultural research, demonstration and training, expanding training, transferring breeding and plantation technologies and cooperate with African countries to increase agricultural unit productivity*”. Instead, promotion of home seeds in Africa have remained invisible in FOCAC documents that just referred to China’s assistance in “*seed health testing/certification*” (Action Plan 2019-2021: 3.1.6), and in “*joint research on breeding and the production of seeds*” (Action Plan, 2016-2018: 3.1.7).

The 2018 Beijing Summit under Xi's leadership reinforced and expanded the narratives of the 2015 FOCAC. In his opening speech, President Xi launched eight major new initiatives and pledged US\$60 billions of funding for the African continent. Within these new initiatives, supporting Africa in achieving food security by 2030, thanks to agricultural modernization, is one of the main priorities. To this purpose, President Xi announced the implementation of 50 agricultural assistance programs, the provision of 1 billion RMB in humanitarian food assistance to African countries affected by natural disasters, the relocation of 500 senior agriculture experts to Africa, and training for young researchers. This agricultural plan explicitly promoted a technology transfer for the promotion of high-tech food productions.

Green development

In the opening speech of the 2015 FOCAC, President Xi asserted that the thematic Forum on “*China-Africa Cooperation for Common Development - Catapulting the African Industrialization Renaissance*” was highly relevant for an inclusive and sustainable development of the African continent. Discourses on sustainability and green development happened in a time when the global attention on environmental crisis was at their highest pick, also thanks to the Paris Conference of Parties on Climate Change held in the same year. A greater attention to environmental impacts in

Africa was also shown by China through the “green development” discourses in FOCAC. Starting from 2015, ‘green, low-carbon, and sustainable’ development narratives became central in FOCAC policy documents, and in the Action Plan 2016-18 when several ‘green’ projects were launched between China and Africa. For instance, in the Action Plan 2016-18 was announced the establishment of the first China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Centre.

Officially, China’s geostrategic narratives accommodate the global debate around the urgent need for ecological transition. In his 2018 keynote speech, President Xi claims that “*The Earth is the only place which we mankind call home. China will work with Africa to pursue green, low-carbon, circular and sustainable development and protect our lush mountains and lucid waters and all living beings on our planet*”. Following this statement, the Action Plan 2019-21 poses a special emphasis on sustainable and organic farming, environmental friendly techniques and the use of renewable energy (3.1.4). We could however question how agricultural modernization and organic farming will possibly coexist in the agricultural cooperation; and how, and with what farming groups this novel ecological sensitivity will be reflected in practice. Moreover, a sustainability approach would require attention to social sustainability; while FOCAC’s documents invisibilizes farmers’ roles and rights in farming practices. The only reference to their presence in the Action Plan 2019-21, is presented as a need to “*enhance skills of farmers at grass root level in modern farm management techniques*” (3.1.11), meaning that local knowledges and practices are not recognized but should instead change. Yet, gender issues are not addressed, and women in agriculture remain invisible in the China-Africa cooperation strategies.

Following FOCAC 2018, green development initiatives and discourses in the Action Plan and declaration expanded related, among others, to ‘circular’ development, and ‘ecological and environmental protection’, agriculture, and energy financing. Despite a proliferation of green development narratives, the role of technology transfer between China and Africa remains a central element, as shown in the Action Plan 2019-21 “*China welcomes African countries to use its model and technology of desertification treatment in light of their real needs and apply it locally through demonstration projects*” (4.6.6).

6. Discussion

The consolidation of China’s agricultural cooperation in Africa is legitimized by official discourses presenting China’s agricultural cooperation as a means to improve Africa’s food security through technology and modernization. These discourses have naturalized China’s intervention, indeed, discourse analysis contributed to challenge the naturalization and depoliticization of discourses

(Ziai, 2016). The strategy involves a modernization of production processes based on mechanization, hybridization, use of genetically modified crops, pesticides, fertilizers, and intensive land use, driven by capitalist market forces (Dibua, 2006). This approach does not appear innovative compared to decades of European intervention within a cooperation framework that has been criticized for impoverishing Africa (Bereano, 2017; Boafo & Lyons, 2021; Kansanga et al., 2019; Mittal & Moore, 2009; Wise, 2020). The recent environmental-friendly solutions proposed by China, whose implementation in the field could not be assessed during these Covid-19 pandemic years, are in the same lines of the New Green Revolution, funded by public assistance institutions of OCDE as well as by philanthropic organizations such as the Bill and Gates Foundation. Against this backdrop, the Chinese cooperation seems to reinforce the traditional economic modernization logics changing local productions, rather than strengthening local alternative based on emplaced knowledges and decision making (Matunhu, 2011).

Since the 2006 FOCAC, the launch of Chinese Agricultural Technology Demonstration Center in Africa is representative of China's attempt to 'fix' agro-technologies in the African space. However, economic interests beyond ATDCs remained invisible in FOCAC documents (Jiang, 2020; Jiang et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2016). In fact, agricultural technology has become an independent economic activity seeking new markets and creating new needs guided by technological fetishism (Harvey, 2018). Indeed, through ATDCs, China has attempted to introduce its own machinery, pesticides, fertilizers, hybrid seeds into the African agricultural production system (Pepa, 2021). Globally, China is assuming a central role in controlling agribusiness chains, as suggested by the ChemChina acquisition of Syngenta, one of the one world's major crop-chemicals companies (Zhang, 2019). The role of China in restructuring the agricultural sector, and the geography of pesticides are central in discussing China's role as a technological partner in Africa and the sustainability of its intervention (Schneider, 2017; Shattuck, 2021).

As already anticipated, China's technological and modernization narratives excludes from the discourse the potential of peasant farming, the role of indigenous knowledge systems, local know-hows and practices (Boafo & Lyons, 2021). Yet, these expertises appeared central to address climate change issues and their impacts on livelihoods and agricultural systems (Iloke, 2016). In view of the above, alternatives to exploitative agricultural models together with the potential of indigenous systems for climate change mitigation, and radical imagination for the human and beyond-human world is urgent (Chao & Enari, 2021).

Similarly, the role of women farmers remains invisible (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021; Tamale, 2020). FOCAC documents include a subsection on ‘Youth and Women’, but not in relation to agriculture. Yet, questions abound around ‘who’ the agricultural actors are, who should carry out the project results, and who will benefit from their outcomes, in the vision represented in the FOCAC policy statements. Indeed, the final targets of these agricultural interventions seem not to be clearly specified. While particular emphasis is placed from the Action Plan 2004-2006 on the role and support of Chinese enterprises within Public-Private Partnership mechanisms (Jiang & Zetao, 2019), there is little evidence of the role that African enterprises will play in this relationship.

Another key aspect in China’s discourse is the emphasis on the ‘green’ option in agriculture from FOCAC 2015, but more as a rhetoric in line with global climate concerns than proactive policies or practices on the ground, either in Africa or within China (Si et al., 2017). The proliferation of environmental considerations were also reported in BRI official documents (Alves & Lee, 2021). Moreover, as part of FOCAC 2021, a 'China-Africa declaration on Combating Climate Change' was announced, which reaffirms the ‘green’ turn in China-Africa relations according to China’s shifting international development strategies (Shen, 2021). Although the Declaration acknowledged the importance of climate intervention, the actions reported depend upon the use of Chinese technologies for energy transition, and among others, aerospace and aviation technologies for addressing climate change, agriculture, and so on (Fmprc, 2021). Yet, China's finance for the energy sector in Africa has been largely discussed in terms of its environmental and social impact, TT, and commercial opportunities (Shen, 2020). Indeed, Chinese technology transfer could be relevant for African countries if host governments negotiate the institutionalization of TT beyond the completion of projects (Chen & Landry, 2018). Furthermore, if, on the one hand, new green initiatives open economic development opportunities, on the other hand, if goods, services, and labor forces are coming from China, African domestic opportunities remain limited (Ibid.). Although ‘green’ development is a central element in China’s official discourses, the commercial opportunities for Chinese enterprises to enter new African markets together with the promotion of Chinese technologies overseas seem to drive China’s geopolitical strategies rather than a genuine interest to build African self-capacity amid environmental degradation as China's 'win-win' discourses suggested.

Having considered the above, China’s presence in Africa is not without contestation. African resistance in local areas is growing especially against illegal mining activities and environmental impacts of extractivism (Aidoo, 2017; Wameru, 2020; Yi, 2021). Although the voices of grassroots

organization and non-state actors emerged in various forms, they are not included in FOCAC consultation mechanisms (Folashadé, 2021).

Anti-Chinese sentiments are also related to the increased presence of competitive Chinese products in local markets (Aidoo, 2016). African food sovereignty and resistance movements are consolidating (Pereira & Tsikata, 2021) condemning extractivism in plantations and other forms, recognizing the ecological and climate impacts, and contesting the New green revolution in Africa that does not provide any forms of discontinuity from those practices (AFSA, 2021; Heft, 2021; Mkindi et al., 2020; Patel, 2013; Schurman, 2018). Yet, the China-Africa Agricultural Cooperation Strategy launched in 2017 under the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) remained invisible at FOCAC, as well as the role of ChemChina/Syngenta as one of AGRA's official financial partner.

7. Conclusion

The focus in this paper has been on China's official discourse on agricultural cooperation at FOCAC. The discourse analysis revealed the centrality of technological modernization, and green narratives, showing a different story compared to the usual narrative of the Chinese cooperation as offering an alternative approach to development, compared to the conventional western one. Discourse analysis contributed to challenging the features of development discourses (naturalization of political-economic interventions, othering, legitimization, hierarchization, depoliticization, and appropriation) (Ziai, 2016), overcoming simplistic South-South rhetoric, and showing how China's discourse depends upon certain geopolitical context.

The ground of the problem remains in the very transfer of economic models that are designed outside the continent, based on experiences of foreign actors (Obeng-Odoom, 2017). On the contrary, the centrality of peasant farmers or women farmers, as well as the role of indigenous knowledge and local technology systems, have remained invisible. The complex and contextual articulation of farming and food systems are not considered, but reduced to technical problems of yields and performances, to which China aims to contribute with technological transfers. The reduction and depoliticization of agriculture have not allowed to solve problems of asymmetric power relations in access to land, water and other resources, deriving from intersectional injustices versus certain farming groups, and from problems of ecological degradation, thus hiding the socio-ecological complexity of agriculture (Bernstein, 2005; Franco & Borras, 2021; Ongunlela & Mukhtar, 2009). Discourse analysis contributed to problematizing the neglected complexity of agriculture in China's official discourse and creating space for political alternatives that represent one of the major contributions of discourse analysis to development studies (Ziai, 2016).

China's engagement in African agriculture is not going to slow down at any point in the near future, indeed, agriculture and food are crucial element in China's geopolitics. Agriculture's priority within the FOCAC has been confirmed in the latest meeting, in November 2021. The latest Action Plan 2022-2024 includes specific areas of cooperation such as digital research, e-commerce of agricultural products, and import of African agricultural products, within the usual traditional cooperation framework involving training and research, and with the aim to keep modernizing the agro-business and strengthening the Chinese position in the global markets.

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| YEAR | DECLARATION | ACTION PLAN | KEYNOTE SPEECH |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 2000 | Beijing Declaration | Programme for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development (2000-2003) | |
| 2003 | N/A | Addis Abeba Action Plan (2004-2006) | |
| 2006 | Beijing Declaration | Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009) | Hu Jintao opening speech |
| 2009 | Sharm El Sheikh Declaration | Sharm El Sheikh Action Plan (2010-2012) | |
| 2012 | Beijing Declaration | Beijing Action Plan (2013-2015) | Hu Jintao opening speech |
| 2015 | Johannesburg Declaration | Johannesburg Action Plan (2016-2018) | Xi Jinping opening speech |
| 2018 | Beijing Declaration | Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021) | Xi Jinping opening speech |

Tab I. FOCAC documents analyzed in this article

7 CONCLUSION

In this study, I have analyzed China-Africa agricultural cooperation as representative of South-South Cooperation modalities and discourses. First, this research has discussed the challenges of China-Africa relations under the SSC framework. The consolidation of Sino-African relations, BRICS countries, and the ‘reemergence’ of SSC have represented the main transformations in the global development landscape (Mawdsley, 2015). The ‘rise’ of the South questioned North-South binary construction and Western-dominated mainstream development cooperation projects, discourses, and practices. This led towards a polycentric development regime in which the lines between North/South, and center/periphery are blended and fluid. In the words of Raghuram *et al.*, 2014 “The Rising Asia ruffles commonly accepted spatialities underlying postcolonial geographies” (p.120). As this dissertation suggested, China-Africa relations are representative of these changing dynamics. The spatialization of aid, deeply rooted in cartesian construction, is inadequate to unravel the complexity of the current global aid regime. This requires investigating the spatial rise of Global China and to reconsider the role of the territory in the analysis of China’s technological territorialization (Mohan, 2021).

This study has highlighted the challenges in maintaining the principle of non-interference considering China’s geoeconomics and geopolitics interest in African states (Article I). Indeed, the erosion of the principle of non-interference in realpolitik has blurred the lines between Southern and Northern discourses and practices. In this respect, this work contributes to the academic debate around the rise of the South, and of China particularly, in re-articulating the global development landscape (Mawdsley & Taggart, 2022). However, in the last years, the medical, economic, and environmental crises are challenging the consolidation of SSC and China-Africa relations. Indeed, future research should consider the impact of Covid-19 on SSC. China is the largest bilateral creditor to African countries and plays a major role as a development finance actor beyond the OECD/DAC. Yet, the ways in which Covid-19 has affected China’s domestic and international agenda is key to discussing China’s relationship with the African continent (Chen, 2021).

Furthermore, the economic and health impact of the pandemic on African economies, as well as the deterioration of the African debt crisis both towards China and other international creditors, are central issues for the ‘reemergence’ of SSC in the wake of African industrialization development ambitions (Alden, 2020). Moreover, other key aspects in interrogating the challenges of SSC under the consolidation of China-Africa relations are dependent upon the African countries China is dealing with, their peculiar historical relation, and particular geoeconomic/geopolitical interests. Indeed, despite China-Africa relations being presented as equally occurring with all African

countries, the importance of multiple territories, scale, and spatially embedded processes should be considered (Mohan, 2021).

In this study, I have explored the case of the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers as the flagship project of China-Africa agricultural cooperation (Article II). At the same time, this study brings to the fore the challenges and limitations in the ATDCs model and gaps in ATDCs research. Indeed, the role of space/place and spatial relations should be reconsidered in ATDCs analysis and should be linked to a critical political-economic, and comparative analysis of China-Africa agricultural cooperation. The reconsideration of the territory into the study of China-Africa agricultural cooperation appears crucial to interrogate the local complexity as well as hidden power relations and to illuminate direct/indirect effects of Chinese agricultural projects on the embedded territories, such as in the analysis of the Chinese ATDCs in African states. Indeed, as suggested by Mohan (2021): “This multiplicity of territorial strategies is necessary given that China is seeking to both align with and change the existing geopolitical structures while also creating markets for Chinese goods and service”. Moreover, I have claimed that ATDCs resemble the agricultural experience of foreign actors and have contributed to transferring economic models in Africa that are designed outside of the continent (Obeng-Odoom, 2017).

The case of the ATDC in Tanzania (Article III) has contributed to the discussion on the diversification and reproduction of African dependency (Carmody, 2021; Lisimba & Parashar, 2020; Taylor, 2014, Taylor & Zajontz, 2020). ATDCs act as commercial platforms to facilitate the introduction of Chinese machinery and agricultural inputs but also foster the dependency on Chinese know-how and technology transfer. Although China’s geostrategic narrative of mutuality and win-win, technology transfer is far from being neutral and includes the transfer of cultural and political values together with a specific vision of agriculture. At the same time, ATDCs do not represent alternative cooperation models to the North-South programme. It rather seems that China’s agricultural aid, as Western cooperation projects traditionally did, tends to impose their own experience ignoring local needs, identities, and knowledge (Bertoncin & Pase, 2006). Yet, this study has contributed to discussing how China's relations with African states follow well-known patterns of unequal power and economic relations which have traditionally driven the North-South axis (Carmody, 2013; Gonzalez-Vicente, 2017; Sindzingre, 2016). Despite the importance to move beyond colonial spatialities based on North/South narratives, this study suggested that China-Africa relations, like other ones, remain “linked to the development of capitalism” (Mohan, 2021: 21).

In this dissertation, I have analyzed changes and shifts in China's official discourse on China-Africa agricultural cooperation at FOCAC (Article IV). Drawing from a discourse analysis of FOCAC official documents have emerged that the key recurrent themes are modernization and technology, and green development. China's official discourses have evolved following global environmental concerns, yet the grassroots voices and experiences of those who have been firstly affected by severe environmental impacts have continued to be excluded from the FOCAC consultation mechanism. In the thesis, the use of discourse analysis has contributed to the debate on the relevance of discourse analysis in deconstructing development discourses (Ziai, 2016). Another contribution this study has made regards the analyses of FOCAC official documents that despite their relevance have remained unstudied in particular concerning agricultural cooperation. The political importance of African countries and agricultural cooperation remains an area of continuity in FOCAC 2021. However, China seemed more cautious about the financing of mega infrastructural projects, also due to African indebtedness. Indeed, Chinese funding announcements appeared to be more cautious along FOCAC 2021 (Nyabiage, 2021; 2022). Nevertheless, due to the centrality of Chinese development finance to African countries, in future years, researchers should consider China's 'innovative' financing modalities and the role of Western institutions in this space of (re)negotiation.

In this study, I have highlighted the consolidation of African contestation and mobilization towards Chinese interventions and their environmental impacts. Overall, African resistance movements are at the forefront of extractivism, land grab, recognizing the urgency to act in the wake of climate change, and claiming for the central role that local knowledge, peasant farming, African women farmers and philosophies have for a transformation and decolonial agenda. Another key aspect in challenging China-Africa relations and the expansion of SSC, is, indeed, linked to global mobilization towards environmental degradation, and loss of biodiversity. In the context of Africa-China relations, the role of the climate crisis will be a key priority interest. Indeed, more research should be conducted on the role of African popular protest against China's environmental damage: an important aspect that remained poorly captured in current academic debates. A radical imagination for the human and more-than-human world is necessary and the decolonial calls that Africa resistance movement advances posed these issues at the front.

Overall, this study suggests that agriculture has remained a priority sector in China-Africa relations, and this will not slow down at any point soon. Instead, as this thesis suggested, Afro-Chinese relations are complex, dynamics, and change fast according to China and Africa geoeconomics and

geopolitical interests. The role of geography and geographers remains crucial in observing these changing and evolving development dynamics, giving voices to rising contestation from below, and sustaining calls for the decolonization of development which resonate loud within African resistance movements.

The relevance of spatially embedded processes in China-Africa agricultural cooperation should be central in future research. Yet, a nuanced understanding of China's engagement in African agriculture requires a reconsideration of territorial and spatial relations linked to critical analysis on China's role in development finance and as a global development actor. At the same time, reflecting on China as a global development actor includes considering the multiple ways in which Chinese micro-practice affects the remaking of the aid regime, and what this means for the West. To conclude, future research should consider different scales (from local to global, and back) and places concerned with the role of Global China in influencing the African development trajectory.

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