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## China-Congo Cooperation: Environmental Disaster

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### Abstract

This research sought to address the impact and disaster caused by China's activities in Congo Brazzaville on the environment and population. It found out that China-Congo relations are a rather more complex phenomenon; they are rooted in a long history comprising of economic, socio-political, strategic and cultural dimensions. Therefore, there is obviously a need for Congo Brazzaville to strengthen and restructure its policies and regulations in the conduct of its relations with China. It is true that China's presence in Africa in general and Congo Brazzaville in particular is its priority on resources extraction for its global market, but this has a negative impact on the environment. In its interest of Congolese natural resources, China through Chinese companies is contributing to the destruction of some part of environment in Congo. The role of China in environmental diplomacy and environmental protection was raised. This paper examines this phenomenon as it manifests in Congo Brazzaville. It looks at the disaster and pollution caused by Chinese companies. Finally, it will make some suggestions that will be relevant to both Chinese and Congolese government for better and fruitful cooperation

**Keywords:** China-Congo Cooperation, Environmental disaster, pollution

### 1. Introduction

Following the Bandung Conference (1955), the Congo gained its independence on 15 August 1960. On this occasion, Chinese Prime Minister, Zhou Enlai (周恩来) and Foreign Minister Chen Yi (陈毅) has recognized and congratulated the Congolese people. In 1963, Alphonse Massamba-Débat became the President of the Republic of Congo and the first African head of state to follow the Marxist-Leninist model. In fact, the first contact between the two nations was already established in the Middle Age. China had already been present in Africa the Middle Ages (1371-1433), 600 years before the Portuguese, the English and the French, thanks to the voyages of Zheng He the voyages of Zheng He (郑和) during the reign of China's third emperor, Ming Yongle (永乐帝). At that period, the first rapprochement between China and the Congo took place in 1929 during the construction of the Congo-Ocean Railway. Because of the difficulties encountered on this 502 km route, the French company Batignolles called on foreign labour. It is in this sense that Julien Bokilo, a Congolese socio-economist, states that: 'the recruitment of Chinese was carried out in Kouang-Tcheou-Wan and in Hong Kong. The government chartered a ship with 800 (Chinese) men. After two months of sailing, they disembarked at After two months of navigation, they disembarked at Pointe-Noire in July 1929. For their use, 400 of these Chinese were sent to M'Boulou (which was the centre of the Mayombe labour force)". (Bokilo, J., 2012)<sup>1</sup>

Some of these workers remained in the maritime town at the end of the the work. It is therefore from this date that the first Chinese immigrated to the Republic of Congo in order to seize certain commercial opportunities. The agreement on economic and technical cooperation between the People's Republic of Republic of China and the Republic of Congo was first signed on 2 October 1964 in Beijing; then another agreement concerning the large

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<sup>1</sup>Bokilo, J. (2012). La Chine au Congo-Brazzaville : Stratégie de l' enracinement et conséquences sur le développement en Afrique. Paris, L' Harmattan.

joint cooperation committee which allows for scientific and technical partnership, humanitarian aid and the forum on "China-Africa" cooperation was signed on 27 May 1982, also in Beijing. Since these two symbolic dates, cooperation between the two countries has taken into account various development sectors<sup>2</sup>.

An economic feat, an environmental threat, China has managed to multiply the size of its economy by 10 in 25 years. While the largest economic catch-up in history has lifted hundreds of millions of Chinese out of poverty, this exponential development has not been without its problems and damage. The authorities in Beijing seem to have learned from their past mistakes and have started to make a shift to "environmentally friendly" development in their territory. But the same cannot be said of their companies abroad. Africa, Congo Brazzaville in particular, the new Eldorado for raw materials, is paying the price. With little experience outside China, little experience of social or environmental protest, and little control, Chinese companies in Congo are struggling to apply the most basic international standards of environmental governance. Throughout the country, examples of environmental scandals have been multiplying over the last ten years. This paper examines this phenomenon as it manifests in Congo Brazzaville. It looks at the disaster and pollution caused by Chinese companies. Finally, it will make some suggestions that will be relevant to both Chinese and Congolese government for better and fruitful cooperation

## 2. Literature review

As the world's leading player in the hydroelectric sector<sup>3</sup>, China is multiplying dam projects in Africa: The Merowe dam in Sudan, the Bui dam in Ghana, the Inga dam in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), etc. The construction of the latter should lead to the displacement of 10,000 communities and villages and have a lasting impact on the environment, made up of humid forests. The Chinese NGO International Rivers denounces projects which aim above all to ensure the electrification of the mines, which are also operated by Chinese companies, rather than to ensure access to electric current to a Congolese population which is deprived of it at 94. %. Dams seem to be a disaster for the environment. It's even the worst thing you can do to a river. In Mozambique, the Chinese logging industry shamelessly exploits local labour and primary forests teeming with rare and endangered exotic species: mopane, ébène, panga panga, etc. By recruiting Mozambican loggers, Chinese companies circumvent logging licenses and the obligation to replant trees, which are sold for a hundred times more on the Asian market<sup>4</sup>. These illegal practices accelerate deforestation, foster corruption and keep local populations in poverty. It is estimated that 93% of logging in Mozambique is illegal. The forests of the DRC, Cameroon, Madagascar, Gambia and Congo-Brazzaville are also under threat. The fact that, there is huge desire and battle of developing the economy of China, problems like water contamination and air

contamination are imperiling the well-being of people. Described by Congolese governments as virtuous, Sino-Congolese cooperation is poorly perceived by the people and civil society of its existence. Civil society groups have raised the alarm over pollution of rivers in eastern and northern Cameroon by gold mining companies. The Center for Environment and Development says two Chinese companies, Mencheng Mining and Zinguo Mining, are allowing significant amounts of mercury and cyanide to spill into watercourses in the East Region. Besides, vast areas of forest destroyed by earthworks, unusually coloured water. Inhabitants of villages such as Lebayi, Otsouanzokou, Longouama, Ondoumbi in the district of Kellé in the Cuvette-ouest region, nearly 700 km north of Brazzaville, are on the verge of an unprecedented ecological disaster<sup>5</sup>. It is obvious that the environmental policies of protecting not only the Congolese environment but also their health are not put into consideration by Chinese companies, despite at the 2006 FOCAC in Beijing, Chinese and African leaders agreed to intensify cooperation in environment protection, share experiences and boost sustainable development on both sides<sup>6</sup>. It is useful to put the relative importance of environmental concerns in both Congo and China into perspective. Protection of the environment has never been a particularly high priority for African governments. Congolese leaders have traditionally been much more concerned about issues such as disease, poverty, civil conflict, ethnic violence, and religious extremism. While this remains the case, there is a growing awareness of the importance of good environmental practices and a concern that global warming will have especially negative implications for the continent.

Several researches piloted both within and outer China approximate that ecological dilapidation and contamination take about eight to twelve percent of China's GDP per annum. This issue is further aggravated by the fact that although Beijing sets aspiring objectives to defend and protect the environment, resident bureaucrats regularly flout them, favoring further advancement of economic growth<sup>7</sup>. Hence, based on what is happening in Africa in general and Congo Brazzaville in particular, one should wonder, what will happen to Africa when China invests without adhering to proper environmental guidelines since most countries in Africa do not have strong environmental policies?

## 3. Research methods

The methodology of this work is based on qualitative research using mainly document analysis, historical documents on Africa, China or Sino-Congolese cooperation. It emphasizes the use of scientific literature,

<sup>5</sup> <https://fr.africanews.com/2019/01/25/congo-brazzaville-d-importants-degats-environnementaux-causes-par-des-chinois/>

<sup>6</sup> Zhou Yan & Ou Sa, Chinese, African Leaders Underscore Cooperation in Environment Protection, XINHUA NEWS AGENCY (Nov. 5, 2006), [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-11/05/content\\_5292754.htm?rss=1](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-11/05/content_5292754.htm?rss=1). See May Tan-Mullins, Policy Meets Practice: Chinese Environmental Protection in Africa in the Wake of FOCAC VI, in FOCAC VI: AFRICAN INITIATIVES TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE CHINESE RELATIONSHIP 50, 52 (Ross Anthony ed., 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Economy E., The Great Leap Backward? The Costs of China's Environmental Crisis, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, United States, 2007

<sup>2</sup> African Economic Outlook (2016).

<http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/fr/statistiques>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.people.com.cn/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/05/22/nouveaux-ravages-chinois-dans-les-forets-du-mozambique\\_4638952\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/05/22/nouveaux-ravages-chinois-dans-les-forets-du-mozambique_4638952_3212.html)

including books, scientific articles and journal articles. The information collected and analyzed is based on a review of existing literature on similar topics. It analyzes documents relating to the historical, economic and environmental cooperation between China and Congo Brazzaville. The proximity of the author of this article to this field is a very important contribution to the realization of this work, which requires a large amount of data. The paper examines the phenomenon of environmental disaster on pollution caused by Chinese enterprises in Congo Brazzaville. This method has effectively participated in the writing of this article

#### 4. Findings

The irresistible Chinese breakthrough in Africa is causing great controversy in the international community. Is it a lever for the future political and economic emancipation of the continent or a brake on its development, or even a factor of instability to the extent that this cooperation is contributing to the destruction of African environment and people wellbeing? An approach that takes into account the diversity of points of view and the multiple dimensions of the Sino-Congolese relationship allows us to better measure its importance, stakes and implications.

##### 4.1. Motivations for Chinese entrepreneurs to the Republic of Congo

The earlier motives of the relationship between China and the Republic of Congo were undoubtedly an act of good will. However, the recent motives of China are not well known to many. China proclaims that it establishes relationship with African Countries for the sake of increasing trade in relation of the respect of the environment protection policies and laws, But recent examples like The Chinese company Wing Wah located in Kouilou region in the Republic of Congo is a threat through water pollution, non-compliance with the Congo's environmental and social management plan, negligence in the management of staff health and safety issues and the absence of a plan or programme for the management of the chemicals used by it. These substances are already in contact with the environment and the population, polluting the very useful waterways in rural areas<sup>8</sup>

At individual level, one may also ask what motivates Chinese people to even risk their lives by sometimes informally arriving to Congo Brazzaville or any other country. For this concern, one could not find a universal or rather general answer to this question. An anonymous (2014) pointed to the possible explanation emanating from being unhappy with strict controls over their lives, incomes, and oppressive culture, all important to the Chinese government 's control over its citizens. To these Chinese, therefore, coming to Congo is a sign of liberty to operate without a strict control of our government.

##### 4.1.1 Deficiency and absence of the government

Several studies conducted in Africa by many institutions like AFREWATCH have shown populations are exposed to the impacts of the activities of the mining companies, notably the destruction of livelihoods such as waterways

and soil, vegetable gardens and fields by the dumping of acid solutions or acid, the destruction of houses and roads by the effects of mining, the destruction of health by air pollution. Since 2017 for instance, the populations around the CDM Congo Donfang Mining mining company and particularly the inhabitants of the Kasapa, Kamatete and Kamisepe neighbourhoods have complained about the company's failure to respect its environmental obligations. They deplored the effects of CDM's discharge of wastewater and acidified water from its installations into their homes and the propagation of toxic fumes in the air that the company emits at night, which negatively affect their health and fields.

Through a report published by Afrewatch, the study showed that CDM does not respect the provisions of articles 81 and 204 of the Mining Code as well as 357 and 358 of its Regulations, which oblige holders of mining rights and processing entities to behave responsibly towards the environment and the social life of the area in which they operate by having an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) that has been approved, in particular by the communities surrounding its activities, and by having an Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) that it will scrupulously apply. Field surveys have shown that either CDM does not have an ESIA and ESMP to document and manage the negative impacts of its activities on the environment and the neighbouring population, or that it has them but does not implement them.

Thus, to verify the flooding of which the populations of the Kasapa, Kamatete and Kamisepe neighbourhoods claim to be victims, the researchers visited between December 2020 and January 2021, the aforementioned neighbourhoods which are downstream from the CDM plants to verify the passage of water as announced in the communities' complaints. They observed large quantities of water coming from the CDM plants and spreading in the 3 neighbourhoods. In order to get rid of the large quantities of water in its concession, which occupies the entire upstream part of the area, CDM has created several canals that cross the walls of the southern part of its concession. The quantities of water released in this way spread throughout the plots of land behind its factories as far as the Kasapa central prison. Another quantity is discharged into the large pipe that runs along the avenue bearing the name of the company and that crosses the 3 districts, passing through the Kasapa police camps and the market called "Moise". Also, it should be noted that the construction of the drains carried out with the aim of recovering the water from his concession to the Lubumbashi River has not been completed and this has only made the situation worse.

It is obvious that the Chinese investors are getting advantage of the fragility of the Congolese government to not respect the environmental laws. the complaints of the population remain curiously unheard because, in spite of the multiple complaints of the populations and denunciations of the Organizations of the civil society, the Company CDM continues to exercise its activities in violation of the human rights, while polluting the environment and this, without being questioned as well by the provincial authorities as national

##### 4.1.2 Corruptibility of two parties

In Africanews, we have seen the images that have made the rounds on social networks: a man observes pollution in

<sup>8</sup> <https://information.tv5monde.com/video/republique-du-congo-une-usine-chinoise-pollue-les-cours-d-eau-en-toute-impunite>

several rivers in the Kouilou region of Congo. The Chinese factory Wing Wah, installed in 2013, is said to be responsible for this water pollution, with consequences for the health of local residents despite their awareness of the article 45 of the Environmental Protection Act of April 1991.

When the population complains about the pollution, these companies Wing Wah, CDM are neither questioned nor sanctioned. These Chinese companies take advantage of this state failure to make the surrounding population suffer by throwing toxic waste on the road, which is less costly for them, instead of abiding by the environmental protection laws. Normally when a company discovers a given natural resource, it obtains a license to operate and then the next step is to carry out an environmental impact assessment, after which consultations are held with the surrounding population to let them know about the advantages and disadvantages of the activities. It should be noted that it is not the state as an institution that grants these exploitation permits but rather the politician who grants these permits. Generally, when Chinese investors come to invest, they give loans to the government of a country or to a government representative and when something happens, the state is powerless because it is liable. There is a complicity of politicians and state officials with Chinese investors, said Human Rights Programme Director Afrewatch Richard Ilunga Mukena

#### **4.2 Impact of those activities on environment and population**

The analysis of soil samples made by AFREWATCH researchers showed very high levels of copper, zinc, lead and nickel, far exceeding the values recommended by Canadian guidelines for good soil quality for crops and residential construction. According to environmental experts consulted by AFREWATCH, high levels of these three substances can lead to soil pollution, death of soil invertebrates and childhood diseases in humans.

The same is true of water samples taken in Kouilou, which indicate the presence of mercury and nickel at levels well above the values recommended by international standards, including those of the World Health Organisation (WHO) for drinking water. It should be noted that this water invades almost all the roads, floods the surrounding plots and schools, market gardens and fish ponds. This deplorable situation is the cause of the erosion that degrades the roads and destroys the crops and livestock, but also of the disruption of education in the surrounding schools, which are often forced to stop classes because of these incidents. Communities have chronic coughs, colds, eye pain. Apart from acid discharge, there is also smoke and bad smell from their activities which are spread over nature

### **5. Suggestions and discussions**

#### **5.1 Discussions**

Can we talk about ignorance or lack of mastery of certain processing techniques or good practice in environmental standards in mining management on the part of certain Chinese companies? Rather, there is an intentional desire for these Chinese companies in order to maximize profits and reduce costs that they decide to use practices that endanger the environment.

It should be noted that all companies, before starting their

activities, carry out environmental impact studies and have environmental and social management plans in place, which include the impacts that may arise and the management mechanisms that are also provided for, and these studies are submitted to the state's technical service, which assesses and approves them. The state also has environmental experts who analyze these studies. However, these companies do not want to apply these mechanisms when there are incidents of pollution simply because of a high level of corruption between the two parties. But what is very serious is that these companies do not even carry out the studies normally as planned, but instead bribe the authorities to work illegally

#### **5.2 suggestions**

To ameliorate Congo-China cooperation and make investors respect environmental protection laws in the future, this article suggests:

1. There should be accessibility and transparency of documents of any investors exploiting and treating Congolese natural resources showing the impacts that their activities may cause on the environment and populations
2. 2-The Republic of Congo, which thanks to the Congo Basin is the second largest carbon sink in the world, is an important reserve that must be preserved to avoid the worst
3. That the judiciary power does its job, that all those involved in this practice have to be questioned and sanctioned like Arlette Soudan Nanault, the Congolese Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development, has done by issuing a warning to the Wing Wah Company about the impact of their activities on the environment and the health of the population of the Banga Kayo locality, which has reached worrying proportions.
4. Investors, multinationals, who are part of several international directives, must respect the laws governing environmental protection, otherwise their hegemony will be challenged. At the level of the supply chain, there must be an awareness of the need to respect the laws at both the production and consumption levels
5. The Congolese authorities or a Congolese commission must every times visit the places where the Chinese companies are treating and exploiting the natural resources to confirm the complaints of the populations

### **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the main point of this investigation was to understand the disaster of pollution caused by Chinese companies in Congo Brazzaville. After analyzing some reliable documents, this study found that the Chinese companies in Congo Brazzaville are really contributing to the destruction and pollution of the Congolese environment through their activities. However, the population, victims of this phenomenon are not getting the attention of their authorities who are supposed to protect, serve and assure their wellbeing. Rather, they are keeping silence and even ignoring the complaints of the population. This behavior from the Congolese authorities and Chinese investors have negative consequences on the population that are witnessing their water, soil be polluted even their health destroyed. In fact, the relation between China and Congo

Brazzaville are always well seen by the Chinese and Congolese authorities, but in recent days, people in Africa in general and Congo Brazzaville in particular have started questioning and even doubt about this win-win cooperation with violation of human rights and non-respect of the environment laws. This relationship should be restructured in certain aspects because the Chinese government will never admit and accept any multinationals operating in China to pollute and destroy the Chinese environment. It is quite true that this study is well completed. In view of the author's limited experience and knowledge, this article would certainly have obscure points or needs to be improved. That's why everyone interested in reading this article is invited to make his criticisms. In the end, the author of this article would like to learn from literary experts so that he can better improve his writing skills in the days to come.

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