

China-Africa Sports Exchanges Since the Establishment of Focac: Look Back and Look Ahead

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Abstract: Sports, as an important branch of people-to-people and cultural exchanges between China and Africa, plays an important role in promoting the overall development of society and economy, and enhancing national identity of different ethnic groups and also the mutual understanding of people in different nations. However, compared with other humanities fields, sports exchanges between China and Africa has lagged far behind, so the future China-Africa sports cooperation and exchanges should take the promotion of capacity-building, economic development and popular national identity among African countries as the main guidelines. Besides the traditional way of stadiums construction, financial support and sports coaching aid, the future cooperation should adhere to the principles of unity, cooperation, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, giving full play to all aspects like competitive or mass sports, as well as sports events, education, industry and tourism and related research, to facilitate the construction of a civilized, peaceful and prosperous Africa and mutual understanding.

1. Introduction

I. Introduction:

Sports, as one important field of people-to-people and cultural exchanges and cooperation, can help mutual understanding and good relations of people in different ethnic groups or nations, form favorable foundation of harmonious development with low cost, no barrier to communicate, much ease to manage and accept. Nowadays sports is commonly acceptable as one international silent language for people in different corners of the big world to communicate and also as one essential means to build good relations in the international diplomatics. China-US ping-pong diplomacy in the 1970s, Beijing Asian Games in 1990 and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games are excellent episodes of Chinese sports communication, and Lang Ping, Yao Ming and other sports coaches or players or more foreign sports athletes in China are good examples of sports in promoting communication and cooperation between China and the world. In comparison, sports exchanges in China and African nations has lagged further behind other domains in the present bilateral cooperation, though much progress has been made.

2. Review of Sports Cooperation in the Focac Plan:

The China-Africa Cooperation Forum has been attaching importance to sports exchanges and cooperation of the two sides as early as its establishment in 2000. The first ministerial conference held in Beijing from 10 to 12 October in that year charted the direction for the development of a new, stable and long-term partnership featuring equality and mutual benefit between China and African countries. At this meeting *The Programme for China and Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development* was signed with approval, which explicitly advocated “increasing cultural exchanges, particularly the visits of high-level cultural delegations in sports and art “^[1]. *The 2006 Beijing Summit Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation* stressed enhancing China-Africa cooperation in fields like culture, science, and sports included, too^[2].

Not long before the fourth ministerial conference *The Implementation of the Follow-up Actions of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*^[3] published, made a comprehensive summary of China-Africa cooperation since the third conference from six areas. Its

fourth part deals with cultural and people-to-people cooperation, in which Article 6 is about sports. And the ministers in charge of foreign affairs and economic cooperation from China and 49 African countries attending the fourth conference reached and issued *the Declaration of Sharm El Sheikh of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*^[4], once again emphasizing the exchanges of culture, sports and tourism, and *the Sharm el-Sheikh Action Plan*^[5] approved by the two sides made sports cooperation as one independent field for the first time since 2000. Three year later *the Beijing Declaration of the Fifth Ministerial Conference*^[6] reaffirmed the continuous strengthening of the new strategic partnership between China and Africa following the principles of political equality and mutual trust, win-win economic cooperation and reciprocal exchanges and mutual learning, agreeing with a new round of exchanges in such fields as culture, education, sports and tourism. Sports was stressed one more time in *the Fifth Ministerial Conference Action Plan*^[7]. *China's African Policy Paper*^[8] was publicized in the Johannesburg Summit and the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Forum held in South Africa from 3 to 5 December in 2015, making explicit statement to expand the exchanges and cooperation in cultural and sports activities, making special emphasis on sports exchanges and cooperation with a new leaf to begin china's assistance to African sports. Indeed, *the Declaration of the Johannesburg Summit*^[9] and *the Beijing Summit Declaration of 2018*^[10] both emphasized much closer exchanges, learning and cooperation in sports between the two sides. Besides FOCAC exchange and cooperation, China has also established its first high-level intergovernmental human exchange mechanism with countries like U.S., Russia, France, U.K., etc., to foster and deepen the understanding, friendship of Chinese people and other foreigners, among which South Africa as an African example^[11]. The mechanism is equally attaching great importance to cooperation and exchange of sports.

However, compared with the progress in many other fields, sports exchanges in China and Africa is marching far behind. There was little mention of sports cooperation in the declarations and action plans prior to 2009. *The 2009 Action Plan* (2010~2012) is the first concerning sports as stated in the fifth section of the sixth part, but pitifully no concrete actions or activities. Similarly, the action plan for 2013-2015 took sports one independent area as in 2010-2012, but so general as in one sentence "the two sides encourage and support sports exchanges and cooperation, with specific activities to be decided by the two sides". Contrasted to other areas, no more concrete programs or events was specified. *The Paper on China's Africa Policy* made clear claim of sports exchanges and cooperation, however, it put priority to China's one-side support and assistance to Africa, but with no cooperation projects scheduled. The Declaration of the Johannesburg Summit placed great importance on the close exchanges, still there was little sports embodied in the plan. As previously, further exchanges, mutual learning, and cooperation in sports was encouraged as culture, education, but poorly as only stated in "people-to-people exchanges" section.

Correspondingly, one cannot retrieve news involving the sports activities on the subject webpage of FOCAC. Such relevant news began report from 2019, but relatively or small in coverage or scope.

3. Sports Cooperation and Exchanges: New Vision

Nowadays, much greater progress has been made at faster pace in China-Africa cooperation, with great achievements gained. But sports exchanges fail to keep up with. It calls for instant measures and actions to be taken to make up for the previous loss and deficiency. Accordingly, the two sides should make persistent efforts in the following sides as the new direction of future cooperation.

1) Competitive Sports

Today, competitive sports have been commonly acceptable as an important index to reflect the comprehensive strength and the spiritual outlook of a nation or people. Sports of this kind plays an irreplaceable role in promoting the all-round development of human beings, improving the people's physical quality, enriching the spiritual and cultural life of the civilians, developing their patriotism and strengthening the unity and cohesion in the people. 1984 was the first time that P. R. China participated in the Olympic Games, winning 15 golds, 8 silvers, and 9 bronze medals, also being the

top fourth in the gold medals table. In 2000 Sydney Olympic Games China ranked the third in the gold as well as in the whole medal standing with a total of 59 medals and into the first top group since then. China has won a globally good reputation as being invincible in such areas as gymnastics, weightlifting, shooting, women's volleyball, table tennis, and badminton, but poor in track and field, basketball, especially the men's football, which happen to be the strength of Africa. Long-distance runners in Ethiopia and Kenya have been winning as the champion in not only the Olympics but also other world-level tournaments. In addition to their inborn talents, geographical advantages, social support, world-leading training techniques and powerful back-up from the government in the two countries are key to their brilliant performance in the world arena^[12]. 2019 Basketball World Cup was the first time that China failed to make the final 16, so miserably, so did the Africans. But still there was one African team Nigeria played with brilliant glamour, ranking first both in tackles and blocks, second in rebounds. Another typical example is South Africa's men's football, twice reaching the final in the men's football world cup. Their good performance, together with the strong interest and enthusiasm, helped them to be the host country for 2010 world cup, setting a good example to China.

In view of the above, China is up to seek more opportunities to frequent its communications and cooperation with some African strong powers in sports items such as long-distance running with Ethiopia and Kenya, short running with Jamaica, and football with South Africa, in such a variety of means as joint training, friendship or invitation matches, to extend more fields or scopes of medals in the international sports events. As for China, the assistance of Chinese sports coaches to Africa should be continuously pushed, helping to facilitate much greater advancement of competitive sports in African countries and expand the weight of African competitive sports in the world. Worthy of note is coaching the athletes should involve regular consultation and frequent communication with each other in sports cooperation, learning to listen to opinions, suggestions and even complaints from the other side, being alert to any discomfort or ill symptoms, sparing no efforts to fit new coaching methods and techniques to new athletes' different living habits and physical features. Each side should alert themselves to stop the re-emergence of an instance that some Chinese applied for earlier departure than scheduled because of their strong fear of being trained to good-for-nothing when the African coaches failed to target with the distinct conditions of Chinese runners in the high-intensity training^[13].

2) Mass Sports

Consistent weight and importance has been attached to mass sports in China as equally as to competitive ones. Mass sports, also interpreted as social sports or public sports, refer to sports activities of many different forms engaged by unprofessional mass voluntarily with a wide range of purposes like body build, physical fitness, entertainment, relaxation or social communication^[14]. Mass activities are endowed with many benefits like convenience in time, space or types, seldom being restricted by age, sex, hobby or occupation of participants, open to people of all walks of life, functioning multiply as improving people's physical quality, enriching their spiritual life, regulating and enhancing people's life into increasing comfort and fascination, and impetus to more understanding and friendship besides the prevention and treatment of physical deficiency or occupational disease. Sports popular in mass also help to raise the life quality and happiness of people to much more satisfactory.

In 1952, China Chairman Mao Zedong dedicated the inscription to sports work of the newly-founded China "Developing sports exercises helps to strengthen people's physique", which specified the objectives and directions of the sports of socialism China, and also doubled people's devotion to sports exercises. From then on, mass sports represented by setting-up exercise to radio music have flourished in China, and thus more people's health improved a lot. *National Fitness Program Outline in China*, the first plan of mass sports in history, was issued in 1995. And in 2009, the first legal document centering sports fitness, *China National Fitness Regulations*, was promulgated. Furthermore, mass sports has been under a lot better development with further clarified top-level design and optimized long-term planning since the 18th National Congress of China Communist Party. Mass fitness program was promoted in 2014 as a national strategy, and

therefore its important position was further strengthened in building a well-off society.

The success of the 2008 Beijing Olympics filled Chinese with more passion and fervour in participating sports exercises. Mass sports stepped into a new period, as square dance, Taijiquan, fancy rope skipping and others flourishing nation-widely, sports fitness and sports tourism blossomed into a new consumption if hot spot and life fashion. However, compared with competitive sports, exchanges in mass sports between is developing at a low pace. Indeed, mass sport events, small-scale recreational sports and nationalities' fun games can benefit Africans in many ways. What comes as practically significant to Africa is that mass sport events are a real facilitator in improving the health, in particular, an effective way to reduce the probability of being infected with some local epidemics. More importantly, mass sports activities can help to form a solid foundation in the construction of a peacefully unified nation with many nationalities for these activities entail many opportunities in communication and understanding of different tribes or ethnic groups. These are more realistic in sense of identity and solidarity to regions or nations populated with dozens of ethnic groups with turbulent disturbance, which is of sovereign importance.

The work for the two sides in future is to be centered on more exchanges concerning the planning and development of mass sports, the construction of national public fitness service system and the legislation on public service for national fitness. The exchanges can also incorporate the lessons from the inadequacies that China have exposed in the development of mass sports activities, such as blind imitation in small and medium-sized cities and rural areas, lack of guidance in scientific training methods on the citizens in particular specifically for the disabled or women in pregnancy, and the noise trouble of square dancing into the residents nearby.

3) Hosting major sports events

Competitive sports are effective in stimulating people's enthusiasm to physical exercise, raise the people's awareness of fitness and health, enriching their spiritual and cultural life. Besides, they can also function a role in facilitating the well-equipped of sports infrastructure, the improvement of comprehensive urban management, the acceleration of civilization and the sound development of industrial structure, besides economic prosperity in urban areas. However, what a pity is that the 19th World Cup, and the African Games (also known as the Pan-African Games or the All-Africa Games) are the two largest sporting events in Africa and the continent is the only one of having been excluded from hosting the Olympic Games and thus the color of black has failed to display its due glamour in symbolizing Africa continent in the Olympic flag. African countries, like Egypt and South Africa, once had the will to bid for the Olympic Games, but failed for not being qualified in the economic strength, hardware facilities, domestic environment. And more crucially is that most Africa countries are not affordable to host. Beijing is about to become the first city globally to have ever hosted the Summer as well as the Winter Olympics on its own strength. Other major cities in China have also experienced in hosting many large regional games such as the Asian Games, the East Asian Games or some global sport events of one single item, having rich experience of application, organization and management of global sport events, the construction and maintenance of stadiums and gymnasium, and security and publicity affairs together with opening and closing ceremonies, which is assets to exchange and cooperate with Africans.

In the years to come Africa countries may go to host the Olympics on one's own or jointly with preferential policies rendered by the Olympic Committee¹. As a long tradition in modern times China has assisted Africa's competitive sports in such different means as the construction of sports gyms, the donations of sports apparatus and financial support. But the more pressing task the two sides are to be taken now is the cooperation in Olympics and other major global sport events. Presently Africa may learn to accumulate more experiences and resources for future Olympics by hosting some continental or regional major sport events or as the home of some famous brand games in the world. And China can make its cooperation with Africa in large-scale sports events by co-organizing or co-hosting with African countries, and also by ways like investing in stadiums and

¹ President of the International Olympic Committee Jacques Rogge said once that the IOC will render some referential policies to Africa if it intends to host the Olympics.

gymnasiums, donating sports equipment, assisting with professional and technical personnel, training referees, doctors and volunteers, in the construction and maintenance of sports venues, in financing, broadcasting, advertising, sponsoring and servicing. In addition, some African countries that wish to bid for the Olympic Games or other major international events may take the initiative to build its contact with some famous-brand Chinese companies majoring in sports equipment, sports shoes and clothing manufacturers, sports culture and advertising media to invest or open new branches on the continent, so as to grow its necessary potentials and capacities concerned in preparation for the new Olympics in the future.

4) The cultivation of professional talents

China has been for several decade helping Africans in the cultivation of professional athletic talents by sending sports coaches and teachers abroad or accepting African students into Chinese universities or professional institutions. African sport students has been enrolled in Beijing Sports University began since 1978 and in 2006 Shanghai Institute of Physical Education also began accepting Africans. So far the two universities have accepted a total of over 100 international sports students from Africa^[15]. The other way is that China cooperate cultivating the sports talents for African countries by offering the sports courses and curriculum in the Confucius Institute abroad. In addition, the cooperation has also been realized by Chinese athletics' sports performance in Africa.

In Africa a very large number of competitive sports talents are cultivated by domestic and foreign brokers or headhunters following the routine of being hunted, short-term trained and then sent abroad to participate the U.S. and European leagues, mainly driven by profits. This can satisfy the anticipation and physical need of the African's, i.e., to earn a better life by serving for the western countries. Only a small number are lucky enough to receive the formal school education or to study abroad and eventually become the professionals. But it is a fact never to be neglected that the short-sighted way that most Brokerage companies adopt in sending African sports players to European contests is bad to the sustainable development of African sports. The two dominant ways that African sportsmen in service to other nations or African athletes joining the international sports events personally instead of as a member of their state team, do much harm to themselves and the nation. Their participation in international sports by themselves or for others is neither helpful to create the fame of African players, nor is conducive to the recognition or affiliation to their own countries and nationalities. And increasingly, more and more cases have happened to African athletes in recent years of the violation of civil rights or economic interests even a fatal threat to African athletes when going internationally by appealing to brokerage agents.

Accordingly, the future direction is that top-ranking sports universities or institutions in China go to Africa to start their Africa campuses or or take the form of joint education and training in competitive athletes. The cooperation must attach adequate attention to the following aspects as the foundation of future cooperation. First, a consensus must be reached that training of African personnel should give priority to arousing awareness of national identity and patriotism of African athletes, helping to establish the patriotic consciousness and the struggle spirit for their nations. Secondly, the two sides should strive for the construction of the reciprocally bilateral cooperation in future. Up to the present a larger proportion of cooperation has been realized in that China has unilaterally trained sports talents for Africans. In contrast, few plans or measures have been made that African coaches or teachers offer professional guidance and help to Chinese athletes, nor has a lot of programs that Chinese athletes go to study in Africa or African coaches and tutors take sports education or act as guide coach in China. The third aspect of paramount significance is in the cooperation of schooling sports, which will benefit two sides in further improvement of athletes' sports competitiveness and the friendship as well as the civilians with far-reaching effect and all-round progress. The future cooperation should focus on the comprehensive quality of sports personnel, giving prominence to the formalization and professional development of sports majors in institutions of higher education, frequent exchanges in sports courses of basic grades in elementary and secondary schools. The exchange and cooperation should also lay much stress on the selection and training of younger students with innate sports talents. And the last task in the future is the recruitment of some African athletes, who once performed well in foreign leagues and now in

retirement for reasons such as age or injury, return home country or come to China as sports training personnel.

5) Sports industry.

Sports industry includes the manufacture and sales of sports equipment as well as sports clothes and shoes, competitive events, sports performances, fitness and entertainment, rental of sports venues and facilities, sports brokerage and agency, design, advertising and exhibition, together with sports education and training, information-consulting, architecture, lottery, and tourism, commonly been acceptable as the sunrise industry in the new century. It has many extraordinarily important roles and functions like improving the people's physical quality, promoting high social productivity, meeting people's diverse needs in daily lives, invigorating the national spirit, accelerating the development of sports cause and human beings, and promoting the whole society into more civilized. In contrast with the westerners, sports industry started a little later in China. In June 1995, *The Outline for the Development of the Sports Industry (1995-2010)* was issued by the National Sports Administration, formally proposing for the first time in the history the establishment of a modern sports industry system in line with the laws of modern sports, the system characterized with full ranges, reasonable structures and standardized development. Since then, a series of policy documents have been issued one after another like *The Guidance on Speeding up the Development of Sports Industry* (2010), *Opinions on Speeding up the Development of Sports Industry and Promoting Sports Consumption* (2014), *Guidance on Speeding up the Development of Fitness and Leisure Industry* (2016), *Opinions on Promoting National Fitness and Sports Consumption and High Quality Development of Sports Industry* (2019). Driven by this, China's sports industry come into a new stage with faster pace to catch up with, its ranges being more wide-ranging, the size continuously expanding, and the structure more optimizing, in particular, sports clothes, shoes and other facilities developing so fast as to rank the second largest manufacturer and consumer in the world. There is no doubt that sports industry will definitely play a very important role in the present Africa in that it will not only facilitate the development of African economy but also enhance the unity of of many nationalities to form a harmonious nation-state. And thus, the future cooperation should take as the primary task the cultivation and development of African indigenous national sports brands. The cooperation can be made firstly in the research and production of sports facilities and equipment to establish Africans' manufacturing capacity in sporting goods and the whole volume is on the continuous increase. And secondly the two sides should exchange often to share the experiences in competitive sports, sports performance, fitness and leisure, information consultation, advertising, design, construction and decoration of stadiums and gymnasiums, stadiums and gymnasiums services, brokers, physical education and training, and also lottery, helping to build more comprehensive industrial chains of African's sports industry. The third should focus on the development of export-oriented sports service industry of Africans' by holding some globally renowned sports matches and events, to build a new superpower of sports industry in the whole world with scientific planning.

6) Sports tourism

With the rapid progress of human society, more people are desirous for a better life of high quality, which transforms tourism from traditionally sightseeing to participant experience, and consequently sports tourism a new fashion. Nowadays, sports tourism have already accounted for about a quarter of the total tourism income in most developed countries. As for China, Beijing is a convincing instance that sports games can be a great impetus to the tourism industry for the 2008 Olympic made the Bird's Nest, Water Cube and other Olympic venues the new tourist destinations. Now water surfing, snow sports, desert exploration, rock climbing, bungee jumping and some ethnic sports events with rich flavor of minorities have created unprecedented opportunities for the development of sports tourism in remote regions.

Accordingly, it should be the main direction of China-Africa cooperation in sports tourism that sports venues and training bases should be made better use of with the combination of local geography and geomorphology to develop new patterns of tourism like ecological, experience, adventure, and folk culture tours, to attract more tourists and to facilitate the leap-forward

development of sports cause. As for that purpose, the preliminary is to do a good job of publicity to open up overseas markets by taking sports events, cultures and tourism into a whole with various activities and real-life experiences. The sales and marketing of regional sports tourism could first invite dozens of famous international sports stars as the spokesmen to promote African sports tourism with the siphon effect of those sports stars as the first step to develop African sports tourism. Besides, each African nation must give full play to their own strength in sports items to hold some sports competitions, performances and service or trade activities, training bases or sports-theme parks to develop into sports cities or towns, as alternatives for the development of sports tourism in Africa.

7)Scientific research.

Now science and technology penetrates into all aspects of sports as basic motive force and essential element to realize the modernization and comprehensive development of sports cause. Sports cannot develop so rapidly in a healthy manner without the strong support of science and technology. It is common to find that some African sports players could always manage to appear in the international sports games as the champion only by leaning on their ethnic and physical strength, though their sports facilities and shoes are shabby and cheap to the extreme. But it is doubtless to say that this cannot last so long. Sooner or later, the day will come that the shabby and inferior shoes will block the Africans to stand as the top in the international long-distance running for “the leading area of modern sports industry is in the continuous advancement of the midsole of sneakers and also of garment textile technology”^[16]. Hereby, the first cooperation in sports scientific research is to strive to improve scientific and technological content and added-value of sports shoes and clothing, sports food or drinks by researching into the characteristics or qualities of plant products unique to African continent. Next to that, the two sides could make the cooperative research into the field of training of talents, sports industry, tourism, anti-fraud, anti-doping and so on. Last but not least, the two side must think highly of the cooperation in applying the latest communicative industry like the Internet, cloud computing, big data, 5G and even next-generation 6G in the organization, referee, service, broadcasting and publicity of sport events.

4. Conclusion:

In future the two sides, whether China or African nations, should do the best to remove or overcome the stumbling blocks, either in the physical or mental form, like geographical distance, asymmetric technology exchange, poor communication and traditional prejudices, to extend the breadth and width of exchanges and cooperation to benefit all the participants with a big win in economic interest. Exchanges and cooperation in competitive sports should give appropriate weight to the adaptability while turning to foreign coaching or guidance, never to do the things “to cut one’s own foot to fit others’ shoes”. Exchanges and cooperation of mass sports activities should pay attention to the realization of the function of promoting national identity of different ethnic groups to build a state-nation with integration and the peacefully sustainable development with few disturbance or conflicts by the great development of mass sports activities. The exchange and cooperation in competitive sports must take the hosting of the Olympic Games by African countries as the ultimate goal, strengthening the exchange of experience in many fields, such as event hosting and capacity building. The two sides should be mainly directed at joint education by some influential universities of sports from both sides and the absorption of some retired African sports talents into new services as coaches in the cooperation of sports education. The cooperation of sports industry should take cultivating the production capacity of sports goods in African countries as the primary task, extending the industrial chain and the added-value to promote the overall development of African sports industry. In this aspect the cooperation should make full use of stadiums, training bases, and mountains, plateaus, rivers, lakes as well as deserts to make Africa a new business card in global sports tourism by live performances of international sports stars from all parts of the world. Great importance should also be attached to the deep and frequent exchanges and cooperation in the field of sports scientific research between the two sides, making science and technology boost the revitalization of African competitive sports, the development of mass sports,

the hosting of sports events, the prosperity of the sports industry and the improvement and efficiency of sports tourism with a broad range of fields by taking more pragmatic measures and actions.

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