HANDBOOK ON
China and Globalization

Edited by
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HANDBOOKS OF RESEARCH ON CONTEMPORARY CHINA
“Africa is now the El Dorado of espionage,” a serving intelligence officer once said. Even if he was talking then about South Africa, the entire continent has now become the new battlefront of intelligence services. The major reason for this is not so much the global war on terrorism located in the sub-Saharan region, but China’s growing economic role. This country has emerged as one of the biggest economic players on the continent, where it is investing heavily in infrastructure, building a strong presence in many countries, in large part motivated by its huge appetite for fuel and resources. And Chinese intelligence services are its perfect tool to sustain China’s objective at the economic as well as political level.

The evolution and role of China’s intelligence and security services have remained quite unknown to Western scholars despite the flourishing of intelligence studies for almost 30 years. And this ignorance is especially concerning when one considers that their activities lead those services to a region like Africa, far from the South China Sea islands. The very few studies that do exist have been written mainly by journalists, without a real methodology, and their criticism rests on the basis of a handful of seemingly sensational but deeply flawed sources and focuses on each incident as a bellwether of the West’s relationship with the Chinese or as a straightforward counterintelligence issue.

However, there is long history between China and Africa, even if considered from the perspective of studies of the intelligence service. The history shows globalization as being the long trend, initiated in China since the end of the 1950s. It also presents intelligence gathering as having evolved closely linked to Chinese political objectives, from the original Maoist anti-imperialism to the new scramble for African natural resources. Chinese intelligence and security services have always accompanied these policies. If their activities were quite easy to follow during the Cold War, their actual objectives are more connected to the state’s economic objectives than major Chinese companies, which enjoy a close interlock with the intelligence community.

THE TIME OF THE SECOND DEPARTMENT OF THE JOINT STAFF HEADQUARTERS

The first appearances, between 1957 and 1973, of the People’s Republic of China’s intelligence agents in Africa were a consequence of the Asiatic colonial wars and a part of the Eastern Cold War strategy. China was a newcomer to both worlds of intelligence, as it was to Africa.

The Algerian Matrix

In November 1949, one month and a half after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo formally approved a Central
Committee “Resolution on Intelligence Work” (Zhong Gong Zhongyang guanyu qingbao gongzuo de juebing), which recognized the major role that intelligence had played in the Party’s achievement of national victory in its extended war with the Kuomintang. But its interest in intelligence was only from the internal point of view (Qingbaobu). Concerning foreign intelligence, only the Second Department of the General Staff Department, a part of the Central Military Commission of the CCP (Zhongguo Gongchandang Zhongyang junshi weiyuanhui), had some capacities. Under the direction of Lieutenant General Liu Shaowen, it supplied at one time or another, between 1956 and 1965, nearly all of the various African liberation movements with arms, money, food, and medicines. In the first few years, in 1956 and 1957, many Chinese delegations, largely composed of political and intelligence officers, visited Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Ghana. They were like “missionaries,” as Philip Snow characterized them, delivering the “gospel of independence to African soil.” Moreover, it welcomed all of the movements’ commanders at the Nanjing (guerrilla warfare) and Shen-Yo (ideology, command) military academies to train them in the theory and practice of guerrilla war. In February 1966, while visiting Beijing, the first prime minister (1952–60) and president of Ghana (1960–66), Kwame Nkrumah, was deposed by the National Liberation Council; the Ghana Police Service found in his personal safe some Chinese guerrilla warfare handbooks.4

Behind this opening to the CCP Central Committee to Africa was a skilled and able diplomat, Zhou Enlai. The first premier of the People’s Republic of China (1949–76) and its foreign minister (1949–58), he was a member of the Central Military Commission ever since its creation in 1928. He was also the first Chinese spy. Traveling across Europe (1920–22), he worked for the Comintern and developed many international connections (1922–40). He also controlled the “Special Service section of the Central Committee” (Zhongyang teke), the CCP’s intelligence and anti-espionage team (1929–31, 1934–49).5 This background gave him an excellent understanding of intelligence matters in formulating modern China’s international relations. It was founded on information (qingbao), as the action-enabling purpose of intelligence (jihuo zhishi means “activating knowledge”).6

In December 1949, Zhou Enlai established the Chinese People’s Institute for Foreign Affairs (Zhongguo renmin waijiao xuehui) to study foreign policies and international issues and provide the central government with suggestions on foreign policy.7 With the rapid development of national liberation movements in Asian, African, and Latin American countries, this institute became a public diplomacy tool specializing in unofficial contacts with senior political leaders of various nations, and offered an important channel to expand diplomatic contacts. Visitors who made the trip to Beijing included, from South Africa, Walter Sisulu, the Secretary-General of the African National Congress (1951); from Algeria, Rabah Zerrari, the famous “Major Azzedine” (1960); from Zanzibar, Abdul Rahman Mohammed Babu, General Secretary of the Nationalist Party (1960); from Angola, Jonas Savimbi and António Agostinho Neto Kilamba, two nationalist leaders (1963 and 1971); others also came from Libya, Nigeria, and Senegal.

First contacts were made by Chinese foreign agents, under diplomatic or Xinhua titles from the “Central Investigation Department” (CID, Zhongyang diaochabu) of the CCP.8 Its director, Li Kenong (1946–61), was a close friend of Zhou Enlai and agreed to dispatch some of his operators to monitor the independence movements. But the direction for intelligence activities remained with Zhou after an analysis from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). It is not surprising that the first Chinese ambassador in Egypt was Zhou’s
former secretary, Chen Jiakang; from 1950 to 1956, he served as MFA senior officer and Assistant Foreign Minister (1955–56). Chen encountered General Gamal Abdul Nasser during the Bandung Conference (April 1955), but the ambassador had hinted to him a year before that Egypt could be the most likely independent African country to be receptive to diplomatic recognition, moreover since this country had yet to distance itself from the United States. During the Bandung Conference, the deputy director of the Office of the Premier particularly cultivated the Egyptian delegates; Luo Qingchang was, above all, the CID’s deputy director. And, after a first agreement between both countries in August 1955, China’s first diplomatic recognition in Africa, in May 1956, was Egypt. Two months later, Chen was appointed Ambassador to Egypt (1956–65); during his mandate in Egypt, he assumed also the charge of Minister to Yemen (1958–63).

Bandung was the first contact for Chinese with Africans; until 1955, Zhou Enlai’s preoccupations were much more Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Burma, and, of course, French Indochina. Nasser first introduced him to the independence struggle of another French “colony,” the three Algerian départements (1954–62). Between June 1956 and November 1957, the Chinese leader adopted symbolic support for the Algerian guerrillas. Ties between African national liberation movements and the anti-imperialist Maoist metropolis grew after the Chinese association with Soviet covert operations action to the Third World through the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Conference. The first conference took place in Cairo (December 1957–January 1958), which legitimated the Soviet and Chinese participations. The establishment of the Permanent Secretariat of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) gave the Chinese precedence over the Soviets from which to make direct contacts with dissidents from all over Africa without going through the European communist parties or the Soviet-controlled international front organizations. The New China News Agency (Xinhua) established its first office on the continent in Cairo; generally seen in the journalistic profession as the “eyes and tongue” of the CCP, among its firsts were some military correspondents holding diplomatic passports and coming from the Second Department of the General Staff Department. The Embassy, led by Chen Jiakang, completed the Chinese intelligence dispositive in Africa, becoming its first base. And its first operation dealt with Algeria. From spring 1958 to spring 1962, the ambassador received Algerian national representatives, organizing “diplomatic” trips for them to Beijing (1959–60), and coordinating CCP material support (financing arms purchases, organizing military drills in China) for the Algerian guerrillas.

Algeria appears to be the Chinese penetration’s matrix in Africa and, moreover, in Latin America. Egypt only offered China a diplomatic reconnaissance, which was very important in its competition with Taiwan to be recognized as the sole “Republic of China.” Nasser also presented Zhou as a possible Third World leader. But Algeria made China a “revolutionary” country. This was sufficient for the Chinese intelligence deciders, Luo Qingchang and Lieutenant General Liu Shaowen, of course, but also Zhou Enlai, to transfer clandestine activity from Egypt to Algeria. And so Algiers became a “Mecca for revolutionaries.” Before that, China had to make a real work of intelligence analysis. Cheng understood from his liaison with Algerians that Morocco, for the haven across international frontiers that it offered, was an essential tool in this “Great Game”; in November 1958, the establishment of diplomatic relations between both countries showed that penetration succeeded. What is unknown was how China did it: Zhou used
the Israeli intelligence service facilities in this Maghreb country. Since 1949, a young Jew from Shanghai, Shaul Eisenberg, was the Mossad’s (HaMossad leModi’in uleTafkidim Meyuhadim, Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations) tie-in with China. He contacted the head of the Tevel section, Ya’acov Caroz, who managed contacts with Morocco.13

After Algerian independence, China continued to make a financial contribution to the Armée nationale populaire’s training camps, but the Second Department of the General Staff Department increased the flow of weapons, trainees, and revolutionary militants between China, Algeria, and South Africa.14 Beijing pledged funds, and Algiers became its logistical and diplomatic gateway for the movements that both sponsored. General Liu’s agents, under Xinhua or diplomatic titles, went around Africa (Table 19.1). In February 1966, when Nkrumah was deposed, the Ghana Police Service expelled 500 Chinese, all journalists or diplomats.15 Most of them, as shown in Zaire when Beijing recalled its 250 instructors in October 1975,16 might have been military advisors. Concerning the journalists, it is possible to estimate how many they were, not only in Ghana but in all Africa, by exploiting the Charles W. Elliott’s analysis of the complete collection of Xinhua press releases in English from 1949 to 1990.17

Until the end of the 1960s, only they were intelligence officers. Between December 1961 and January 1964, the South Africa coordinator, Kao Liang, was one of them, located in Dar es Salaam as Xinhua chief of post.18 This special press agency opened 16 offices all along Africa. But there might also have been CID agents, whose number remained unknown.

**Confronting Reality**

During the 1960s, it is easy to understand how the Chinese intelligence objectives were limited, even with it being valuable as an alternative diplomatic service, liaising with countries who were not prepared to deal openly with Beijing, or when the MFA at times caused rivalry and mistrust between the unofficial and official diplomats. It developed an intense activity to establish relations – before Taiwan – with new African independent countries (five after 1955, 15 during the 1960s19). Until 1966, always with Algerian support, the Second Department of the General Staff Department promoted two rebellions on the model followed between 1958 and 1962, in Zanzibar (January 1964),20 and in Congo-Libreville (1963–66).21 There was also the formation of national armies, in Cameroon, in Sierra Leone, in Togo, and in Zaire. Almost 2500 underground trainees were sent to the Nanjing and Shen-Yo military academies between 1958 and 1978 (Table 19.2). However,
Table 19.2  Military trainees in China 1958–1978

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<th>Countries</th>
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<td>350</td>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Zaire</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
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<td>Somalia</td>
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After 1966, the only great Chinese intelligence initiative was a limited support to the Angola guerrillas (1973–2002). Usually, the main explanation for this disappearance of revolutionary activity is the end of the African decolonization process and due to the beginning of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Of course, there were also the responses from the adversaries’ intelligence services, like the French *Service de documentation et de contre-espionnage* (SDECE, Documentation and Counter-Intelligence Service), the African section of the Belgian *Sûreté de l’État*, and, of course, the local services of the new African states. In 1960, a few days after that country’s independence, Cameroon’s *Service d’Etudes et de la Documentation* arrested six rebels returning from their six weeks’ guerrilla training in China.

The intelligence “Great game” has never been a game played alone. And China realized its limits in its intelligence capacities. The Algerian double surprise is a good example. First, the distance taken from China by the Algerian president, Ahmad Ben Bella, during the third AAPSO Conference, in Moshi, was not anticipated.22 Second, the subsequent Soviet interest in Algeria, seen as a key to Africa in the ideological contest with China, rather than with the West,23 remained unnoticed until the Algiers military coup (June 19, 1965). Even if the reason of the then Minister of Public Security Xie Fuzhi’s visit to Algiers in March (Ben Bella’s changing attitude? coup preparation? Ben Bella’s security?), remained unknown, it is clear he noticed nothing relative to the Soviet preparation. Furthermore, Ambassador Zeng Tao was surprised and urged his government to announce immediately support for the coup.24 This proved that none of the Chinese intelligence apparatus noticed the Soviet maneuver. Nonetheless, the changing attitude of the Algerians might have been noticed because, in August and September 1964, diplomatic treaties were signed with Tanzania and Ghana that allowed for a number of Chinese experts to train members of liberation movements at military training camps at Obenamasi25 and on nearby Pemba Island.26 Finally, China seemed to collaborate with the Holden Roberto initiative, the “Congo Alliance” (1936–May 1964), apart its *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (National Front for the Liberation of Angola), the Pan-Africanist Congress of South Africa, the *Comité revolucionario de Moçambique* (Revolutionary Committee of Mozambique), and the Zimbabwe African National Union. Apparently, the Chinese involvement in this strictly Pan-African initiative was limited to financing those liberation movements, as the Second Department
of the General Staff Department did with the Namibian South West Africa National Union.

In fact, those initiatives arrived at the same time as the Sino-Soviet split (1962) had forcefully spilled into the Third World and into Africa especially, where the two massive communist countries were in competition more than they had been allies. The “Congo Alliance” demonstrated it well; Roberto only sought to federate all the non-communist liberation movements. And effectively, all the Soviet-sponsored groups were outside Roberto’s alliance, but also out the Chinese orbit. In fact, after the Algerian defection, but also after the transfer of the revolutionary activities more to the south, it appeared necessary to redefine Chinese covert operations. But, in the climate of forced and hard competition with the Soviets, possibilities were limited. After the fourth AAPSO Conference (May 1965), “some interpreters felt that, at Winneba, the Soviets sought to have the Havana meeting replace what would normally be the next AAPSO Conference in an effort to minimize Chicom [Chinese communist] influence in AAPSO.”

The Algerian coup showed that the Soviets were determined to eliminate the Chinese from Africa. This threat, combined with the ideology of the Cultural Revolution, drove the Chinese intelligence services to adopt a new objective. The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimated, in November 1965:

Violence pervades Communist China’s view of the entire globe – she advocates starting revolutions where they can have only destructive results, (e.g., Congo (L), Burundi, Somalia, . . .); Chou En-lai’s ill-advised proposal to African leaders that ‘Africa is ripe for revolution’ is the verbal counter-part to CCP [Soviet Union] actions.

In October 1966, a French intelligence officer, Major Maurice Bat, operating in Africa, wrote to the SDECE in Paris:

China, today expelled from Ghana which was its strongest implantation in black Africa, remains influential in Somalia, Mali, and Congo-Brazzaville. [. . .] Brazzaville is [. . .] the only Chinese card in black Africa. His situation allows him to act both to the ex-Belgian Congo and to francophone Africa. In such a context, the People’s Republic of China plays and will play the Brazzaville card with the maximum of obstinacy.

Both Western intelligence services presented China driving to the wall. But they presented two different issues. Whereas the French feared a destabilization of the former French Congo, where it was preparing its own undermining, the United States viewed it as a more general threat that could damage the entire continent. The most important was that both gave a clear vision of the Chinese position just seven years after the apparition of the Second Department of the General Staff Department in the continent. Due to its involvement in the Algerian question, the French military intelligence, in Algiers as in Paris, followed the “Chinese penetration” in the Algerian conflict as in the whole of Africa. The French panic was a decline of its influence in Africa. On the contrary, the United States were clearly determined to minimize communist influence in a strategically vital, resource-rich location in central Africa. Their battlefront was the former Belgian Congo.

The Cultural Revolution prevented the Chinese from choosing also this position to transfer their activities from Algeria to Central Africa. Initially, a transitory post – between Dar es Salaam and Kinshasa – would have been located in Bujumbura (June 1964). The translation had been prepared by Kao Liang, acting as an alternative
diplomatic officer until the official relationship was signed (December 1963). Soon after, Chang Yen arrived officially to open the Chinese Embassy, but covertly took charge of the support (money, arms) coordination for the Congo’s Lumumba supporters as for Rwanda’s former king (1959–61) Kigeli V (Jean-Baptiste Ndahindurwa) and their Inyenzi partisans. But two spy affairs made the whole operation miscarry. After the Zanzibar and Congo’s Simba uprisings, Kao Liang was expelled from Mauritius (August 1964) and the Kenyan, Ugandan, and Tanzanian governments decided to limit the personnel of Chinese diplomatic missions to ten, and that of Xinhua to one. Then, a few days before the official opening of the Bujumbura Embassy, Tung Chi-Ping, a young “assistant cultural attaché,” defected to the CIA. He revealed the Chinese African strategy to the Western intelligence services. Last, on June 1964, the SDECE identified an expert in guerrilla warfare and subversion based, as first counselor, in the Chinese Embassy at Brazzaville; he was an old companion of Kao’s (Nepal, India), Colonel Kan Mai.

These events’ revelations, largely diffused in the local media, had a destructive effect for China after Zhou Enlai’s triumphal trip in Africa (December 1963–February 1964). As usual, accompanied by Luo Qingchang, the Chinese premier came to prepare the fourth AAPSO Conference (May 1965). But he had to manage the effects of the Zanzibar crisis (January 1964) and Ben Bella’s temptation “to impose [its] own will on others.” The total disorganization of the Chinese intelligence activities came in December 1965 when Chen Jiakang, “the most experienced diplomat in Africa,” was recalled in Beijing to become vice-foreign minister before dying in July 1970. This closed the short period of the Second Department of the General Staff Department in Africa (1958–66). French military intelligence files in Paris noticed only half-hearted activities in Mauritania (1971) and in Benin (1973).  

FROM THE “TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS” TO THE BELT & ROAD INITIATIVE

This first period could be seen as a “revolutionary” episode. For the Chinese intelligence services, it reflected an era of learning about African realities. After the Cultural Revolution, which contributed to a transformation of the perimeters of services, the Chinese analysis of Africa continued, and, from 1998 onward, opened a new era of the action of its services in Africa, more economical than ideological.

Founding New Ties

Chen’s recall and the Cultural Revolution did not mean the end of Chinese intelligence activities in Africa. On the contrary, they lost their coordination at a point that an observer said, in 1971, they “were bizarre.” It was less the activities of Chinese agents than those of their partisans, like political assassination in Burundi (1961) or Brazzaville Ange Bidie Diawara’s failed coup (1971–72). It was also sentiments in Congo about one of two Chinese military advisors acting really as a Maoist “missionaries” helped by an interpreter (July 1966). During the same period, some African journalists made the trip to Beijing to join Asian colleagues in an ideological formation. It seems that a “secret
war” intervened “for three years” with the Mossad after China began to express extensive support to the Palestinians (March 1964). After Kao Liang would have escaped death in Brazzaville, some Chinese agents would have been eliminated in Ghana, in Mali, and in Zambia by the secret Kidon (bayonet) assassinations unit, and at least one Israeli was killed in Congo. The Mossad would have been behind the fire that consumed an apartment block in Zanzibar where the local CID staff lived, and also behind the coup against Nkrumah. In 1967 or 1968, both services would have concluded “peace” through an intermediary, President Joseph Désiré Mobutu of Congo-Libreville.\(^4\)

Five years later, after Congo-Libreville was renamed Zaire, in 1971, Mobutu was received for the first time in Beijing.\(^4\) In January 1973, Zhou’s position inside the MFA was weakened by the Cultural Revolution, even if US President Richard Nixon’s visit (February 1972) has been credited to his efforts. But he was isolated. His friends Luo Qingchang (1966–73) and Liu Shaowen (1967) were purged. The CID was merged with the Second Department of the General Staff Department to spy on it (June 1963–March 1973). Even after Luo was returned as its head, the restored CID never was able to refine its international competences. As a sign of Zhou’s marginalization, they were substituted to the International Liaison Department (ILD, Zhongyang Duwai Lianhuobu) of the Central Committee of the CCP. Initially created in 1951 on the Soviet model for contacts, communications, and coordination with other communist parties around the world, it became more active after the Sino-Soviet split, working with Chinese embassies in various countries with the task of finding, investigating, and eventually supporting pro-Chinese splinter groups and malcontents, encouraging them to form so-called “Marxist-Leninist” parties in opposition to pro-Soviet “revisionist” parties. Therefore, its first new generation’s head, Geng Biao, was regarded more as an old comrade of Zhou Enlai’s.\(^4\)

This period was not favorable for intelligence, nor to Africa. First, at that time, the ILD was nothing more than a political police on the Sino-Soviet ideological front, and its African desk was the eightieth desk that came into use around the world. Second, in the MFA, the same disinterest was notable; the African Affairs Department, constituted in January 1964 by the other diplomat considered to be an African expert, He Ying, was occupied by young officers for only two or three years who knew “little about Africa.”\(^4\)

In 1970 and 1971, intelligence concerning the Soviet penetration in Somalia and in Sudan came from the Israeli Tevel liaison rather than Chinese agents on the ground.\(^4\) And the answer, especially in Somalia, was more diplomatic and economic. The Israeli warning was not devoid of ulterior motive: since the end of the 1950s, the Mossad manipulated the Anya Nya rebels in Southern Sudan and needed political stability in the North and not Maoist and “revolutionary” involvement like in the Congo during 1964–66. After the 1972 Sino-US détente, the same Chinese game seemed to be repeated in Mozambique, but with the South African Directorate of Military Intelligence; Tevel might have made the liaison between the Second Department of the General Staff Department and its South African counterpart. The deal was to let South Africa destabilize the pro-Soviet regime in Mozambique, and the Chinese organized, from Tanzania, a coup in Seychelles (June 1977). More generally, except for a rhetorical position during the Nigerian civil war (1967–70), China never took sides in the Western Sahara dispute and in the Chadian civil war (1965–88).

In fact, the intelligence interest in Africa during the 1970s and 1980s differed from the 1960s. Of course, the Cultural Revolution drastically reduced the importance of Africa
for Chinese decision makers, except the already-ill Zhou Enlai. But warnings to the West of Soviet strategic designs in Central Africa uttered by the Chinese, like Vice-Premier Li Xiannian to a British delegation (March 1977), reflected a lack of capacities from their intelligence services in this area. All their competences were employed to overcome their great fear of a Soviet “strategic naval encirclement” by entering the Indian Ocean.47 Viewed in this background, the June 1977 Seychelles coup took on another significance. It appeared as a part of a mission induced by the intelligence arrangement concluded with the CIA, after National Security Counselor Henry Kissinger (Polo) and Zhou negotiated (1970–72), and concretized by the opening of a CIA station in Beijing (February 1973).48 Zhou’s last decisions before he died (1976) were to open new embassies in Mauritius (1972) and in the Comoro Islands (1975), like he did all around Congo-Libreville in the mid-1960s. This strategy was completed with the Chinese decision to follow the Angolan leader Holden Roberto, asking in Beijing (December 1973) for the resumption of Chinese support to his party; it seemed he had some meeting with the ILD Africa head, probably “Chang Tang.”49 Ten years later (July 1983), the Chad foreign minister, Idriss Miskine, came to the Chinese capital for military supplies against Libya, but the ILD refused, opening a similar Chad demand to France.50 The Chinese Angolan concern revealed China’s obsession with the Soviets much more than by the West. During the summer of 1979, the ILD accepted the French proposition made by a SDECE Service Action officer, Ivan de Lignières (Lionel Deham), to the Chinese embassy, to deliver the weapons supply to the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), forbidden by the French political authorities.51

This renewal of interest in Africa, seen as the western element to the Indian Ocean regional stability, was underlined by the first tour in the region since 1964 of an intelligence head (August–September 1980). The Minister of the ILD, Ji Pengfei, accompanied by vice-foreign affairs minister and acting African affairs director Gong Dafei, visited six eastern African countries.52 Aside from Madagascar, where the East German Stasi (Staatssicherheitsdienst, State Security Service) were solidly installed inside the local Direction générale de l’information et de documentation, intérieure et extérieure (General Directorate of Information and Documentation, Internal and External), all those countries were resisting a Soviet offensive. Useful tools in keeping the Soviets from making further inroads in Africa until the Cold War’s ending, the Chinese intelligence services remained troubled after the Soviet/Russia–US détente (1989–2003). It was also because they were not receiving new missions regarding Africa before 1998. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and its General Staff Department were in a particular position inside. They were implicated in selling and smuggling weapons since the 1960s, but also in forming some national African armies; there always were some military instructors remaining in this continent. At the intelligence level, the Second Department continued to gather information from the military attachés (at least 14 out of the 107 Chinese military attaché offices worldwide are in African countries) and the Xinhua correspondents-cum-intelligence operatives (Table 19.3).

The Xinhua network revealed the Chinese intelligence focus of interest beginning in the 1980s better than any explanation. These countries offered keys to understanding the Soviet penetrations and clandestine operation (Madagascar), as well as to localize the Second Department’s operation in Angola (Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Congo, Zaire, Zambia, and Tanzania). This long and particular knowledge of western
Table 19.3  The African Xinhua network in 1982

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Senegal and Mauritania, Mali, Gambia, Guinea,</td>
</tr>
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<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
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and southern Africa permitted China, since the 1990s, to participate in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions to avoid any isolation after the détente following the Soviet collapse. Since its first engagement in 1989 in Africa, the PLA participated in 17 UN missions, especially in Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sudan, and Ivory Coast.

Jiang Zemin’s “Going Out Strategy” (1996–2000) marked the beginning for Chinese intelligence of a new interest in Africa. During this period, many meetings were organized to define a new strategy in each administration. According to its long and permanent implication in Africa, the PLA began first in 1998 by a conference of Beijing’s military planners, among them Major General Xian Guangkai, intelligence chief of the Second Department. The “White Paper” that emerged from the commission underlined the PLA economic implications. It advised the Chinese deciders on the shifting role of African armies in peacekeeping deployment operations across the continent, and the reluctance of Western countries to get involved in such operations, but also on the need to aggressively increase arms sales to these countries as well as to step up training programs for the armed forces to counter Western training programs. In late July 1999, a joint regional meeting was held between the country’s various security organs to discuss intelligence operations in Africa. Strangely, it was organized under the aegis of the Ministry of State Security (MSS, Gongheguo guojia anquan bu or Guoanbu), created in June 1983, responsible initially for political security and counterintelligence in non-military areas of interest. Because a large part of its effectiveness was learnt from the CID or Jia Chunwang’s admiration for the CIA, or simply benefitted from the Tiananmen crackdown, the MSS soon developed a competence for foreign and business intelligence.

As an illustration, the 1999 meeting was chaired by his third minister (1998–2007), Xu Yongyue, an old counterintelligence operator, and hosted Wan Chun Xie, the main figure in MSS’s African intelligence gathering networks, Zou Jiahua, analyst and internal advisor to the Intelligence Directorate, and Cheng Yu Wei, head of the coordinating committee that designates intelligence agents that must be included in all Chinese trade and economic missions into Africa. In late 1999, a closed seminar on a “Twenty-first Century
Development Strategy for Sino-African Relations” was held under the auspices of the Chinese Research Society on African Affairs to prioritize, among other topics, intelligence activities with the global strategy regarding Africa: strengthening development aid to African countries in general, concentrating specifically on energy-producing countries and avoiding those maintaining diplomatic relations with the Taiwan government.54

Using New Tools?

In 1999, the new African Intelligence Strategy reflected the major Chinese political and economic preoccupations. As it was to accompany a new scramble for Africa, a new intelligence player was needed. In contrast to the 1960s or 1980s strategies, political and military tools were not adapted to the Chinese decision-makers’ needs of information. The first, not really specific to Africa, was linked with China’s internal security. Among the millions making up the Chinese diaspora in this continent, like in South Africa, in Ethiopia, or in Tanzania, there were elements forming the so-called “bamboo network,” credited for their immense contributions to the development of their home economies.55 But because the CCP’s discourses during the Cultural Revolution characterized them as “traitors,” it was not advisable to ask them to finance both China’s transition from totalitarianism to marketplace decision-making and the rapid expansion of other regional economies, like in Southeast Asia. For a similar CID mission like in the late 1950s, new types of “missionaries” had to be used instead of the classical Second Department or the ILD agents. The Second (International Intelligence) and Third (Politics and Intelligence) Bureaus, of the MSS’s Second Department (Intelligence), were respectively responsible for international strategic intelligence gathering and national economic and technological information collection. Clearly, one specialized in espionage and the other, created in 2000, in business intelligence. The Third Bureau usually works with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation’s, then the Ministry of Commerce’s (2003), Business Intelligence Unit, created in 1997, and two “private” companies, the China International Trust and Investment Company, and the China National Petrochemical Corporation.56 This dispositive is completed by the Fifth Bureau of the United Front Work Department (UKDW), a CCP structure managing relations with non-Communist Party elites, including individuals and organizations holding social, commercial, or academic influence, or who represent important interest groups, both inside and outside China.57 Concerning Africa, where it controls 170 Chinese expatriates’ associations, the UKDW forms the spine of the “bamboo network” better than any other organization; and the new “missionaries” are among their members.

This business intelligence structure gathers to the Ministry of Commerce 70 percent of its economic information. It is also supposed to be interested in South Africa’s Pebble Bed Modular Reactor by Pretoria’s National Intelligence Agency.58 The rest is provided by the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, launched in Beijing in October 2000,59 like the old AAPSO that was created in Cairo. In both cases, it is seen by China as a tool to intensify interactions and formalizing relationships with Africa, the 2000s initiative capitalizing on long experience because its origins can be traced to half a century ago. To follow the comparison with the former Chinese intelligence policy, we must notice that the foreign minister made an annual trip with a group of selected Africans for high-level meetings (since January 2001), and the PLA hosted African officers, like Colonel Emmanuel
Ndahiro, general secretary of Rwanda’s National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), to its National Defence University, in Changping. At the intelligence level, it is notable that the Mauritius National Intelligence Unit, Nigeria’s National Investigation Agency and Rwanda’s NISS, certainly Libya’s Mukhabarat el-Jamahiriya (Intelligence of the Jamahiriya) and perhaps the Algerian Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (Department of Intelligence and Security), had been trained, in the beginning of the 2000s, to business intelligence by MSS instructors. These business intelligence structures are focused on influence over China’s African economic objectives as energy-producing countries (Angola, Nigeria, Chad, South Sudan) or port control (Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Durban, Djibouti). This last objective is essential to the success of the Belt & Road Initiative, particularly in its “twenty-first-century Maritime Silk Road,” unveiled in autumn 2013.

As for the “Twenty-first Century Development Strategy for Sino-African Relations,” the intelligence community has been closely associated with the development of the new strategy. At the MSS head, the fourth minister (2007–16), Geng Huichang, was the first to have a background in international politics rather than internal security; he is an international relations specialist and is considered an expert on industrial espionage. After a decennial of desuetude, the ILD found a new actuality with the Belt & Road Initiative. In February 2016, it co-sponsored the “Belt & Road” International Think-Tank Alliance Conference, in Shenzhen. The two last heads, Wang Jiaryl (2003–15, after being vice-director 2000–2003) and Song Tao (since 2015), have an economic background, the first coming from the Ministry of Commerce (1993–95), the second having worked directly for Fujian’s enterprises (1978–2001). Inside the MFA, the ILD has more room to maneuver, undertake policy initiatives, and delegate authority and influence to the field. It seems to have been the intelligence service dealing with the African states that remained in diplomatic relations with the Taiwan government. Between 1994 and 2013, like in Malawi 1964 and 1967, MFA agents used the same corrupting tool, but without asserting this proposition to an assassination attempt. This time, to avoid any Taiwan National Security Bureau detection, the negotiation was conducted at the United Nations in New York. This operation led to 13 African states switching their diplomatic relations in favor of China; only Swaziland and Burkina Faso remain linked to Taiwan.

Taiwan did not remain without reaction and tried to use the same financial tool too. But it has had to face the MSS agents’ scrutiny, like in Liberia (2003) and Senegal (2005). A special MSS team was constituted to detect any Taiwanese financial support during the different electoral campaigns to presidential candidates in a country that had just tied diplomatic relations with China. But Chinese agents had also to deal with local intelligence and security services; a country like Burkina Faso has even created in 2016 its national intelligence agency, after having instituted a Homeland Intelligence Coordination Centre in 2011, which it did not need until then. Of course, the main reason for the Burkinabe creation had to do with the region’s terrorism and violent extremism. China also faces those particular threats in Africa under three different aspects. Of course, the first is linked with the 114 Uyghurs who had already joined the Islamic State in Syria, and especially the few of them who appeared in the Sahel region since 2015. This specific question is treated by the MSS Eighteenth Department (Counter-Terrorism) in Beijing and agents deployed in two Chinese embassies, in Harare and Bissau; this explains why some critics came from the PLA after the Malian hotel siege in November 2015. MSS agents

The aim of the Chinese base’s opening in Djibouti – decided in autumn 2015 and operating since summer 2017 – is also to contribute to protect Chinese citizens and infrastructure in Africa. It also offers a chance to the Second Department of the General Staff Department to make its comeback in Africa. Between 1996 and 2016, it closely prepared the ten large-scale evacuations of nationals from foreign countries, notably twice in Libya (2011, 2014), due to riots, wars, or natural disasters, typically with minimum military participation. But the actual economic orientation of Chinese intelligence needs in Africa have left PLA quite apart. This return is also the result of a major change in the Chinese strategy regarding Africa. Since the launch of the “twenty-first-century Maritime Silk Road” program, the traditional intelligence implantation, coming from the 1980s, had to move. In the classical conception, the Dar es Salaam Embassy was leading. The political penetration in Sudan, in Zimbabwe, and in the Democratic Republic of Congo responded to a long operation from Tanzania. With the new strategy, and especially after Djibouti’s PLA base opening, the gravity center moved north. The MSS seems to have anticipated this move, operating in four embassies (Cairo, Khartoum, Luanda, and Pretoria) on a North–South axis, but also in Abuja’s one. The finishing destabilization of Taiwan’s positions, classically from the embassy of a neighboring country, like in Gabon from Nigeria, as similarly the economic penetration, like in Chad, and espionage, like in South Africa from Mozambique, urge to cover the whole continent. Projects to be undertaken under the Belt & Road Initiative framework in Africa are located in Bizerte, Tunisia; Dakar, Senegal; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Djibouti, Djibouti; Libreville, Gabon; Maputo, Mozambique; and Tema, Ghana.

Any arbitration will come from Beijing. There, only the MFA has the very few reservoirs of expertise and field intelligence, yet positions in Africa are less coveted than those in Europe or North America, resulting as always in a comparatively shallow bench for talent. However, the confrontation with Western interests – French, British, but mostly US – will be decisive. In São Tomé and Principe, the MSS obtained the diplomatic reconnaissance (2016), but the Ministry of Commerce’s Business Intelligence Unit missed the petroleum exploration (2004). And American diplomatic and military relations with this island are becoming closer (2005). It could be the same in Djibouti, where French, American, Japanese, and Italian armies have also a presence, that other questions than African security will concern intelligence services. If MSS will surely spy on US communications, Japanese divers already approached a Chinese warship (2017). And what about the Indian Research & Analysis Wing as well as the Indian embassy in Zimbabwe that suffered a hacking from a supposed Chinese Shadow Network less than two years after India formalized its First India Africa Forum Summit (2008)? The Indian African interests are also located in Southeast Africa!
Of course, Africa and Chinese intelligence has a long history. Since its clandestine meeting in Beijing or elsewhere with African national liberation leaders, to its preoccupations nowadays with economics, its implication changed drastically, more because of Chinese internal political choice than because of a changing interest for Africa. The Sino-Soviet split transformed the revolutionary paradigm in an objective contribution to the West’s Cold War. Nowadays, the Belt & Road Initiative seems to offer a new concept for the Chinese intelligence services in Africa after the 1958–64 one. That’s why the actual deployment of their activities seems so similar to their 1960s strategy; it might be trivial to note it, so true is it that intelligence services are used to repeating their successful operations. Instead of revolution, the new Chinese need is a peaceful Africa, in order to be a steady Maritime Silk Road periphery. It reveals a lack of Africa in China’s long-term interests. It is enough to look to the publications’ themes produced by the various research centers associated with the intelligence services, like the Chinese People’s Institute for Foreign Affairs (MFA/ILD), the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (MSS), or the China Academy of International Trade and Economy Cooperation (Ministry of Commerce). There are too few studies on Africa to suggest a real political interest, other than the search for African diplomatic support (already Gambia, Kenya, Mauritania, Togo, Burundi, Lesotho, and Niger) in the South China Sea dispute.

At the intelligence level, this Chinese internal political support has always been decisive for the African operations. It explains why, during the 1970s and the 1990s, the Chinese intelligence played the CIA’s auxiliary. Before this period, the Maoist exaltation generated a strong reaction from Western intelligence services; the archives also reveal a Western politicization around the old “Yellow peril” much more caused by a sentiment of submersion generated by the world penetration of Chinese ideology than by the African action of the Second Department of the General Staff Department. Since the MSS appeared in Africa, quite 40 years after, there has been opened a new period of “Yellow peril,” founded on a Western feeling of decline linked to Chinese economic performance, rather than the reality of the Chinese intelligence activities. Except for support to Chinese enterprises, the same main preoccupations characterized them: limiting Taiwan’s diplomatic audience, gaining support during international negotiations concerning Asia, and preventing the emergence in the Indian Ocean of another power, namely India.

NOTES


19. Egypt (1956); Algeria, Morocco (1958); Sudan, Guinea (1959); Ghana, Mali, Somalia (1960); Zaïre (1961); Uganda (1962); Burundi, Kenya (1963); Benin, Central African Republic, Congo (Brazzaville), Tanzania, Tunisia, Zambia (1964); and Mauritania (1965).


28. FOIA CIA, CIA-RDP78-03061A000300050004-1, AFRO-ASIAN-LATIN AMERICAN PEOPLES SOLIDARITY CONFERENCE, 8 November 1965.


35. United Arab Republic (currently Egypt), Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana, Mali, Guinea, Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia.
37. Larkin, China and Africa, 181.
38. SHD, 9 Q5 86*, 107*.
40. Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions, 165.
41. SHD, 9 Q5 101*.
43. SHD, 9 Q5 74–4*.
46. Thomas, Gideon’s Spies, 250.
49. FOIA CIA, CIA-RDP85T08875RO01000010043-9, 52-53. His identification is still classified.
52. Kenya, Burundi, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Djibouti.
63. RD Fisher, China’s Military Modernization: Building for Regional and Global Reach (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008), 37.


68. *South China Morning Post*, November 22, 2015.

