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**Degreume**  
Department of Education,  
Faculty of Higher Education,  
University of Xiamen, China

## China in Mauritania: Investments and Creation of Job's Opportunities

**Degreume**

### Abstract

Since the date of its revolution until today, China occupies an important place in bilateral and multilateral relations. Especially in recent years, China has played an undeniable role in international relations. According to the observations, the African continent is China's best partner in the world. For non-Africans and those who do not know Africa; they still think Africa is a small and sizable country. In reality, Africa is a continent as vast as Europe or America, which is made up of 54 independent countries. Therefore, when we talk about Africa as a partner of china, we are actually referring to African countries. The current subject will focus particularly on the bilateral relationship between china and the Islamic republic of Mauritania, which remains today one of the best economic partners of china in Africa. The previous researches show that China has always provided assistance for the economic and social development of Mauritania, while the Mauritanian government sticks to its policy of friendship with China and supports China in its vital interests. Precisely, the theme on which we are going to lean throughout this work is china in Mauritania: investment and the creation of job's opportunities. In order to achieve the writing of this subject, it would therefore be judicious to first present the history of the bilateral relationship between china and the Islamic republic of Mauritania; then present the major Chinese investments in Mauritania and their impact on local economy and business activities; and finally describe the creation of job's opportunities for Mauritians by the Chinese government and investors.

**Keywords:** Mauritania; investment; impact; creation of opportunities.

### 1. Introduction

With the need of political, economic, social and cultural support, friendly relations among countries in the world become more and more important. Especially in the past 20 years, we can even say that a country cannot exist without the support of other countries. To be precise, the power of many countries in the world today is measured by their relations with other countries. This is one of the biggest motivations for every country to build more relationships with foreign partners today. The history of Africa shows that most African countries achieved independence in the 1960s. After independence, most of African countries allowed foreigners to enter African land. Foreign forces have also made achievements on the African continent. It must be pointed out that, apart from the colonialists who had explored African resources and their continued exploitation of Africa today, the relationship between African countries and other countries that have been colonized is a win-win one or south- south relation. As mentioned above, China is undoubtedly the first win-win partner of African countries. This can be justified by the physical achievements of Chinese government in every African country. For example, Chinese government has provided some of African countries with road's construction without expecting something in return. At the same time, she assisted African countries by providing the necessities during some crises, such as attack by Bako-haram terrorist group early in 2015. China has played the most important role to assist and support Africa during this crisis.

In this survey, we will particularly discuss the relationship between Mainland China and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, as well as the theme of China's investment and opportunity creation in Mauritania. China and Islamic republic of Mauritania established diplomatic relations on July 19, 1965. For 57years, whatever the international uncertainties

**Correspondence:**  
**Degreume**  
Department of Education,  
Faculty of higher Education,  
University of Xiamen, China

and the evolution of the situation of each of them, their bilateral ties have always been marked by a continuous development of high-level and high-quality, their high-ranking visits are increasing and their cooperation in various fields is fruitful. As it was said above, China has undoubtedly provided assistance for the economic, humanitarian, social development of Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Mauritanian government didn't stop ameliorating its policy of friendship with China and supporting China in its vital interests. The research showed that until 2017, China has executed 99 aid projects in Mauritania, 88 of which have been completed, including ports, hospitals, roads, urban planning, and stadium and office buildings. In addition, China has provided over 5.4 billion RMB in financial aid in various fields in Mauritania. Also in 2017, China offered scholarships to more than 400 young Mauritanian students, who have been or are studying in China. Therefore, based on the nature of the close relationship between the two countries, it is certain that the number of projects and scholarship winners has increased significantly in the past years. It is worth mentioning that every year, the Chinese government sends investors to invest in Mauritania and send Chinese teachers to teach at Nouakchott University.

In fact, it is a good idea to develop Chinese investment and creation of opportunities in Mauritania. The author develops this theme not to satisfy his relaxation pleasure, but hopes to reveal something important. This topic has several subtitles, including: the historical patent of the relationship between China and Mauritania; China's investment in Mauritania and its impact on local economic and commercial activities; China's creation of opportunities on Mauritania land; Finally, some suggestions will be put forward to help Mauritians gain access to any opportunities created by China in the country.

## 2. Literature review

Relations between mainland China and Africa have been established many years ago. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the relations between China and Africa have been successfully cemented on the following fields: political, economic, military and social fields. Recent years, China and African countries ties have been reinforced in both political and economic fields; declare Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe and Liu Hongwu.<sup>1</sup> Chinese government and African countries leaders are undoubtedly looking for the best path and policy to strengthen and generate the sustainable development of the relationship between China and Africa in this new area of cooperation, to benefit both Chinese and African people. The previous researches on Sino-African relationship show that Chinese government engagement with African nations in this respect has significantly increased and institutionalized over the past decades, particularly with the foundation of the FOCAC and publication of white papers on Sino-African policy in 2006 and China's foreign aid policy in 2011. When we talk about the relations between China and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, we rightly refer to the bilateral relations between these two countries. The bilateral relations between China and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania have a long history. In 1965, the two countries maintained

diplomatic relations. In "Sino- Mauritanian relations and major aid projects financed by China in Mauritania", brochure on relations between China and Mauritania introduction published by the Chinese embassy in Mauritania. In this brochure, it clearly said that China and Mauritania established diplomatic relations early on July 19, 1965.<sup>2</sup>

## 3. The historical patent of the relationship between China and Mauritania

Mauritania is a country located in West Africa, close to Atlantic Ocean. Historically speaking, Mauritania has been colonized by France, a few years later; it has been invaded by Islamic people, it's later called Islamic Republic of Mauritania. It is divided into twelve regions and covers an area of approximately 1.03 million square kilometers. Its GDP stood at five billion dollars and its population was estimated at 4.42 million people in 2018. Its economy is based on the following sectors: agriculture, livestock and mining, according to the data from the International Monetary Fund. Regarding the people of Mauritania, there are two races of people including black people and white people, commonly named "Maures". Except these two groups of people, there are numerous migrants who respectively come from Senegal, Ivory Coast, Mali and Morocco. It is crucial to remind that Mauritania is one of the African countries in which most of people face poverty, misery, corruption and some people used to be threatened as inferior's men. Briefly, there are several social problems encountered by some people living around the country. Here is a brief description of Mauritania.

Concerning China, there is nothing special to mention, because even garden school children know a lot of things about it. In short, China is a country located in Asia. China is very large country divided into 23 provinces (with Xinjiang as the biggest province), 5 autonomous regions, 4 municipalities directly under the central government and 2 special administrative regions. It stands at third position in the world, with 9,596,961 km<sup>2</sup> as land size. According to the statistics of November 2020, China's population stood at 1,412 billion and 91, 11% of population was Han Chinese. Recently it became one of the most influential countries not only in Asia, but also in the whole world. After its reform and opening, China has impressed the whole by its rapid development and increment on every field. This rapid and incredible development of China has attracted many researchers and experts' attention. European Commission, in 2019, pointed out that China can no longer be a developing country, because it is a key global actor and leading technological power. In short, according to the European Commission staff, China plays a main role for the global transformation and change.<sup>3</sup> Historically speaking, China was one of the poorest countries in the world. As we all know, Chinese people have been mistreated by the Japanese first and others super powers for many years. It has the same historical background with African countries, except the slavery part. That maybe is the reason why China and Africa remain the good partners. The kind of relation between both China and Africa can be resumed in this sentence: It is so easy to be in relationship with someone

<sup>1</sup> China-Africa relations governance, peace and security, Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe and Liu Hongwu

<sup>2</sup> Sino- Mauritanian relations and major aid projects financed by China in Mauritania, the Chinese embassy in Mauritania

<sup>3</sup> EU-China- A strategic outlook, Strasbourg, 12.3.2019

who is easy-going and someone who we have something in common with.

Above is a brief presentation of both China and Mauritania. According to this description, we can see that each country has its historical background and characteristics. For example, Mauritania still faces many social problems while China occupied an important position in the world.

#### 4. Research objectives

The main objective of the present paper is to find out the remarkable investments of Chinese people in Mauritania and the numerous job's opportunities created by Chinese investors; highlight the impact of Chinese activities on local economy progress and development; enumerate the worst problems encountered by local people while working for Chinese companies or Chinese investors. Finally, this study will make some important suggestions that can help young Mauritanians to catch every job's opportunity with better conditions around the country.

#### 5. Research method

Two research methods have been investigated in order to achieve the present study. First, literature research method or documentary research method was the main research method used in this study. In order to complete this study, the author except reading the precious papers related to the research, had read the recent information or news on Mauritania and China relationship. It is important to point out that, this research method has successfully helped the achievement of this dissertation. The second research method is the interview. During this research, two Chinese investors (working in Mauritania) and four qualified and influential Mauritanian workers have been interviewed. These respondents' opinions have successfully contributed to this dissertation. The two research methods investigated in this study have guided the author to understand the situation of China-Mauritanian bilateral relation. In the following part, we are going to highlight the most influential Chinese investments in Mauritania, their impacts on local commercial activities and youth's future.

#### 6. Result and discussion

##### a. Result

As result, the combination of both documentary research method and interview investigated during this study led to get the following information:

##### ✧ The most remarkable Chinese investments in Mauritania

It is important to mention that China remain a dynamic and preferred partner of every African country, of course, it is undoubtedly a good partner for Mauritania. This study found out that since the independence of Mauritania, China has maintained diplomatic relations with Mauritania. The Chinese companies or investments involved in agriculture, trade center, Atlantic energy company, international friendship hospital, real estate company and commercial free zone company. Economically, Mauritanians attach a great importance on its relationship with China and reject that of western countries, which are today accused of taking back systematically what they have given from one side. One of the interview's respondents, who is actually working as assistant in Mauritania's HONGDONG fishery company (it is one of the best performing Chinese

companies in Mauritania. This company officially signed a US100 million agreement with Mauritania to obtain 25 years fishing rights lease)<sup>4</sup> said that: in terms of aid efficiency, China remains today Mauritania's best economic partner. She continued by listing up the following Chinese realizations: construction of hospital in Kifa, Selibaby and Nouakchott, the construction of the autonomous port of Nouakchott (and the expansion of a US294 millions Chinese loan to Mauritania). Houses of Parliament, the Olympic stadium and cultural home are also Chinese achievements in Mauritania.

As in most of Sub-Saharan countries, China's presence in Mauritania has become more "humanized" in the last 10 years. For local businessmen, the involvement of dozens of Chinese in commercial activities, including the trade in green tea, Chinese made household products and their rapid growing presence in the local construction industry, seems to be an invasion. In addition, driven by the current regime, China's commercial offensives led to the construction of the numerous shopping centers, where are sold in details and cheap price Chinese products delivered from a large warehouse in the port of Nouakchott. One of the respondents to the interview, who has served in Chinese shop for at least 10 years declared freely: just visit a market in Nouakchott, the political capital of the country and you can understand the existence of China through its various commodities and products. Clothing, kitchenware, electronic machine, television, receiver, antenna, auto parts and mobile phones, all have Chinese labels.

##### ✧ China in Mauritania: job's opportunities creation and contribution to fight against unemployment

For many Mauritanians, China has changed completely their life's conditions by creating numerous job's opportunities all over the country. For those people, China brings them hope and new life through its unstoppable investments or realizations in the country. Here are the most remarkable job's opportunities created by Chinese government and investors in Islamic Republic of Mauritania:

As it was said above, China has invested in many fields in Mauritania. The most popular are the autonomous port of Nouakchott, that is today the biggest economic exchange's zone between Mauritania and its economic partners. It advantageously located at the crossroads of the routes connecting Africa, Europe and America and it is one of the leading public commercial ports in the Sub-Sahara for ships sailing from Europe. The autonomous port of Nouakchott offers many job's opportunities to local and neighbor countries' people each year. It contributes enormously to fight against unemployment and extreme poverty in that zone. A Mauritanian worker, who has worked more than six years in autonomous port of Nouakchott, one of the respondents declared: approximately ten thousand local people get jobs in autonomous port of Nouakchott every year.

The second Chinese biggest investment in Mauritania is HONGDONG international fishery company, established in 2010 in Nouadhibou, economical capital of Mauritania.

<sup>4</sup>

[http://www.chinafrique.com/Homepage/201908/t20190808\\_800175359.html](http://www.chinafrique.com/Homepage/201908/t20190808_800175359.html)

The company employs more than three hundreds local people every year. Except the fixable employees, numerous local people are needed and payed every single day, because the company operates the day as soon as at night. For an unpopular country like Mauritania, it really makes sense and helpful if a company can provide jobs for hundreds of people every year. Many local people also point out that the company, Hongdong, is one of the main opportunities for educated and uneducated young people. Educated people are employed in positions that require a certain level of knowledge, while uneducated people engage in manual labors. One respondent, an administration's member of Hongdong company, said that most of young people living in Nouadibou city have worked in Hongdong for at least half a year. It should also be noted that, in addition to Hongdong company, which employs a large number of workers every year, there are three local companies working in cooperation with Hongdong. The partners of these three companies used Hongdong's fishing boats. Research shows that they provide jobs for hundreds of people every year too.

No one can deny that most of Mauritians are unemployed, in particular black-skinned citizens. In addition, the majority of women are queen, that means, they choose to be housewives and be totally in their husbands' responsibility, particularly white-skinned women. This paper found out; the Chinese achievements are effectively contributing to the mentality's change of Mauritians. The number of unemployed citizens reduces rapidly during the last two decades, because there are many Chinese companies with good salary for local employees. The appearance of Chinese firms has created several job's opportunities for Mauritanian citizens, in particular for black-skinned people. At the same time, a lot of white-skinned women who were less interested in work are today excited by the big salary given by Chinese companies. They are so active and competitive in work at present. This study finds that white-skinned women occupy high positions in Chinese companies unlike black employees, this does not say that they are better educated or that they have more experience, but it is due to the fact that the majority of state leaders are white men. This problem of inequality at work is not only frequent in Mauritania, but also in almost all the 54 countries of Africa. The good jobs always belong to those who lead the nation, and precisely what sometimes creates an atmosphere of hatred between the citizens of a nation.

Concerning aids, since the start of relations between the two countries in the 1990s, china has assisted Mauritania in almost all areas of life. This aid manifests itself through the construction of public centers, especially hospitals, to ensure the best care for the local population. For example, at the national hospital in Nouakchott, china has opened a block which takes care of local and foreign patients, especially major illnesses. Many Mauritians declare that they are very grateful to China, because thanks to this medical care center, most of the patients are healed, in particular those infected with covid-19. Chinese companies established in Mauritania also provide a multitude of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable areas. for example, the Hongdong company, which is one of the largest Chinese companies in Mauritania, makes humanitarian gestures to the vulnerable zones every year before the celebration of Ramadan. For the year 2021, this company

made an offer of 300 bags of rice, hundreds of bags of salt, boxes of cooking oil, and many other things. this humanitarian action remains an unforgettable story in the historical agenda of Mauritania.

Generally speaking, Chinese investments in Africa in general and in Mauritania in particular, constitute a central door to get out of unemployment and poverty, but they are not always profitable for the local people who seek to develop themselves. How can Chinese investments impact the local population and their activities negatively?

#### ✧ **Impact of Chinese presence on local people's activities**

The multitude of Chinese investments and companies in Mauritania not only have advantages for the local population, but also negatively influence their mentality and activities. Mentally or psychologically, Chinese companies through the slightly higher salary compared to private and state companies enormously affect the mentality of pupils and students to the point of abandoning their studies, this undoubtedly constitutes a danger for a country that its future depends on educated youth. it should be noted that several Chinese companies have limited the age range for young employees, but this is however not all Chinese companies established in the territory, because many of them think young people are physically good for hard work or operations. Most Chinese companies operating in fisheries, construction etc. rarely accept people over 40 years old, the average age of employees in these companies is 25 years old. In many countries around the world, 25 is the normal age for undergraduate students, but unlike most of young Mauritians drop out of school at this age to work in Chinese companies as simple laborers. As an indirect consequence, many of them will be unemployed after a few years, because most of Chinese companies work in a fixed period, others will be excluded because of age. In addition, as was said above, it is the future of the nation that is in danger, because those who abandon their studies today are certainly leaders of tomorrow, who knows maybe there is even a nelson Mandela among them. The president of the republic of Cameroon his excellence Paul Biya said in one of his speeches addressed to young people that "youth is the spearhead of the nation", which means the future of a nation is placed on the shoulders of young people. Education is surely the pillar that will enable this spearhead to rise to the occasion.

In the area of health, it should be noted that many Mauritians fall sick each year because of the continuous work of the Chinese. This study found that most of Chinese companies operate day and night and employees work at least 10 hours a day. It should also be noted that they do the type of work that requires a lot of physical strength and takes a lot of energy. In such condition, it is inevitable for every employee to lose physical strength and be sick. Work accidents are also common in these companies, as most of them operate with technical tools or machines.

This study found that the most impacted sector by Chinese investments or activities in Mauritania is trade or local business. The massive appearance of Chinese brand products on all markets in Mauritania has weakened local trade, or even put an end to the business of certain local operators. A local trader of Mauritanian origin affirms with despair that: my commercial activities are not working

Well these last 10 years, because right here next to my shop, a Chinese saleswoman has opened a shop and sells almost the same items as me. Often, she comes to observe the customers in my shop and see exactly what interested them more, after that she imports the same products from China and sells them at a lower price. As everywhere in other African countries, the Chinese in Mauritania first study the needs of local markets before launching their commercial activities. Their strategy of making products of the same brand as what the local people marketed long before their arrival and selling them at an affordable price is increasingly destroying local commerce. Many local traders claim that Chinese products are not of good quality, but the local population prefers them because of lack of financial source to buy the best quality products. And this has led many local shops to be closed, which is directly linked to the unemployment in the country. Another local trader adds saying this: the Chinese are so curious, once they get know well the local population and make the most revitalizing local shops disappear, they start to gradually increase the price of the products in their shops until they reach their goals. The reality shows that the Chinese have even started to sell local products in recent years such as vegetables, traditional clothes, seafood and more. This constitutes a danger for local traders, of course it is the future of young Mauritians that is in danger. A Mauritanian returning from China affirms that China can never allow foreigners to do business freely as they do on the African continent, especially to an African, this is an impossible dream. If today China already leads the African or Mauritanian markets, over time it will no doubt meddle in the political affairs of this nation, moreover we are not surprised that a Chinese has become a traditional chief in Ghana. This is an alert for all of Africans, Africa has no friends apart from friends by interest. Today it is France which is the headache of Mauritania, but tomorrow it will be China, this is not a prophecy but it is a reality based on the present and the future.

#### **b. Discussion**

The best way to help a person is to teach him to fish by himself, but not by giving him every time the fish when he or she is in need. According to their first intentions, the main goal of Chinese was to transmitting certain experiences and knowledge to Africans and Mauritians in particular. This is why, several Chinese companies have been opened in Mauritania with the intention of improving the level and knowledge of local peoples. According to the agreements, the Chinese manage the companies the ten first years, and when local peoples are able to manage the companies, they will replace all Chinese leaders. But today, the Chinese no longer respect these agreements. This study discovered that the Chinese present in Mauritania have neither taught local peoples how to fish nor give them the fish, but on the contrary, they sell them the fish or local products. Here it is important to know, how the Chinese manage to neglect the agreements in a country with a good government in place? Would the Government not be corrupted by the Chinese? These are questions that every Mauritanian citizen arises every day. In this context of non-compliance with the agreements concluded, it is likely that south-south cooperation between China and Africa changes completely into master-servant relation.

China is the Savior of Mauritania because she assists the

country almost in all situations. Its presence in Mauritania is manifested by physical achievements and financial offers or debts. After the accumulation of Chinese debts and the disability of Mauritania to repay them, how will China act? Maybe no African country once think about this issue. The debts given to Africans by the Chinese today are probably the cause of distribution of African land or resource in the future. The most deteriorating case is the action of the Chinese in Malawi where they have large spaces or construction surface while many local peoples do not have even for a single room to sleep. If Mauritania today continues to accept the debts given by the Chinese, when the government is unable to repay them in the future, what will be the last word of the Chinese? It is important to resume that Chinese is the most curious man in the world, who aims first his own interest.

#### **7. Suggestions**

In order to awaken the minds of Mauritians about the future and improve the friendly relationship between Mauritania and Chinese investors, this study makes some important suggestions:

It is important to remind that Mauritania is one of the richest African countries in natural resources. As time goes by, several foreign powers will constantly visit Mauritania to exploit these natural resources. Today, China is one of the foreign countries which operates in several fields in Mauritania, in particular on the economic field. This study showed that 80% of Chinese-french interpreters in Mauritania are foreigners. We sincerely suggest to the Mauritanian government and parents to accentuate the education of young people, especially to initiate them in business languages such as Chinese, English, etc. the initiation of young people in foreign languages is one of the surest doors to progress and development. In addition, Mauritanian parents must also encourage young girls to pursue higher education in order to be able to integrate into social life. This suggestion is made with the aim of encouraging young Mauritians to seize all opportunities for work within the country.

The second suggestion is the most crucial, because it concerns all Mauritians without distinction of age and sex. As it is said above, the Chinese commercialize all kinds of products in Mauritania today, this has negative impact on the commercial activities of the local population and increase the number of unemployed. the Mauritanian government must prohibit them from selling certain products such as vegetables, cereals, fruits and all those products which the local people sell to feed their families. It should be noted most of Mauritanian women residing in urban areas feed themselves by selling these small things. If the Chinese, in addition to the big businesses that they manage all over the country, win the market of agricultural products, the number of unemployed across the country will certainly increase. The Chinese can import and export the agricultural products freely, sell to the local people in wholesale freely, but the sale in details must be done by the local people.

#### **8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is important to remind that the central objective of this investigation is to present the major investments and the job's opportunities created by the Chinese in the Islamic republic of Mauritania. After the

analysis, it appears that, the Chinese have invested in several areas in Mauritania such as fishing, construction, trade etc. Among these areas, fishing remains the area in which the Chinese are most interested. As an example of Chinese investments in Mauritania, we can cite the autonomous port of Nouakchott, Hongdong company... Despite the negative impacts of Chinese investments on the education of young people and local trade, China is still the best partner of the Mauritania, because it participates in the rapid reduction of unemployment throughout the country. Today, Hongdong company has become essential in Mauritania, because it employs a lot of young people every year. To the question of why young Mauritians do not occupy good positions in Chinese companies, the answer is quite that they should be more interested in learning the objective language, which is the Chinese language. Finally, this study suggested to the Mauritanian government and parents to emphasize the education of young people, in particular the education of young girls for their integration into social life, because education for Africa is the major key of progress and development.

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