

8. China and the Chinese stadium diplomacy

As mentioned above in chapter 6, China and Chinese construction companies have built numerous venues in Africa. According to 'The Africa Report', China had built 52 stadiums in Africa up to spring 2010¹²⁹ and, according to our investigations; Chinese stadiums can be found in nearly 30 African nations. But several additional stadiums are currently under construction and China's interest in the construction of stadiums abroad extends not only to Africa, but to Central America, the Caribbean, Oceania and Asia.

Is there an underlying explanation?

China, as do many other countries, has various ways in which it formulates its foreign aid in developing and NIC countries. In the Chinese foreign aid, six key areas are prioritised: agriculture, industry, economic infrastructure, education, health care, and public facilities.¹³⁰

The construction of sports facilities is included together with the construction of public buildings, hospitals, cultural venues and the digging of wells for water supplies¹³¹ in the foreign aid area. In addition to the different foreign aid areas, China has various ways of implementing its aid programs. The form of assistance that China mainly offers when it comes to the construction of stadiums is named 'complete projects'.

When the complete projects are implemented, the Chinese stadiums are built with financial assistance from China in the form of grants or interest-free loans. An important aspect is that China is responsible for the entire process – from the initial planning stage to the stadium's completion.¹³² This means that China organises and is responsible for feasibility studies, design and construction; provides Chinese equipment, materials; and sends Chinese engineers and technical staff to lead and organise the projects. Until late 2009, China had built 85 stadiums in the form of foreign aid.¹³³

Another essential aspect is the policy that Chinese economic aid and technical assistance is based on:¹³⁴ equality and mutual benefits, respect from China of each country's sovereignty and no counterclaims for financial support and technical assistance – 'no strings attached'.¹³⁵

The Chinese policy has meant that China has not taken into account the countries' political situations and has built stadiums in countries with questionable political leadership and public governance, as its stadium projects in Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe, for example, have demonstrated.

¹²⁹ <http://www.theafricareport.com/index.php/201007023293023/sports/china-the-master-stadium-builder-3293023.html>

¹³⁰ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/21/c_13839683_10.htm

¹³¹ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/21/c_13839683_12.htm

¹³² http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/21/c_13839683_6.htm

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/21/c_13839683_17.htm

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Although Chinese-built stadiums only accounted for about four percent of China's complete projects abroad by the end of 2009¹³⁶ and the fact that there are no official counterclaims from China, a pattern appears when looking at the various Chinese stadiums projects abroad that suggests that China has both economic and political objectives it wants to achieve through its stadium projects.

Free trade agreements have been made in connection with the stadium deals, which are naturally said to benefit both the recipient countries and China.^{137 138} However, there were, and still are, concerns that the Chinese goods and contractors out-compete domestic goods and job opportunities.^{139 140} Another financial issue is that in connection with its stadium agreements China has also made agreements regarding access to natural resources in certain countries.^{141 142} The access to natural resources is essential for China as a great part of its population has increased its living standards, which has led to an increased need for both energy and consumer goods.

In addition to the overall Chinese objective of increasing political influence¹⁴³ and gaining international recognition, the aim to unify China through the One-China-Policy is also a main objective behind China's interest in building stadiums abroad. Several cases indicate that China, despite its official offer of 'no strings attached', has required recipient countries to cancel their diplomatic relations with Taiwan if it wants new stadiums to be constructed.^{144 145 146 147}

But do the Chinese stadiums have any impact on domestic sport? Is it possible to see whether the construction of new stadiums has had an impact on sport in each country?

In the context of sport in general, it is quite difficult to give a straightforward answer. Through our investigation we cannot determine whether participation in sport in each country where China has built stadiums has increased or that sporting structures have improved in other ways. As China has mainly built big stadiums, it is likely that these stadiums have primarily benefited elite sport. Several countries have, thanks to the Chinese stadiums, been able to host international or continental sporting events. As Table 8.1 below shows, we have found that ten Chinese stadiums built abroad have hosted an international or continental sporting event. The majority of the events have taken place in Africa, mainly

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ <http://www.thefootballramble.com/blog/entry/china-why-costa-rica>

¹³⁸ http://www.uschina.usc.edu/w_usct/showarticle.aspx?articleID=17566&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/09/in-africa-an-election-reveals-skepticism-of-chinese-involvement/245832/>

¹⁴¹ <http://en.radio86.com/china-past-and-present/government-and-country/friendship-and-development-chinas-stadium-building-pro>

¹⁴² Nuttall, Ian. Kicking Off. Stadia July 2008

¹⁴³ <http://en.radio86.com/china-past-and-present/government-and-country/friendship-and-development-chinas-stadium-building-pro>

¹⁴⁴ http://www.uschina.usc.edu/w_usct/showarticle.aspx?articleID=17566&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2056147,00.html>

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.thefootballramble.com/blog/entry/china-why-costa-rica>

¹⁴⁷ <http://archives.pireport.org/archive/2008/July/07-16-ft.htm>

Africa Cup of Nations, but China’s stadiums have also helped countries like Fiji, Sri Lanka and countries in the Caribbean islands to host sporting events.

In 2007 the West Indian Federation hosted the Cricket World Cup.¹⁴⁸ The majority of the countries sharing the hosting rights for the event did not have acceptable venues at that time, so it was necessary for them to build new stadiums. Help came from China and several of the stadiums used during the event were built using Chinese assistance.¹⁴⁹

Table 8.1: Overview major sporting events with Chinese stadiums

Event	Country	Year
Africa Cup of Nations	(MLI)	2002
South Pacific Games	(FIJ)	2003
South Pacific Games	(CKI)	2007
Cricket World Cup	(ATG), (BAH), (DMN), (GRN), (JAM) and (LCA)	2007
Africa Cup of Nations	(GHA)	2008
Southeast Asian Games	(LAO)	2009
Africa Cup of Nations	(ANO)	2010
Cricket World Cup	(SRI)	2011
All-Africa Games	(MOZ)	2011
Africa Cup of Nations	(GEQ)/(GAB)	2012

The Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda states that China was well aware that his country did not have the financial strength to build a new stadium and that the construction of Vivian Richards Cricket Ground would not have been possible without China’s help.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, the then St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and Trinidad and Tobago

¹⁴⁹ <http://en.radio86.com/china-past-and-present/government-and-country/friendship-and-development-chinas-stadium-building-pro>

¹⁵⁰ <http://en.radio86.com/china-past-and-present/government-and-country/friendship-and-development-chinas-stadium-building-pro>

The 2011 Cricket World Cup was hosted by Sri Lanka and once again China was called upon to construct a World Cup venue. It built Mahinda Rajapaksa International Stadium, and although the stadium was opened as recently as 2010, Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) has found that it cannot afford to maintain the stadium so the stadium has been handed over to the Sri Lankan army.¹⁵¹

Mahinda Rajapaksa International Stadium is probably not the only case in which Chinese stadiums have been hit by financial problems. Even if the majority of the stadiums being built by China are gifts or are funded by interest-free loans, additional costs such as maintenance costs will still be present after the stadiums are completed. Maintenance costs have often been ignored or not given top priority (see Abuja National Stadium) or can simply not be paid due to lack of money. A stadium that is not maintained or utilised after the initial event will quickly lose its shine and value in the local community and there is an imminent risk that many stadiums will not be able to be used for sport because they are poorly maintained.

Additional problems have emerged with the Chinese stadiums. As mentioned above in chapter 6, some of the stadiums are poorly constructed;¹⁵² ¹⁵³ a problem which has also been apparent with other public buildings¹⁵⁴ built abroad by China, although China officially insists that it only uses materials and products of the highest quality¹⁵⁵. FIFA has noticed the problem and, according to the magazine *Stadia*, it has pointed out the Chinese built Kamanyola Stadium in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a stadium with serious flaws and weaknesses in security and threatens to close the stadium for international games unless substantial improvements are made.¹⁵⁶

China continues to construct stadiums abroad and the number of stadiums that have been built through Chinese foreign aid involvement has passed a hundred. Algeria, Cameroon and Cape Verde are among the countries next in line to receive stadiums from China.

¹⁵¹ <http://www.insidethegames.biz/commonwealth-games/2018/14786-army-take-over-control-of-hambantota-stadium>

¹⁵² Nuttall, I.: Kicking Off. *Stadia* July 2008

¹⁵³ http://www.aercafrica.org/documents/china_africa_relations/Uganda.pdf p.10

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.aljazeera.com/Opinion/Editorials/2011/April/4%2000/The%20New%20Imperialism,%20China%20in%20Angola%20By%20Rafael%20Marques%20de%20Morais.htm>

¹⁵⁵ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2010/china/2011-04/21/c_13839683_7.htm

¹⁵⁶ Nuttall, I.: Kicking Off. *Stadia* July 2008