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This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Arrigo Pallotti (2020). The Chinese Penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Tanzania. Leiden : Brill [10.1163/9789004428898_021].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/757456> since: 2020-04-30

Published:

DOI: http://doi.org/10.1163/9789004428898_021

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(Article begins on next page)

The Chinese Penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Tanzania

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1) Introduction

The African states have long been portrayed as weak, dependent and vulnerable actors within the international relations literature. In spite of the high expectations raised by the independence of a large number of African countries in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the military vulnerability of the newly independent African governments and the many difficulties they encountered in consolidating their state institutions led William Zartman already in the late 1960s to conclude that: “African states have little capability of influencing the decisions of other African and non-African states. (...) Africa does not have the power to protect itself and promote its own goals” (Zartman 1967: 550, 554).

During the 1970s the disappointing results of the import substitution industrialization policies pursued by the African governments and their growing authoritarian tendencies pushed some scholars to stress “the influence of external interests, demands, and models in manipulating African “development” strategies” and political trajectories (Shaw, Grieve 1978: 7). While Francophone Africa was depicted as the victim of France’s neo-colonial ambitions (Amin 1973), more generally scholars pointed to the weakness of the African capitalist class and the ambiguous role played by multi-national corporations (MNC) within the newly independent countries in order to explain the fact that “political independence in Africa has not brought economic independence or development to the continent; rather, it has intensified the inheritance of economic dependence” (Shaw, Grieve 1978: 11). As Langdon and Mytelka remarked: “the symbiosis of MNCs with African petit bourgeois forces that existed after independence blocked developmental responses to [historical problems of poverty and inequalities] – the industrialization that occurred working mainly to the advantage of small minorities” (Langdon, Mytelka 1979, 207).

In the 1980s, the debt crisis and the donor consensus on the need for new and radical solutions to the economic difficulties of the developing countries left the African governments with no option but to ask for assistance from the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, the neo-liberal economic reforms the African governments were required to implement in order to get access to the loans provided by the WB and the IMF failed to restore economic growth in Africa. The political, economic and social crisis of the African countries led some scholars to argue that the African states lacked the basic requirements of state sovereignty.

Jackson and Rosberg argued that after independence a perverse notion of juridical sovereignty had shielded the African governments from “the competitive pressures and dynamics of the international system to bring about political and economic development to retain their statehood”. As a consequence, international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and the same African governments had coalesced to bring about “a new international underclass of mendicant states which have come to depend very heavily not only on legal recognition but, increasingly, on foreign aid as well” (Jackson, Rosberg 1986: 2-3, 28). While in the mid-1980s the analysis of the development cooperation between Africa and the European Economic Community led John Ravenhill to conclude that the African governments behaved as “clients” of the European countries (Ravenhill 1985), almost twenty years later Bayart noted that the African agency in global affairs had been historically limited to a manipulation of the continent marginal and dependent position through a “strategy of extraversion, at the heart of which is the creation and the capture of a rent generated by dependency” (Bayart 2000: 222)

The end of the Cold War, together with the failure of the international peace operations in Somalia and Rwanda reduced Africa’s strategic relevance at the international level. While in the mid-1990s Christopher Clapham wrote that the African states were “at the bottom on any conventional ordering of global power, importance and prestige” (Clapham 1996: 3), Khadiagala and Lyons observed that “the leverage of African actors has decreased” after the end of the Cold War (Khadiagala, Lyons 2001: 10). As development aid was now conditioned to the implementation of both economic and political reforms, the African countries, which “existed on the periphery of world politics since their independence” (Harbeson, Rothchild 1991: 1), had now been transformed into “choiceless democracies” (Mkandawire 1999).

During the 1990s the outbreak of violent conflicts, the impasse of the democratic transitions, and the growing poverty were considered as evidence of the fact that the end of the Cold War had left “Africa in chaos” (Ayittey 1998), and had laid bare the “fiction” of the African state (Hent 2001: 188). Within this context, while some scholars argued that the study of African international relations would better focus on non-state actors such as “warlords, non-governmental organizations or ethnic groups” (Smith 2012: 28. See also Dunn 2001), others suggested the need for the African governments to cede part of their sovereign rights to the multilateral institutions in order to speed up the development of their countries (Callaghy 1995).

In spite of the intense international competition for Africa’s natural resources during the last two decades, the view of the African countries as “victims” of global forces and actors remains a dominant one within the African

international relations literature. As some scholars have suggested that the closer relations between Africa and the emerging powers have strengthened the African governments' bargaining power in the international fora (Rocha 2007: 32), the recent literature on the "new scramble" for Africa has mainly depicted the African governments as "pawns" in the hands of the old and new powers competing for access to oil and gas deposits and consumer markets on the continent (Bond 2006; Lee 2006).

In addition to these two perspectives, a third one has emerged, which if on the one side acknowledges the "political agency" of the African governments, on the other side recognizes the "structural pressures" bearing on them (Taylor, Williams 2004: 2). Factors such as the dependency on foreign aid, the international consensus on development, and the vulnerability of the African countries to the fluctuations in the international prices of primary commodities substantially limit the political leverage of the African governments. According to Roger Southall, "in the wake of rapid globalisation and IMF and World Bank entrenchment of neo-liberal economics, African leaders now have little option but attempt to make capitalism work for their countries under highly unfavourable conditions" (Southall 2009: 31). Brown and Harman have recently pointed to an "increased African agency" within the context of the war against international terrorism and the boom of international commodity prices, but have cautioned that when "exploring (...) agency in international politics, Africa serves as something of a limit case" (Brown, Harman 2013: 3, 10).

This chapter aims at putting into question the mainstream view of the African states as passive actors within the international system by investigating the historical evolution of relations between Tanzania and China during and after the Cold War.

One of Africa's poorest countries at independence, in the mid-1960s Tanzania adopted an unorthodox socialist development strategy whose implementation was politically and materially supported by communist China. During the Cold War the Tanzanian government actively tried to achieve its own political and economic goals at the national, regional and international level by forging close ties with China. The latter, in its turn, tried to project its political influence in Eastern and Southern Africa in competition with the United States and the Soviet Union by actively cooperating with Tanzania. Within the context of what president Julius Nyerere defined "a friendship between most unequal equals" (Hutchison 1975: 261), and contrary to Western fears, during the Cold War the Tanzanian authorities always maintained their own autonomy with respect to the Chinese government. Tanzania only partially realized its development goals, as the country remained heavily dependent on the export of few primary commodities, but it did play a relevant role in the decolonization of Zimbabwe (Pallotti 2017a).

During the 1980s, while Tanzania entered a serious economic crisis that compelled its government to abandon socialism and start to implement a structural adjustment program supported by the IMF and the WB, China was busy implementing its own internal reforms. As a consequence, the reduction in the Chinese aid budget deprived Tanzania of Peking's support at a very critical juncture in the country history. After the end of the Cold War, against the backdrop of China's renewed interest for Africa, relations between China and Tanzania intensified again. China's development aid and, more importantly, concessional loans to Tanzania help the latter's government to pursue its own development vision and maintain its control over the country's state and society. On its own part, Beijing has maintained strong ties with Tanzania for both political (symbolic) and economic reasons.

2) Revolution in Zanzibar and development of Tanzania-China relations

In spite of the fact that Tanzania was "China's closest friend in Africa" during the 1970s (Bailey 1975: 41), at Tanganyika's independence in December 1961 the development and consolidation of close ties between the two countries was not a foregone conclusion. On the one side, the government of Julius Nyerere – Tanganyika's prime minister (1961-1962) and president (1962-1964), and then Tanzania's president (1964-1985) – soon recognized communist China, but adopted a "cautious" (Hoskyns 1968: 453) or "realist" (Bjerk 2011: 216) foreign policy, and maintained a "close association with Britain" (Pratt 1978: 90), its former colonial power. On the other side, since the late 1950s China primarily directed its attention to Zanzibar in the East Africa, and established close links with the Zanzibar National Party (ZNP) and, in particular, with its secretary-general, Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu.

Paradoxically, the revolution in Zanzibar on 11-12 December 1964 played an unexpected and crucial role in fostering relations between Tanzania and China. The revolution, which was initiated by the Youth League of the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) with the support of some African policemen who had been retrenched by the Zanzibar government soon after independence in December 1963 (Glassman 2011: 64), brought about an international crisis. The British and American governments, which had hesitated to recognize the new Zanzibar government in spite of the pressing requests by Abeid Karume, the leader of the ASP and the Zanzibar Revolutionary Council, were worried by the appointment of Abdullah Hanga, a trade unionist with strong links with the Soviet Union, as prime minister and of Babu as minister for external affairs, and by the decision of the Soviet Union, China and some other communist countries to immediately recognize the new Zanzibar government. In particular, the Americans thought that the "main purpose of [the] accelerated Commie interest [in] Zanzibar [was to] establish [a] strategic foothold off [the] East African coast

[in] order [to] unleash [an] intensified campaign [of] subversion and [the] infiltration [of] important mainland countries in East Africa".¹

Nyerere, who considered the presence of the Chinese in Zanzibar as a "double menace" since, as he explained to the Americans, "their threat is not only subversion. They are a worse threat if they make success of Zanzibar (...). Then what happens to what I stand for in Tanganyika and what happens to this country?"² proposed to Karume the formation of a Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar.³ According to Nyerere, the merger of the two countries would forestall the realization of any pro-communist revolutionary plan and secure the leadership of Karume on the isles (Wilson 1989: 73).

Babu, who after his release from prison in April 1963 had left the ZNP to form the ultra-leftist Umma Party, did not play an active role in the overthrow of the Sultan's government (on the night of the revolution he was reportedly in Dar es Salaam), but then tried to transform a "lumpen, in many ways apolitical uprising into [an] anti-imperialist revolution" (Babu 1991a: 245), and prevented the latter "from taking a racial character" (Wilson 1989: 13). Moreover, as foreign minister of the new Zanzibar government, Babu soon tried to establish diplomatic relations with a number of communist countries, and solicited economic aid from them. Few weeks after the revolution, China, East Germany and the Soviet Union had already offered some economic aid to Zanzibar.⁴

On 22 April 1964 Nyerere and Karume signed the Articles of the Union, which established the United Republic of Tanzania. Zanzibar not only maintained its president and government, but also retained a broad autonomy within the Union, as the latter had (at least initially) exclusive jurisdiction on a limited

¹ *Telegram from Department of State to American Embassy Nairobi, Secret, 14 March 1964, National Archives of the United States, College Park, Maryland, United States (NARA II), General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric File 1963 & 1964-66, Box 3043, Folder: POL 23 Internal Security ZAN 1/1/64.*

² *Telegram from American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Department of State, Secret, 22 February 1964, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric File 1963 & 1964-66, Box 3043, Folder: POL 16 Independence Recognition ZAN 1/1/64.*

³ According to a report by the CIA, Karume's initial response "was not enthusiastic". It was only when Nyerere threatened to withdraw the Tanganyikan police contingent – whose "support [Karume] needed against Babu" – from Zanzibar that Karume accepted the formation of the Union. Central Intelligence Agency, *Zanzibar: The Hundred Days Revolution*, ESAU XXX, 21 February 1966, 123-124, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/esau-28.pdf> (accessed on 15 March 2017).

⁴ In February 1964 the Chinese government provided the new Zanzibar government with a US \$ 14 million interest-free loan and a US \$ 500,000 grant. *Countering Chinese Intrusion – Tanzania*, Secret, 18 May 1965, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs 1958-1966, Box 34, Folder: Political Affairs and Relations: Tanganyika-Chicoms Affairs.

number of matters (foreign policy, defence, external trade, etc.). As Babu was nominated Minister of Trade and Cooperatives in the Union government and moved to Dar es Salaam, Karume could strengthen his leadership within the Zanzibar Revolutionary Council and establish a personal dictatorship on the archipelago (Pallotti 2016), which Nyerere purposefully avoided to publicly criticize due to his fear that Karume could split the Union in revenge.⁵

If the removal of Babu from Zanzibar aimed at reducing communist influence in the archipelago, paradoxically his appointment to the Union Cabinet played a crucial role in the radicalization of Tanzania's development vision and its foreign policy, by consolidating the relations between Tanzania and communist China. While soon after the revolution China had established cordial relations with the Zanzibar Revolutionary Council in spite of its past association with the ZNP, Peking welcome the creation of the Union and embarked on building of close ties with the Union government in order to extend its influence on Tanzania and East Africa.

As Tanzania's Minister of Trade and Cooperatives, Babu took part in Vice-President Rashidi Kawawa's official visit to China in June 1964. Together with the signing of an Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation between China and Tanzania, the Chinese government offered Tanzania a US \$ 42 million concessionary loan (a quarter of it to be spent in Zanzibar) (Yu 1975: 131). Then, in early February 1966 Babu went to China just before Nyerere's first official visit to the country. Babu not only negotiated with the Chinese authorities a new US \$ 14 million trade agreement, but discussed also the possibility for Peking to finance and build a railway line between Tanzania and Zambia. The project aimed at providing Zambia with an alternative route to the Indian Ocean, and reducing its economic dependence on the colonial and racist regimes of Southern Africa. Thus, during Nyerere's visit to China in late February 1966 the Chinese leaders raised the topic of the construction of the railway line between Tanzania and Zambia, and offered to finance and build it (Coulson 1982: 143).

In September 1967, after London and Washington had refused to finance the railway project because of its uncertain economic sustainability, and Kaunda had visited Peking in June 1967, a tripartite agreement between China, Tanzania and Zambia was signed. The Chinese government committed itself to constructing the railway line and financing it through an interest-free loan of £ 160 million to Zambia and Tanzania. The two countries were to repay the debt over a thirty-year period (starting from 1983) (Hall, Peyman 1976: 100). The construction of the railway line, which had a total length of around 1,800

⁵ *Tanzania: Nyerere and His Problems*, Research Study, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, Secret, 6 October 1973, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2617, Folder: POL 2/1/70.

kilometers, began in 1970 and finished in 1974, one year before scheduled (Monson 2009: 35-70). In late 1973, it was estimated that 17,000 Chinese workers were employed in the construction of the railway line in Tanzania.⁶

While the presence of Babu in the Union government played a central role in fostering relations between Tanzania and China, the international repercussions of the revolution in Zanzibar indirectly helped to cement them.

After the formation of the Union, the government of West Germany raised with Nyerere the problem of the presence of the embassy of East Germany in Zanzibar. In accordance with the "Hallstein Doctrine", Bonn asked the Tanzanian government to order the closure of the embassy, or face the political consequences of Tanzania's diplomatic links with East Germany. The Tanzanian president tried to find a compromise solution. The embassy of East Germany in Zanzibar was closed, but an East German consulate was opened in Dar es Salaam. However, Bonn adopted an intransigent position, and in February 1965 it suddenly terminated its military cooperation with Tanzania. In response, Nyerere publicly denounced West Germany's blackmail and ordered the suspension of all West German cooperation activities in Tanzania (Pratt 1978: 140-141).

Relations between Tanzania and the Western countries further worsened in the mid-1960s after the expulsion of two US diplomats in early 1965 and the Tanzania's decision to break off diplomatic relations with London in December 1965 in protest against the British policy towards Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence. In retaliation, the British government froze the disbursement of a £ 7.5 million loan already allocated to Tanzania, and in 1968 all British technical assistance was terminated too (Pallotti 2009).

While in the short term China contributed to filling the void left by the suspension of West German and British aid to Tanzania by providing the latter with some limited military and economic assistance – while Canada started to train of the Tanzanian army and air force (Godefroy 2012), Peking took over the training of the Tanzanian naval force, and offered the Tanzanian government a new £ 2 million loan and a £ 1 million grant – in the longer term relations with China became a central pillar of Tanzania's efforts aimed at pursuing non-alignment internationally, promoting the liberation of Southern Africa from racialism and colonialism regionally, and implementing the socialist development vision of *ujamaa* nationally.

In the mid-1960s the deterioration in Tanzania's relations with the Western powers and the disappointing results of the development plans implemented by the government after independence pushed Nyerere to undertake an in-

⁶ *Airgram from American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Department of State, Confidential, 6 November 1973, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2016, Folder: POL 1/1/70.*

depth reassessment of Tanzania's development strategy. In February 1967 the National Executive Council of TANU adopted the Arusha Declaration, a policy manifesto that committed the government to implementing *ujamaa*, a socialist development vision centered on the promotion of small-holder agriculture, state intervention in the economy, and self-reliance. As the American Embassy in Tanzania observed in the early 1970s, "*ujamaa* provides the nation-building mystique around which this country is organizing itself [and] is articulated by one of the most attractive and persuasive leaders in the Third World".⁷

While, as Lal remarked, "Tanzania and China shared a political language of anti-colonialism and self-reliance, and their domestic agendas both valorized the countryside as the primary site of economic and ideological transformation" (Lal 2014: 99), Nyerere stressed the fact that Tanzania "should be able to admire certain things which have been done in China, Russia, Korea, Yugoslavia, and so on, without assuming that any of these countries provide a model for us" (Nyerere 1968: 20). Besides some military aid (Mathews 1981: 155), Israel, offered Tanzania some assistance in order to develop the cooperative system of the *ujamaa* villages (Peters 1992: 17). Thus, if relations with China represented a central pillar of Tanzania's non-alignment policy, during the 1970s Nyerere consolidated the latter by negotiating development assistance programs with a number of bilateral and multilateral donors (Crouch 1987; Rugumamu 1997; Hyden, Mukandala 1999).

China actively promoted the economic development of Tanzania by funding and implementing some rural and industrial projects in the country. While agricultural projects such as the construction of the Ruvu State Farm and the Mbarali Rice Farm in Mbeya Region in the mid-1960s aimed at introducing modern production techniques in Tanzania and reinforcing food security in the country, industrial projects such as the building of the Urafiki Textile Mill and the Ubungo Farm Implements Factory in Dar es Salaam in the late 1960s were meant to sustain the diversification of the Tanzanian economy (Ping 1999; Brautigam, Xiaoyang 2012: 5-9). Moreover, since 1968 Chinese medical teams started working on both Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar.

In the early 1970s Tanzania had become the largest recipient of Chinese aid in Africa.⁸ Peking also emerged as the largest and most successful aid donor in

⁷ Airgram from American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Department of State, Confidential, 19 January 1973, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2017, Folder: POL 12 TANZAN 1/1/70.

⁸ Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, *Tanzania: Nyerere and His Problems*, Research Study, Secret, 6 October 1970, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2017, Folder: POL 2/1/70.

Zanzibar,⁹ not least because of the many practical difficulties the implementation of the Soviet, East German and Bulgarian aid programs had encountered on the archipelago.¹⁰ In the early 1980s, however, development cooperation between China and Zanzibar had almost come to an end, as “all the Chinese industrial projects had now been handed over to the Zanzibaris”.¹¹

When the military cooperation agreement with Canada expired in 1970, the Tanzanian government resolved not to renew it, apparently because the Canadian government had refused to provide weapons to the Tanzanian army.¹² In this way, China could broaden its military cooperation with Tanzania by offering training to the Tanzanian army, air force and naval force, and selling arms to the country.

The political and military cooperation between Tanzania and China was further strengthened by their shared commitment to the liberation of Southern Africa from racialism and colonialism, which according to the Americans “reflect[ed] a coincidence of goals, rather than necessarily an ideological compatibility”.¹³ Part of the Chinese military aid to the Tanzanian army found its way to the Southern African liberation movements hosted in military camps in Tanzania.

Since the early 1960s several Southern African national liberation movements, such as the Movimento popular de libertação de Angola (MPLA), the South West Africa’s People Organization (SWAPO), the African National Congress (ANC), the Frente de libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) had established political offices, military training camps and refugee settlements in Tanzania. The country’s role in the liberation of Africa had been reinforced in 1963 by the decision of the Organization of African Unity to locate in Dar es Salaam the headquarters of

⁹ *Airgram from American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Department of State*, Confidential, 20 October 1972, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2016, Folder: POL 2 TANZAN 1/1/70.

¹⁰ *Airgram from American Consulate Zanzibar to Department of State*, Confidential, 27 September 1968, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric File 1967-69, Box 2516, Folder: 17 TANZAN 1/1/67; *Airgram from American Consulate Zanzibar to Department of State*, Confidential, 22 December 1969, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric File 1967-69, Box 2515, Folder: POL 15-1 TANZAN 1/1/69.

¹¹ *High Commissioner’s Visit to Zanzibar*, Restricted, 6 June 1980, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, London (TNA), FCO 31/2878 (file 16).

¹² *Hart to Holmes*, Secret, 21 April 1972, TNA, FCO 31/1295 (file 13).

¹³ Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, *Tanzania and Zambia: Campaign against Southern Africa*, Research Study, Secret, 24 March 1971, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2016, Folder: POL TANZAN 1/1/70.

the Liberation Committee it had created for coordinating African assistance to the national liberation movements (Kisanga 1981).

Since “Nyerere [was] a fanatic on the question of Southern Africa’s liberation”,¹⁴ relations with Tanzania “served the vital function of establishing and maintaining China’s revolutionary credibility” internationally (Yu 1975: 39), and supported Peking in its competition with the Soviet Union for influence over the Southern African liberation movements.

More generally, the close ties with Tanzania, whose unorthodox socialist development strategy was seen with suspicion by the Soviet Union,¹⁵ reinforced China’s international projection and, in Nyerere’s words, helped it “to break out from the isolation in which other nations were endeavouring to confine her” (Nyerere 1971[1973]: 328). In 1971 the large majority of the African governments voted for the recognition of Peking as the legitimate representative of China at the United Nations.

Although the Western countries saw with suspicion the relations between Tanzania and China, British and American diplomats shared the opinion that there was no evidence that “China has any direct influence or control over Tanzanian affairs”,¹⁶ or that “the Chinese [government] intend to exploit [its position in the country] by actively subverting Tanzania”.¹⁷

Nyerere constantly rejected any accusation that Tanzania had abandoned non-alignment to side with the communist bloc in the Cold War. Time and again Nyerere explained that after independence Tanzania had just “moved from [its] position as a member of the Western bloc, to the position where [it is] really independent in international affairs” (Nyerere 1971[1973]: 325). As the US State Department recognized, it was disingenuous to argue that Tanzania was a communist country because it accepted military aid from China and the Soviet Bloc for the Southern African liberation movements, since it was “Nyerere’s commitment to the liberation of Southern Africa, rather than pro-communist leanings, that [had] caused him to accept massive aid from Communist China”.¹⁸ As the Tanzanian president remarked, since the “African state are not

¹⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, *African Response to the Rhodesian Rebellion*, Intelligence Memorandum, Top Secret, 3 January 1966, NARA II, CIA Records Search Tool.

¹⁵ *Telegram from American Embassy Moscow to Department of State*, Limited official use, 9 October 1969, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric File 1967-69, Box 2514, Folder: POL 7 TANZAN 7/1/68.

¹⁶ *Airgram from American Embassy Dar es Salaam to Department of State*, Confidential, 3 April 1967, NARA II, General Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric File 1967-69, Box 2517, Folder: POL TANZAN – US 1/1/67.

¹⁷ *The Chinese in Tanzania*, Diplomatic Report No. 254/72, Secret, 11 April 1972, TNA, FCO 31/1295 (file 1).

¹⁸ The US Department of State *Tanzania: Nyerere and His Problems*, Research Study, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, Secret, 6 October 1973, NARA II, General

manufacturers of weapons” and “no country of the Western Bloc is willing to make arms available to the [Southern African] nationalist movements”, the African governments were obliged to turn to “the Eastern Bloc and China [for help, as they] are willing to supply arms to these movements” (Nyerere 1976[2011]: 90).

3) From crisis to new cooperation patterns

In the early 1980s the Tanzanian economy plunged into a dramatic crisis. Some observers argued that the causes of the economic crisis had to be found in the contradictions inherent in the government’s development policy. According to Babu, “though the economy generated less and less revenue, the government expanded the welfare sector on borrowed money. [These] reckless populist policies [...] ruined the country almost irreparably (Babu 1991b: 121-122). Others contended that external factors, and in particular the oil shocks, had a tremendous impact on the fragile economy of Tanzania (Bryceson 2015).

When in the late 1970s the Tanzanian government approached the Western donors with an urgent request of financial aid, most of them refused to provide any further assistance until the government had committed itself to implementing an extensive economic reform program under the supervision of the International Financial Institutions (Snook 1999: 95). However, negotiations with the IMF proved soon very difficult. While the IMF insisted on the need for the Tanzanian government to devalue the Tanzanian Shilling as a precondition for accessing new foreign loans, Nyerere accused the IMF of attempting to violate the sovereignty of Tanzania and stubbornly refused to devalue the Tanzanian Shilling (Edwards 2014: 96-101). As a consequence, relations with most Western donors soured in the first half of the 1980s. Only the Nordic countries continued to provide economic aid to Tanzania, but in the mid-80s they also conditioned the release of new grants to the adoption of a structural adjustment program by the Tanzanian government in line with the demands of the IMF.

Together with the external pressures, the failure of the home-made economic reform programs that the Tanzanian government implemented in the early 1980s and the emerging divisions within the ruling party on how to resolve the economic crisis pushed Nyerere to announce that he would not stand for re-election in 1985. The election of Ali Hassan Mwinyi, the president of Zanzibar, to the Union presidency opened the way to an agreement with the International Financial Institutions. The adoption of the neo-liberal Economic Recovery Programme in 1986 spelt the end of the *ujamaa* experiment, as the government committed itself to an extensive process of economic liberalization.

Records of the Department of State, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2617, Folder: POL 2/1/70.

While it would be difficult to underestimate the influence exerted by the international financial institutions and the Western donors on Tanzania's turn to neo-liberalism in the mid-1980s, after the end of the Cold War the Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), Tanzania's ruling party since independence,¹⁹ retook the initiative. In the early 1990s, CCM decided to abandon the one-party state system established in 1965 and to re-introduce multipartism before the international pressures forced it to do so. In this way, CCM could control the pace and shape of the democratic transition in the country, and transformed itself from a single into a dominant party.

Since the late 1970s also China undertook a program of economic reforms that aimed at liberalising the internal market and attracting foreign direct investments (Samarani 2017). The economic reforms had a relevant impact on China's development cooperation with the African countries. During the 1980s the Chinese government not only reduced its development aid to Africa, but also stressed "mutual development" as one of the main goals of its financial assistance to the Africa. As the Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang explained during his visit to Tanzania in December 1982, from then on development cooperation with Africa would be guided by four principles: "equality and mutual benefits, stress on practical results, diversity in form, and common progress" (Brautigam 2009: 53). Finally, the rehabilitation of already concluded projects became the focus of the Chinese development policy on the continent.

Since the late 1980s the Chinese government embarked on a strategy of closer relations with the African countries, as it aimed at breaking through the international isolation brought about by the events of Tiananmen Square (Taylor 2006: 4), and fostering its economic development. Within the context of China's rapid and sustained economic growth, Africa became a critical source of primary commodities for the Chinese industries, and an export market for their manufactured goods. Trade between Africa and China recorded a dramatic increase, and Africa became an important destination of Chinese investments. China's development aid to Africa has also increased during the last decades, playing an important and instrumental role within the context of the Chinese-African economic relations. Aside from its political aspects, the Chinese authorities have used development aid as a key instrument to strengthen economic and financial cooperation with the African countries and create new business opportunities for the Chinese companies in Africa. Thus, development aid helped to lay the basis for the granting of Chinese concessional loans to the African governments, establishing joint ventures

¹⁹ CCM was formed in 1977 through the merger of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), in power on the Mainland since Tanganyika's independence in 1961, and the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), the only legal party in Zanzibar since the 1964 revolution.

between Chinese and African companies, and opening the African markets to Chinese service providers.

During the last decades the relations between China and Tanzania broadly followed this pattern of Chinese-African relations. In the 1980s Peking provided Tanzania with very limited financial aid. China's assistance focused on the rehabilitation of aid projects realized in the past. In 1983 Tanzania and China signed an agreement for the rehabilitation of around sixty development projects that had been implemented in the previous decades (Brautigam 2009: 57). In the same year, the Zambian and Tanzanian governments asked Peking for help in the management of the TAZARA (ibidem: 83-85). Given Tanzania's and China's economic difficulties, the two countries negotiated a barter trade agreement in 1984 (Kamata: 2013: 91-92). In the early 1980s, also Chinese military aid to Tanzania significantly decreased.²⁰

During the 1990s the relations between Tanzania and China entered a new phase. Contrary to the claim that after the end of the Cold War Peking lost interest for Tanzania (Cabestan, Chaponnière 2016), it can be argued that while on the one side the cooperation between the two countries was inevitably shaped by the realities of the post-Cold War international (dis)order and their national interests and priorities, on the other side both countries continued to consider their cooperation strategic from both a political and economic perspective.

Currently, China has diplomatic relations with 53 of the 54 African countries. During the last two decades not only China has become Africa's main trading partner (Dollar 2016), but also Chinese investments on the continent rapidly increased. Within the context of the growing political and economic relations between China and Africa, the development and consolidation of relations with some specific African countries have become central priorities for the Chinese government and business community. In Southern Africa, after the demise of the apartheid regime, Peking developed close relations with South Africa, to the point that China insisted for Pretoria's inclusion within the BRICS countries (Pallotti, Zambarnardi 2016). Moreover, Angola received a US \$ 2 billion loan from China in 2004 and a second one of the same amount in 2007 to rehabilitate its infrastructure after a civil war of almost thirty years (Corkin 2015), and in 2016 Angola became China's first oil supplier.

During the last decades, while relations with Tanzania have inevitably lost the centrality they had for China during the Cold War, they continued to play a relevant political and economic role for both the Tanzanian and Chinese governments. Thus, the many references in both the speeches of the Chinese leaders and the official documents of the Chinese government to the historical friendship between Tanzania and China since the early 1960s help legitimize

²⁰ TNA, *Codrington to Heckle*, Confidential, 1 September 1982, FCO 31/3672 (file 5).

China's contemporary policy in Africa, by fostering the memory of the role played by Peking in the promotion of economic development on the continent and in the fight against racialism and colonialism in Southern Africa.

During his visit to Tanzania in February 2009, former Chinese president Hu Jintao mentioned the important role the cooperation between China and the African governments played in the decolonization of Southern Africa, and then stressed the fact that after the end of the Cold War the promotion of economic development had become the overarching goal of the Sino-African cooperation. In the words of Hu Jintao: "In the 1950s and 1960s, people of China and Africa fought shoulder-to-shoulder against the colonial rule in order to achieve national liberation on the African continent. (...) Now in this new century, we are working together to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and bring about development (...) of China and Africa".

Hu Jintao further explained that the "New Chapter of China-Africa Friendship" that had opened in the early 1990s had been characterized by a growing economic interaction between China and the continent. "China – Hu Jintao remarked – will continue to promote trade with Africa, accommodate Africa's concerns as best as it can, and adopt preferential measures to increase imports from Africa. The Chinese Government encourages and supports the efforts of more and more established Chinese companies to invest in Africa, create more jobs for the local people and transfer more technologies to their African partners".²¹

Similar ideas were expressed by Chinese president Xi Jinping during his visit to Tanzania – tellingly, the first African country he visited after becoming president of China – in March 2013: "We each view the other's development as our own opportunity, and we each seek to promote the other's development and prosperity through closer cooperation". So, after paying tribute to the historical cooperation between China and Tanzania in the liberation of Southern Africa from racialism and colonialism, Xi Jinping added that: "China has worked and will continue to work with African countries to take concrete measures to properly address problems in our economic cooperation and trade, and enable the African countries to gain more benefits from the cooperation. At the same time, we sincerely hope that African countries will facilitate Chinese enterprises and citizens in their cooperation activities in Africa".²²

²¹ H. Jintao, *Work Together to Write a New Chapter of China-Africa Friendship*, Speech delivered in Dar es Salaam, 16 February 2009, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t538257.shtml (accessed on 24 October 2017).

²² X. Jinping, *Trustworthy Friends and Sincere Partners Forever*, Speech delivered in Dar es Salaam, 25 March 2013, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1027951.shtml (accessed on 24 October 2017).

On the Tanzanian government's side, relations with China help it to maintain a certain degree of political autonomy from the Western donors (Kamata: 2013: 94), reinforce its security apparatus (China is the largest provider of weapons to Tanzania (Cabestan, Chaponnière 2016: 14), and also get the financial resources to pursue a development strategy that currently aims at promoting the industrialization of the country and reducing its dependence on the export of primary commodities to rest of the world and, unsurprisingly, to China. This economic strategy marks an incipient shift from the Washington and the Post-Washington Consensus to a new development vision (strongly influenced by the Chinese experience), which calls for "a more proactive state [that brings] economic transformation forward" (Wuyts, Kilama 2016: 319). Within the context of Tanzania's predominant party system (Pallotti 2017b), the success of this development vision would inevitably strengthen the political legitimacy of the ruling party and its control over Tanzania's state and society.

Since the early 1990s economic relations between Tanzania and China rapidly intensified. The fast expanding Tanzanian economy (in the period 2007-2014 the Tanzanian economy recorded an annual average growth rate of 6.5%) raised the interest of the international investors and of the Chinese business community. In 2016 China accounted for the largest share of Tanzania's imports (33,9%), and was the third destination of Tanzania's exports (5,1%). As the value of Tanzania's exports to China was US \$ 317 million and the value of Tanzania's imports from China amounted to US \$ 3,5 billion, in 2016 China recorded a consistent trade surplus with Tanzania. Moreover, while Tanzania mainly exports primary commodities to China, the latter exports primarily manufactured products into Tanzania (all trade data are taken from the Atlas of Economic Complexity). As a consequence, the structure of trade between the two countries tends to reinforce Tanzania's dependence on the export of primary commodities (Moshi, Mtui 2008: 16).

During the last two decades Chinese investments in Tanzania have also recorded a dramatic increase. According to some estimates, in 2016 the stock of Chinese investments in Tanzania exceeded US \$ 6,2 billion (The Guardian 2017a). Chinese companies are active in the manufacturing sector (Brautigam 2009: 209), in agriculture (Brautigam 2015: 102-106), in services and trade, and also play a relevant role in the building of infrastructures, thanks to both their ability to compete for international tenders and the Chinese concessional loans. The Chinese financial institutions have vigorously supported the expansion of Chinese economic interests in Tanzania, to the point that recently the World Bank warned the Tanzanian government that "while the increased economic ties [with China] have resulted in increased economic growth, they have also increased Tanzania's vulnerability to downturns in China's business cycles" (World Bank 2016: 19). In 2013 EXIM Bank provided the Tanzanian government

with a US \$ 1.3 billion loan for the construction of a gas pipeline from Mtwara to Dar es Salaam. The pipeline, which was built by the China Petroleum Technology and Development Corporation, was officially inaugurated in October 2015 (The Guardian 2016). In 2013 the Tanzanian government signed a US \$ 10 billion agreement with China Merchant Holding International and Oman's State General Reserve Fund to build a new port and a Special Economic Zone in Bagamoyo (The Guardian 2017b).

Tanzania's need for financial resources to fund its infrastructure development programme has not translated into a passive attitude towards the foreign donors in general, and China in particular. In early 2017 president Magufuli cancelled a US \$ 9 billion contract signed by his predecessor, Jakaya Kikwete, with a consortium of Chinese companies to build a new railway line between Dar es Salaam and Western Tanzania because of irregularities, and then turned to the Turkish government for a new concessional loan to build the railway line (The East African 2017).

During the last decades Peking has also provided limited financial aid to Tanzania. As in most other African countries, the delivery of Chinese aid aims at fostering cordial relations between Peking and the host country and reinforcing a positive image of China in the eyes of the local population. The Chinese government has supported some small-scale agricultural development projects in the country (Brautigam, Xiaoyang 2012: 9-17), has built the new Tanzanian parliament in Dodoma and a new stadium in Dar es Salaam, and in 2016 announced the intention to donate a new US \$ 40 million library to the University of Dar es Salaam.

4) Conclusions

Contrary to the prevailing view within the international relations literature of the African governments as weak and passive actors of the international system, this essay has shown that the Tanzanian government has always maintained a high degree of autonomy in its relations with China.

While soon after independence the Tanganyikan government established diplomatic relations with China, only after the revolution in Zanzibar and the creation of the Union that the consolidation of relations with Peking became a priority of the Tanzanian government. During the Cold War China critically supported president Nyerere's development vision and foreign policy. The political, military and economic cooperation with Peking helped the Tanzanian government to realise its development plans, strengthened the country's non-alignment, and contributed to the liberation of Southern Africa from racialism and colonialism.

While in the early 1980s the cooperation with China did not prevent Tanzania from experiencing a serious economic crisis that brought about the end of *ujamaa* (but did not seriously endanger CCM's uninterrupted rule in the country), after the end of the Cold War trade between Tanzania and China rapidly increased, and also the Chinese investments in the country surged to unprecedented levels. Today, the Chinese concessional loans to the Tanzanian government also play a crucial role in financing the realization of the latter's development vision, with its emphasis on economic diversification and industrialization.

Although the close ties with China have contributed to accelerate Tanzania's economic growth and helped the Tanzanian government to diversify its sources of development assistance, some limits and contradictions have clearly emerged. On the one side, it remains to be seen how far China will go in supporting the industrialization of Tanzania, given its need for raw materials and what impact the Tanzanian growing debt with China will have on the economic prospects of the country. On the other side, there is a risk that, contrary to expectations, the Tanzanian government's development policy will heighten the (already visible) contradiction between the high rates of economic growth and the pervasive poverty and rising inequalities in the country. This pattern of "growth without prosperity (Lewis 2008) would further erode CCM's political legitimacy, and put at risk its already uncertain commitment to democratization.

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