

*Full Length Research*

# **The Sino-South African Strategic Partnership: Negotiating Self-Interest or Mutual Cooperation**

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**States distinguish between various goals of diplomacy to promote their interests in another state. They do so to gain advantage in political, economic and socio-cultural matters with diplomats tasked to maneuver their state's positions. This work in particular examines the role that diplomats play in translating the Sino-South African Strategic Partnership into a framework for the harmonizing of national interests. These interests are negotiated between state leaders, visits by high-level officials, in discussion forums, such as the Forum on China-African Cooperation (Focac), and media reports. With this in mind, the aim is to shed light on the negotiating skills of diplomats in adding value to these interests, indicating that diplomats shape the Sino-South African bilateral relationship through specific arts of negotiation. The attempt is not to conduct an in-depth investigation into 'behind the scenes' negotiations but rather to present a broad analysis of interests.**

**Keywords:** China, South Africa, Bilateral Relationship, Negotiation, Interests, Culture

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## **Introduction**

Both China and South Africa intend to constitute a hierarchy of imperatives guiding their decisions and actions. Cooperation to secure strategic advantages, resources, economic privileges, prestige and influence defines their common national interests. Therefore, the focus in this paper is on the joint communiqué signed between the two countries in 2007 and the specific typologies that provide depth to this relationship. The comprehensive strategic agreement negotiated under this

joint communiqué is a matter that arises from both countries' desire to prosper and address strategic trends to their mutual greatest advantages, or deal with potential disadvantages. This is a requirement that defines China and South Africa's mutual strategic interests, and provides for the emergence of new patterns of economic development and trade, and also the challenges to the status and treatment of Chinese citizens in South Africa.

The skills of diplomats in negotiating interests

employed by Freeman (2007), sheds light on self-interested behavior or negotiating for mutual cooperation. This approach is used as qualitative method of investigation. The author reveals that diplomats have certain skills that are useful in producing results at the negotiating table. These qualities are tested against the background of interpersonal contacts and negotiations. While it is true that government officials shaped the negotiations because of their function as representatives and communicators of their respective governments, Chinese and South African non-governmental actors also play a role in negotiating modern agreements. However, due to the unavailability of convincing statements and reports, reflecting their concerns and interests, the analyses only focused on negotiations between ambassadors and high-level officials, where such information was available. The findings indicate that the bilateral relationship is surely not static and holds huge promise for cooperation in areas of mutual concern, the establishment and development of strategic partnerships and the role diplomats play in securing the national interest. Although it may seem that the paper is written in a casual and journalistic manner, the idea is to examine specific points of contact in relation to the method of investigation. In order to achieve this objective, examples drawn from negotiations between Chinese and South African diplomats, points out the relationship between these skills and the manner in which they apply to the study under investigation.

### **Methodology**

A number of points are raised here to indicate what tasks and skills are necessary for diplomats to carry out their duties professionally, with an attempt to examine the influence it had on the joint communiqué. It is first necessary to examine the tasks of diplomats before indicating what skills diplomats use to perform these tasks. The major tasks of diplomats according to (Neumann, 2012) are: (1) linkage of their government's decision makers to foreign counterparts; (2) advocacy of their government's policies and views; (3) negotiation on their government's behalf; (4) commendation to their government of ways to advance or defend interests; (6) promotion of trade and investment; (7) management of programs of cooperation between governments; (8) reporting and analysis of relevant local developments and realities; (9) establishment of facilitative relationships with officials and members of the elites who influence them; and (10) cultivation of an image for their nation favorable to its interests. It is reasoned that diplomats of China and South Africa also perform these functions in their interstate negotiations, which is a given specification of their job requirements. Therefore, no detailed account is offered to the extent they fulfill these duties. Rather, the

attempt in this section is to examine if negotiators from both countries carry out the professional duties, as defined by (Neumann, 2012), in five broadly related categories: agency, advocacy, reporting, counseling and stewardship, emphasizing negotiation skills and tactics.

As stated by (Freeman, 2007: 108), when diplomats perform tasks properly, they gain insights to draw up plans of action to further the interests of their country, and then their governments will be able to form its policies effectively if they are well-informed. Diplomats will then know how to present their government's positions in terms appealing to local interests and sensibilities, and they will then be more capable of persuading host government officials to conclude agreements that are favorable to their country's interests, and they will also know how to enable effective communication between their head of government and cabinet members and corresponding officials in their country of assignment. They will be equipped to provide uniquely valuable counsel and support to direct dialogue between such officials.

### **Negotiating the Strategic Partnership: Self-Interest or Mutual Advantage**

In examining the joint communiqué of 2013, one aspect that elucidates the importance of this bilateral relationship is the phenomenal progress that has evolved from a partnership to a strategic partnership in the space of fifteen years, and then to a comprehensive strategic partnership (South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2013). This was the result of skillful negotiation that displayed signs of mastery. The diplomats' professional conducting of their duties to reach this three phase set of agreements resembled an interpretation of the other side's words and convictions as their own. From the diplomat's perspectives, the object of these strategic partnerships was to craft the outcomes that could satisfy principal countries. Were diplomats of the two countries successful in persuading each other that a comprehensive strategic partnership was the desired outcome? The answer is affirmative if the intensity of this strategic partnership is measured against the goals each principal country has regionally and globally, and the impact it may have on their respective foreign policies.

Expanding and deepening people-to-people and cultural exchanges indicates that Chinese and South African diplomats are also engaged in public diplomacy, dealing with the news media of their own country, as well as in the host country. Ambassador Tian Xuejun's address informs us that the crafting of public beliefs is part of the negotiating process. In the opinion of (Melissen, 1999), this sets the context and influences the agenda for discussion between governments.

Succeeding in doing this is a purposeful task of public diplomacy.

The level of state-to state interaction between Chinese and South African officials and business leaders in the recent past have led to a positive environment to conduct negotiations, lending weight to the interests and views of both parties (Alves & Sidiropoulos, 2010). However, is it realistic to perceive the negotiations as occurring in a perfect environment without obstacles and understanding local trends and developments? The first diplomatic contacts probably did not pay much attention to this aspect, and reporting about mutual interests. Moreover, with the establishment of official programs, those in authority were in a better position to facilitate cooperation, which informed a good understanding of local affairs and mindsets of the negotiators. The result was that diplomats helped their citizens do business in an environment that increasingly started to show signs of economic diplomacy (Grimm, Kim, & Anthony, 2014).

Protecting their citizens from breaking the rules in South Africa has not been a strong reporting point of Chinese diplomats. (The Economist, 2011), reports on the behavior of Chinese in Africa as follows:

“Chinese expatriates in Africa come from a rough-and-tumble, anything-goes business culture that cares little about rules and regulations. Local sensitivities are routinely ignored at home, and so abroad.”

This points to a failure of diplomats to first observe the areas where their citizens are going to work, exercise discretion in bargaining with local companies to the allocation of contracts and permits for their citizens, not educating their nationals about the courteous goodwill local companies have to offer and engaging in community talks with locals in order build confidence. For example, the textile dispute was a case where Chinese contractors acted on incomplete information from embassy personnel as to what their job responsibilities were and how to deal with local customs and laws. The mushrooming of Chinese informal shops in areas where there is a proliferation of foreigners attempting to take advantage on the ill-informed consumer behavior of locals points to another weakness of Chinese diplomats to notify their nationals about the customs and traditions of locals, wishing to purchase goods and services from these business entrepreneurs. Complaints by residents that the Chinese move into their neighborhoods, establishing business practices that often stand in contrast with the rules of the game that is accepted by the business community and locals in that area, which presents a poor understanding of local affairs and thought. The anti-Chinese sentiment in many South African urban and rural areas that is recently becoming more conspicuous is also argued to be the result of diplomats poorly

communicating accepted norms of behavior with their nationals. This leads to a misunderstanding of what they can and cannot do in certain areas and conflict between locals and these shop owners, which can be avoided if diplomats are attracted to local rules and regulations.

A permanent attribute of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is an undertaking by both countries to promote and develop friendship, trust, equality, benefit, coordination, and learning. This is a promise by which negotiators have a professional duty to advance their country's knowledge, share points of common concern, and also do their utmost to advocate commitment to these interests. President Jacob Zuma's declaration that the presence of diplomats negotiating agreements in the fields of science and technology, agriculture, health as well as capacity building and skills transfer in human resources and education (Mgudlwa, 2013) testifies to the gifts for political calculation and ability of diplomats to mutually define each government's interests.

### **Dialogue as Negotiating Instrument**

Maintaining momentum of high-level exchanges and leveraging mechanisms, such as the Bi-National Commission, the Regular Exchange Mechanism between the National Assembly of the Parliament of South Africa and the National People's Congress of China is an expression of both countries' national power in term of tactfully intelligent suasion and peaceable coercion. (Zartman & Rubin, 2000) assert that diplomatic persuasion is the art of convincing other states that their interests are best served by taking actions favorable to the interests of one's own state. (Freeman, 2007: 121-123), views dialogue as the principal instrument of negotiation between states with the purpose to reach common assessments on situations and trends, to estimate its effects on each side's interests, to identify interests that are shared, to affirm preferences for particular outcomes, to discuss options for achieving these outcomes, to clarify intentions, to enable joint or parallel actions to achieve agreed results, and to manage such collaboration. Taking the exchange mechanisms and work carried out by the commissions into account, this process is also followed China and South Africa, just as any other diplomatic negotiations between two or more countries to express their national power. Economic and trade cooperation is an important driver of the bilateral relationship with the Beijing Declaration on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership offering a wide scope of cooperation that should be utilized to the fullest (South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2013). Such cooperation is essential to identify similar views on promoting the trade relationship and factors shaping how it overlaps or differs. For example, the report on China-

Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation states that the two sides will strengthen economic cooperation for mutual benefit, and broaden their converging interests to benefit the peoples of both countries (Information Office of the State Council, 2013). This establishes a measure of mutual confidence in the enlargement and improvement of two-way trade, improvement of trade mix, promotion of trade balance and more trade in value-added goods, promoting value-added activities within close proximity to the source of raw material and providing technical support to each other in the areas of green economy, skills transfer and industrial financing (Information Office of the State Council, 2013).

Diplomats should understand what outcomes they should gain in a specific negotiation. Therefore, they can explore the ways in which particular outcomes might affect both their common and individual interests (Watson, 1982). South Africa's welcoming of Chinese investments in all areas, especially in areas that promote job creation and China's encouragement of Chinese enterprises to invest in South Africa, is a sign of giving rise to a sense of shared risk and opportunity. (Raiffa, 1982) argues that discussion by parties would best serve their common interests if it enables them to identify common preferences. In the case of negotiation between Chinese and South African diplomats, they built a sense of shared purpose and explored options for reaching these results. This is a strong point for laying a basis for cooperation on investments. The exchange of commitment to mutually invest consolidates an understanding between China and South Africa, and brings into being a coalition that is the subject of this mutual understanding.

The establishment of a joint science and technology industrial park that will stimulate high-tech manufacturing (Ventures-Africa, 2014) is a prime example of commitment to cooperation. This cooperative venture has to take into account negotiation by diplomats to coordinate actions by role-players from the technological sectors. The establishments of these parks will provide industries in specific sectors with top-rate facilities and government concessions to foster innovations. In China, these parks serve as a major driver for education and research, and thereby creating a positive socio-economic impact (Africanglobe, 2014). The talks about the establishment of the science and industrial parks reveal that diplomats exchange information and reassure each other that interests are mutually inclusive. It is also a process of verification with each party acting in accord with the expectations that the science and industrial parks will lead to collaboration and the achievement of results. China's deputy ambassador to South Africa, Yang Yirui in a statement verified that the issue was discussed between China's Science and Technology Minister Wan Gang and his South African counterpart, Derek Hanekom (Africanglobe, 2014). Statesmen seek to gain benefits for their state or to avoid harm to it as it interacts with other

states and people. Diplomats help statesmen craft as well as implement overt measures short of war to accomplish this. Diplomats are the counselors of statesmen in the arts of peace (Freeman, 2007: 129).

### **A Principal-Agent Relationship**

The principal-agent relationship in social sciences is an arrangement in which one entity legally appoints another to act on its behalf. In a principal-agent relationship, the agent acts on behalf of the principal and should not have a conflict of interest in carrying out the act (Eisenhardt, 1989: 57-74). Drawing from the speeches presented by Ambassador Tian Xuejun and the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Marius Fransman, it can reasonably argued that they advised their principals on how to best serve their country's interests and achieving ends (South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2013). Representing the Chinese and South African governments respectively, the two diplomats as agents first had the task to ensure that their principal accurately understands the nature of the interests that are at stake for them, and second, they helped their principal to set objectives that will serve their interests. Ambassador Tian and Mr Fransman remarked that the 15th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and South Africa are representative of their friendship and concerns for matters of mutual interests. The Chinese dream of prosperity for its citizens, the renewal of the nation and the happiness of the people, and South Africa exploring the best path for future development point to the diplomat's comprehension of their state's interests and a more effective definition of their state's objectives. This is a delicate endeavor that challenged the persuasive skill of the diplomats from these two countries.

Ambassador Tian's observation that the development of the Sino-South African bilateral relationship over the last fifteen years is best described by vision, velocity and vitality (South African Foreign Policy Initiative, 2013), praises the relationship China desires to build with South Africa. It also embraces the idea that China desires friendship and cooperation, even though this may sound as promoting the image of China as a peaceful and benevolent in its relations with other countries, and not on the abilities of diplomats to serve as counselors who are most self-effacingly loyal to China's national interest abroad. According to (Freeman, 2007: 130), statesmen value the expertise of diplomats partly because diplomats understand and can explain the actions and motivations of foreign states. For example, President Hu Jintao in a meeting with South African President Thabo Mbeki in 2006 lauded the momentum of high-level contacts between diplomats to fully exploit the roles of the bilateral exchange mechanisms. These included the bilateral

committee, which aims to promote all-round reciprocal cooperation and the need to carry out diplomatic consultation, coordination and collaboration (Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in San Francisco, 2006). Whether the Chinese diplomats sympathized with the viewpoint of their leader and were solicitous of the interests of South Africa or advanced their own interests is unclear. However, it is true that diplomats have to change the attitudes and behaviors of their foreign counterparts, and from this bilateral relationship, the diplomats have to help the policymakers define policy options to deal with specific issues. By looking at the areas where the relationship can be strengthened, such as education, human resources, health, culture, sports, academics, media and tourism, the strategic partnership will bear fruit if championed by influential participants in the policy process. President Mbeki responded that the strengthening of the bilateral relationship requires the persuading skills of diplomats to deepen cooperation between the two countries. He also emphasized cooperation in these areas, which has endangered a degree of commitment to produce results and provides an opening for the consideration of new ideas and initiatives (Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in San Francisco, 2006).

What can be said is that Hu and Mbeki's state to state level of diplomacy was supported by the policy machinery of both governments. Diplomats gave advice to the leaders in pursuing mutual benefits. Ambassador Tian said: "The progress of this bilateral relationship cannot be possible without the generous support and joint efforts from various departments of the two countries, as well as the passionate engagement of people from all walks of life (South African Foreign Policy Initiative, 2013). The ambassador, acting on the principles of conventional bilateral diplomacy, knew that effective communication between officials from various departments assist in persuading each other regarding agreements that might be favorable to their country's interests. The same is said of Mr. Fransman, who commented that officials and diplomats working in the Joint Inter-Ministerial Working Group will add to the existing mechanisms and coordinate implementation of bilateral agreements and major projects (South African Foreign Policy Initiative, 2013).

### **Persuasion by Stewardship**

An additional skill diplomats need to use to persuade their friends, allies and adversaries of the specific significance and meaning of their relationship is stewardship (Webster, 1962). Every state seeks to ensure that other states and peoples bear its political, cultural, economic and military interests in mind. A state must tend its image abroad if it is to predispose

foreigners to cooperate with it and its citizens. Every state is concerned about the security and well-being of its nationals and their property abroad. Diplomats are the stewards of these interests (Freeman, 2007: 133). It is not always self-evident what the advantages of the Sino-South African bilateral relationship from a diplomatic perspective are. What is known is that the existing cordial relationship is ensured by diplomats who appreciate compliance with each other's interests. Ambassador Tian remarked: "In the past one and half decade, China-South Africa relationship has been making new strides and experiencing comprehensive and rapid growth. The two sides have enjoyed frequent high-level exchanges, enhanced political mutual trust, cooperated in trade and economic areas and expanded cultural and people-to-people exchanges (The Diplomatic Society, 2013). This is a sign of the gains and opportunities that transactions with South Africa yielded, and the persuasion that Sino-South African interests are moving along similar lines.

This endeavor strives to influence individuals and groups and provide feedback on the decisions that diplomats have to take with regard to the government's investment in this sector. The cooperation that China and South African envisage around human resources and education is an example of the dependency on campaigns to move these centers in favorable directions. It can also be labelled as being a public diplomacy campaign because this campaign requires a sophisticated understanding of the political centers of gravity that seek to influence the foreign target. The bilateral relationship depends on the development of leverage that does not come from fear of harm, but from anticipation of favour. For example, President Xi and Zuma's in their bilateral talks placed emphasis on programs in which a society is the target borne out of friendship. According to (Freeman, 2007: 134), friendship is a sense of mutual reliance, shared destiny based on sympathy, assistance, and expressions of regard. It is reasoned that the Sino-South African relationship follows this same route because of past favors, as well as the expectation of future benefits. Liu Guijin, China's ambassador to South Africa from 2001 to 2007 has occasionally said: "Sino-SA friendly cooperation has broad prospects for development and the traditional friendship will gain drive as the Chinese government enhances its efforts to support South Africa in all-around aspects. (The Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of South Africa, 2006). Entrusted with making and keeping China's friendship with South Africa was an important skill the ambassador possessed that he applied in fulfilling as a steward of his country.

### **CONCLUSION**

The negotiating of bilateral agreements between China

and South Africa remains one of the important elements characterizing this relationship. The range of subjects covered in the joint communiqué of 2013 is infinitely wider than those during previous years. For instance, scientific cooperation and cultural exchanges are becoming increasingly common, and diplomats are charged with working out a protocol to increase cooperation in these fields. This study finds that representatives of both governments and/or the embassies influenced the outcomes of the negotiations, either as advisors or observers, but this was subject to the agreement of the presidents of the two countries and the ambassadors who negotiated the main accords. Individual diplomats stepped in only in situations of impasse, because it is assumed that the main framework of the bilateral communication had already been set by the ministries and their specialists. For this reason, the functions and role of the ministries were not explained.

The bilateral negotiations between China and South Africa, as deduced from the joint communiqué, revolved around common interests, as well as resolving possible issues of conflict. This means that the object of these negotiations did not take unilateral action into account, but implied a willingness to achieve compromise somewhere between China or South Africa's own maximum goals and the absolute minimum that either one of the countries was willing to accept. Establishing merits with the other country is a strong motivation to engage in negotiations because this leads to acceptance of one's position. China and South Africa in the multitude of agreements signed in the joint communiqué asserted positional power and increased their bargaining stances. Because the promoting of cooperation in many areas is viewed as cornerstones of this relationship, both countries were involved in a process of "give and take," or tradeoffs deals. In international relations, states may engage in this form of cooperation to get one or all of their claims accepted by the other country. However, the typical situation, as indicated in the joint communiqué, was for China to have the South African side to accept her proposals. Both sides wanted to sacrifice the least of what one is willing to concede. The finding of a balance between short-term or one-shot gain and building up credibility and long-term reputation is naturally what the negotiators had in mind in order to facilitate future negotiations.

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