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# ARTICLE

## The Evolution of China's Foreign Aid Perspective towards Africa: The Case Study of TAZARA Railway from the Cold War to the Present

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### Abstract

*This study examines the evolution of China's foreign aid policies in Africa by focusing on the Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA), a key infrastructure project initiated during Mao Zedong's era. Initially conceived as a symbol of solidarity with developing nations, TAZARA reflects China's ideological commitment during the Cold War. The research addresses how the evolution of China's foreign aid policies in Africa from the Cold War to the present is illustrated by TAZARA and how its historical development has influenced China's current aid approach. The analysis situates TAZARA within China's shifting aid policies, transitioning from Mao's ideological motivations to Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic economic focus. This transition laid the groundwork for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which emphasizes infrastructure development to expand China's global influence. While existing literature critically assesses China's aid dynamics, few studies analyze TAZARA as a case study of evolving aid strategies. This research fills that gap by providing a qualitative examination of TAZARA, incorporating both Chinese and Western perspectives to highlight its significance. The study is organized into four sections: the evolution of China's aid strategy; the rationale behind TAZARA's construction; the implications of TAZARA's rehabilitation within the BRI; and a concluding reflection on how TAZARA symbolizes China's multifaceted engagement in Africa. Ultimately, the findings suggest that TAZARA represents both a historical legacy and a strategic initiative, highlighting China's commitment to fostering deeper diplomatic ties and shared prosperity across the continent.*

### Keywords

TAZARA Railway, Tanzania, Zambia, China, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

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## Introduction

The origins of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA) can be traced back to Mao Zedong's era when China sought to forge alliances and alleviate international isolation. Mao's African aid strategy aimed to foster camaraderie with developing nations by extending substantial assistance, exemplified by infrastructure projects like TAZARA. Built between Tanzania and Zambia, this monumental endeavor wasn't merely a transport infrastructure initiative but a manifestation of China's solidarity with African nations, reflecting Mao's ideological vision of global solidarity among developing countries.

However, the passage of time and geopolitical transformations prompted a shift in China's aid policies. From the ideological underpinnings of Mao's era, Chinese aid gradually evolved into a more pragmatic approach under subsequent leadership. Deng Xiaoping's reforms marked a turning point, advocating for a pragmatic foreign policy that aligned with China's economic interests. Consequently, aid policies pivoted from ideological alignment to pragmatic economic cooperation, setting the stage for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

TAZARA stands as a testament to China's evolving strategies within its BRI and underscores the transformation of its foreign aid policies. Initially conceived as a symbol of Chairman Mao's African aid strategy, it epitomizes China's journey from ideological altruism to pragmatic global engagement.

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This study is designed to answer the following research questions: (1) How have China's foreign aid policies in Africa evolved from the Cold War era to the present? (2) How and to what extent does TAZARA as an aid initiative reflect the change and continuity in China's foreign aid strategy in Africa? (3) How has the historical development of TAZARA influenced China's current approach to foreign aid in Africa?

The topic of China's foreign aid to Africa has garnered significant attention from various scholars in recent years, leading to numerous academic publications and scholarly works from which this study draws its information. Western scholar

Brautigam is one of the forerunners in this field by addressing questions such as where China provides aid, the reasons behind its aid contributions, and the amount of aid it allocates to Africa.<sup>1</sup> Taylor contends that China's expansion into Africa hasn't been universally welcomed and has claimed that although China is open to building economic and political ties with poor and often unstable African countries seeking foreign assistance, its approach sometimes conflicts with Western policies on governance and development.<sup>2</sup> When evaluating China's foreign aid policy, Lengauer argues that many African leaders' support of Chinese aid and investments does not necessarily imply that the average African will benefit from China's increasing presence on the continent.<sup>3</sup> According to Kjøllestad and Analysebyrå, China's strategic positioning as a key player in foreign aid, particularly in Africa, is challenging traditional donors by providing assistance without stringent conditionalities, prompting a reevaluation of their approaches amid its long-standing relationships with developing countries.<sup>4</sup> Academic studies by Chinese scholars such as Qi Guoqiang,<sup>5</sup> Huang Meipo and Lang Jianyan,<sup>6</sup> and Li Xiaoyun and Wu Jin<sup>7</sup> are more related to the historical review of China's foreign aid, in general, and the practical experiences and challenges faced by China in its aid to Africa, in particular.

On the other hand, existing academic studies on TAZARA are concerned with specific aspects like its economic impact, historical context, or geopolitical significance. For instance, Wekesa discusses the TAZARA project as a significant example of Chinese investment in infrastructure in East Africa. He explores the historical context of the railway, its impact on regional connectivity, and the economic implications for both Tanzania and Zambia.<sup>8</sup> Monson explores how the construction and operation of TAZARA have influenced the lives and livelihoods of local communities.<sup>9</sup> Ke Song portrays TAZARA as a symbol of China's commitment to African development while he believes that the project exemplifies Chinese modernism, shaped by multidirectional knowledge exchange and selective Western influences.<sup>10</sup> Shakhshir argues that the TAZARA project, while initially intended to foster cooperation and development between Tanzania and Zambia, faced significant challenges due to differing national interests, governance structures, and management practices.<sup>11</sup> Using interdependence theory, Eureka highlights TAZARA's positive effects on Tanzania's economy, technological transfer, and China's commitment to African development and liberation, despite challenges from the Cultural Revolution.<sup>12</sup> Liu and Monson focus on cooperation between African and

Chinese workers, with Chinese experts providing on-site training to their African counterparts.<sup>13</sup> Yu analyzes TAZARA as a major Chinese aid project, highlighting China's motivations, the political and economic needs of Tanzania and Zambia, and TAZARA's enduring influence on both local and international contexts from 1955 to 1970.<sup>14</sup> In her dissertation, Bourbonniere explores the historical evolution of development planning through the TAZARA project, examining British-led planning during the colonial era and the reinterpretation by African leaders post-independence, ultimately revealing how historical context and political needs shape development debates and future possibilities for the region.<sup>15</sup>

This study specifically aims to examine the impact of China's changing aid modality in Africa by taking TAZARA as a case study. The study is a qualitative research that is designed to analyze TAZARA's role within the context of China's evolving foreign aid policies and the BRI. The qualitative nature of this research allows for an in-depth exploration of the complexities surrounding the railway's historical significance, its ideological underpinnings, and its contemporary implications in the development landscape of Africa. Apart from Western academic studies, the analysis also draws on a range of Chinese perspectives and academic sources, which have often been overlooked in Western development circles and academia. This includes scholarly articles, government publications, and policy documents. By incorporating these sources, the study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of TAZARA that contrasts with predominantly Western narratives.

This study is organized into four sections. The first section examines the evolution of China's aid strategy toward Africa during the Cold War and its subsequent developments up to the present. The second section analyzes the rationale behind China's approach to extending its influence in Africa through the construction of TAZARA while the third section investigates the rehabilitation of TAZARA and its implications within the context of the BRI. Finally, the concluding section posits that the rehabilitation of TAZARA serves as a symbol of China's multifaceted engagement in Africa under the BRI framework, reflecting its commitment to facilitating substantial development while underscoring the strategic significance of infrastructure connectivity for promoting economic growth and regional cooperation.

## China's Aid Strategy towards Africa during the Cold War

According to Chinese scholars, during the period from the founding of the People's Republic of China to the beginning of the reform and opening-up, China's national interests more or less centered around adhering to the principles of internationalism and building the identity of proletarian revolutionaries; opposing the imperialism, colonialism, revisionism, and hegemonism of the major powers; safeguarding national security and strategic interests, and consolidating socialist political power; and restoring and developing the economy.<sup>16</sup> This ideological approach can be explained by the fact that the People's Republic of China faced a severe international situation between the 1950s and 1970s, with the Western camp led by the U.S. imposing blockades, on one hand, and rivalry with the Soviet Union, on the other.<sup>17</sup> During the same period, Africa was experiencing the peak of its national liberation movements, with the struggle between colonialism and African nationalism becoming the main political focus across the continent.<sup>18</sup>

After the Bandung Conference, 99 nationalist parties aiming for national independence and 12 Marxist groups quickly emerged in the African region. This attracted the attention of China, which was then seeking to expand its anti-imperialist, international united front worldwide.<sup>19</sup> In other words, as China's foreign policy was deeply influenced by ideology, it began to show an interest in African countries and gradually became actively engaged in establishing diplomatic relations with them.<sup>20</sup> Aid became an effective instrument applied by China to gain friends in these newly emerging developing countries. Indeed, the aid provided to newly independent countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America promoted their national liberation and economic development, while China on its part sought recognition of its government by the recipient countries, the utilization of the recipient countries' voting rights in its favor in international organizations, and engagement in its resolute struggle against Taiwan. The most significant achievement was seen in the 26th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1971, where the overwhelming majority, with 76 votes in favor, 35 against, and 17 abstentions, passed the proposal put forward by Albania and 22 other countries to restore the seat of the People's Republic of China at the United Nations. Among the 23 proposing countries, except for Yugoslavia, all were recipient countries of Chinese aid. Of the 76 countries that voted in favor of the proposal, 51 were from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the majority of which were recipients of Chinese aid.<sup>21</sup>

From the late 1950s to the early 1960s, changes in the international situation, especially the rupture in Sino-Soviet relations, had a significant impact on China's foreign policy. China's foreign aid began to shift towards supporting so-called pro-China countries, with a focus on geopolitical needs and ideological outputs. China began to pay much more attention to aid to African countries, forming the initial policy guidelines and management system for foreign aid with more conscious ideological goals. Under this policy guidance, China's foreign aid funds sharply increased in the early 1970s. Foreign aid became an important means for China to export its ideology, to strive for international status, and to compete with the Soviet Union. China's foreign aid policy had strong political implications and almost no economic considerations. The specific forms of aid were mainly based on the needs and requests of the recipient countries.<sup>22</sup>

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During this period, China's aid to Africa highlighted its attempt to establish and develop close relations with African countries as a means to break through the blockades imposed by the U.S. or the rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, thus expanding its diplomatic activities. The characteristics of China's aid to Africa during this period were the following: First, aid was entirely guided by political and ideological considerations, serving political purposes. The political function of aid overshadowed its economic function, and economic benefits were rarely considered. Second, due to China's limited national strength at the time, the scale of aid was also very limited. China's assistance to Africa was generally based on the social and economic development needs of African countries, helping them address pressing issues. For example, infrastructure and agriculture are crucial for Africa's economic development and poverty alleviation, and are areas of deep concern and in need of development. Hence, infrastructure and agriculture have been the focus of China's long-standing aid to Africa.<sup>23</sup>

Although China claimed to provide aid mostly as unconditional assistance, it halted all medical assistance and cooperation, withdrawing its medical

teams from African countries that established formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan during the 1980s and 1990s. This continued until those countries ceased recognizing Taiwan's political status.<sup>24</sup> As an integral component of diplomatic relations, China's foreign aid also became a policy tool serving national interests. During the 1960s and 1970s, China's assistance to Africa, characterized by mutual trust, garnered recognition and support from African nations, significantly expanding China's diplomatic space.<sup>25</sup> Different from aid provided by Western countries, which often comes with political conditions such as rule of law and good governance, Chinese aid focuses on "teaching people to fish." Without any political conditions, it primarily focuses on infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, ports, airports, and fiber optics. These projects are financed by Chinese financial institutions, with funds transferred directly to Chinese engineering enterprises. Upon completion, the projects are handed over to the recipient country.<sup>26</sup>

Over the past 50 years, China's assistance to Africa has undergone changes in both its principles and methods. Although China's foreign aid developed almost concurrently with international development assistance, Chinese aid to Africa has been relatively modest in scale. More importantly, China has consistently followed an independent foreign aid policy, resulting in a distinctly different approach compared to Western countries. Some Chinese scholars claim that Chinese foreign aid, influenced by both political considerations and traditional cultural values, aims to provide moral support to weaker parties, viewing it as a form of partnership rather than a gift to recipient countries.<sup>27</sup> However, according to a recent academic study by Chinese scholars, China's provision of medical assistance to Africa may also be driven by economic interests, although Chinese officials have consistently refuted this idea. Moreover, China's aid serves as a strategy to facilitate access for Chinese state-owned enterprises to African markets, particularly in resource-rich nations with weaker bargaining positions. Meanwhile, the State Council of China has clarified that while economic benefits might arise as a consequence, they are not the primary motivation behind the assistance.<sup>28</sup>

In general, China's aid consists mainly of material goods and construction projects, with the implementation of these projects directly undertaken by Chinese companies and institutions. This approach may not be conducive to the development of local capabilities; however, since it does not involve direct financial transactions, it can help prevent corruption. Since the 1950s, complete

sets of projects and general material assistance have accounted for 70% to 80% of China's total foreign aid expenditure. China's assistance to Africa also primarily consists of complete sets of projects,<sup>29</sup> with TAZARA being one of the most important projects ever completed in Africa by China. Before we continue by exploring the significance of revitalizing TAZARA so far as the BRI is concerned, it is worthwhile to look into the rationale behind China's approach in order to shed light on the evolution of Chinese aid perspectives towards Africa.

## The Case Study of TAZARA: A Gateway to Extending Chinese Influence in Africa

### *The Rationale behind China's Approach*

The idea of building a major railway in Africa can be traced back to the late 19th century. At that time, the African continent was largely under British and French colonial rule. Cecil Rhodes, a British statesman, proposed the idea of building a railway line traversing Africa from north to south. The concept aimed to connect Cairo in the north and Cape Town in the south of Africa through a railway.<sup>30</sup>

In 1960, Tanzania and Zambia gained independence one after another, and there was an urgent need to strengthen railway construction for economic development. Especially in Zambia, there was a plan to build a railway across the two countries to transport its abundant copper ore to the port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. A few years later, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in southern Zambia gained independence. Due to the hostile relationship between the two countries, Zambia's southern sea route was blocked, making the construction of TAZARA necessary.<sup>31</sup>

In 1964, Mao Zedong proposed to regard Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the primary intermediate zones between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which set the strategic goals for China's diplomatic work.

In the early 1960s, the surge of national liberation movements in Africa raised concerns and suspicion in Western countries, and railway construction became highly politicized. Western countries and the World Bank refused to assist in building TAZARA, citing reasons such as poor economic efficiency. The Soviet



Union also did not provide corresponding assistance. Zambia and Tanzania had to turn to China for help,<sup>32</sup> while China, at that time, was also looking towards developing countries in the south.<sup>33</sup> Incidentally, Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) found common ground in their shared socialist ideologies, forging a natural alliance.<sup>34</sup>

In 1964, Mao Zedong proposed to regard Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the primary intermediate zones between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which set the strategic goals for China's diplomatic work. In order to strengthen unity and cooperation with the economically underdeveloped countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, China began to increase its aid to them. At that time, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union were assisting in the construction of large-scale water projects in Africa, such as the U.S. building the Volta Dam in Ghana and the Soviet Union constructing the Aswan Dam in Egypt. China also intended to assist in building large-scale infrastructure projects in Africa.<sup>35</sup> After Western countries refused to build TAZARA citing cost or objective conditions as their reasons, China voluntarily undertook this massive project spanning more than 1,800 kilometers. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai contended,

Building this railway transportation line that connects Tanzania and Zambia could help them break free from the control and extortion of imperialism, colonialism, and racism. It could also enable anti-imperialist and anti-colonial countries around the world to more effectively support the freedom fighters struggling for independence and liberation in southern, central, and western Africa. We view the construction of TAZARA from the perspective of supporting the African national liberation movement. Assisting them is also assisting ourselves.<sup>36</sup>

It is believed that China's engagement stemmed from two additional motives: First, to advance its developmental model originating from rural areas, and second, to establish a fresh framework for collaboration among peripheral nations, aiming to generate favorable economic and social progress without fostering dependence.<sup>37</sup>

Judging from China's aid strategy to Africa in the 1960s, it is apparent that the rationale behind China's willingness to build TAZARA can be directly linked to China's evolving foreign aid policy and its geopolitical strategy during a

time of significant international shifts, particularly the Sino-Soviet split. As China's foreign policy began to focus on supporting "pro-China" countries, particularly in Africa, the TAZARA project emerged as a key initiative to strengthen diplomatic ties with African nations. This railway was not just a means of transportation: it symbolized China's commitment to assisting newly independent African states in their economic development and sovereignty. By helping to construct TAZARA, China sought to provide an alternative to Western influence and support the liberation movements in the region, especially in the context of the anti-colonial struggle.

The railway also served to counteract the U.S. and Soviet blocs, showcasing China's role as a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement. With its ideological objectives in mind, China aimed to position itself as a champion of African solidarity and self-reliance. The project was aligned with the broader goal of exporting China's socialist ideology and demonstrating its commitment to anti-imperialist principles.

Additionally, the construction of TAZARA enabled China to assert its presence in Africa, enhancing its international status while simultaneously providing an avenue to engage in economic cooperation with African nations. The aid given for this project highlighted China's willingness to make significant investments in infrastructure, despite minimal economic returns, reinforcing its political goals over purely economic considerations. In short, the TAZARA project exemplified how China's foreign aid policy during the late 1960s and early 1970s was strategically designed to foster alliances with African countries, break through international isolation, and assert its ideological influence against the backdrop of the Cold War rivalry.

### The Construction of TAZARA

To construct TAZARA, China mobilized a large number of domestic machinery. The railway group's mechanical equipment surpassed that of six domestic railway bureaus, with machine tool quantities exceeding those of a major province. All of China's Yellow River dump trucks and 90% of its Yellow River trucks were sent to African construction sites. Despite this, a significant amount of machinery had to be imported from Sweden, France, and Japan, as their equipment's actual utility far exceeded that of China's domestic mechanical equipment. For instance, the efficiency of French and Japanese mechanical digger was 1.55 and 1.45 times that of domestically produced ones, respectively,

with significantly greater durability. During the construction process of the dam section, China's Red Flag brand mechanical diggers required repairs for 102 units, while Japanese mechanical diggers only needed 17. To a certain extent, the use of these imported equipment was crucial for ensuring the project's completion.<sup>38</sup>

The relationship between the construction of TAZARA and Chinese experience is most prominently reflected in technical transfer. The construction process served as an opportunity for Chinese engineers and workers to train African industrial workers, share China's experience in industrialization, and cultivate a new African working class team.<sup>39</sup> Yet, despite efforts by Chinese instructors and workers to train African workers, Tanzania and Zambia did not achieve complete independence in managing the railway.<sup>40</sup> Starting in 1977, the three countries engaged in two phases of technical cooperation over four years. China dispatched 1,000 experts within two years, but the issue of a lack of railway management talent remained unresolved by 1980, necessitating an extension of the technical cooperation period. When Chinese trainer Du Jian retired in 2005, he lamented that as most of the local management personnel trained by Chinese experts retired, TAZARA in the 21st century faced severe shortages of technical and management personnel.<sup>41</sup>

Numerous incidents of derailment and collisions occurred, partly due to aging equipment, but also because of insufficient responsibility, inadequate technical command, speeding, operation mistakes, poor train and track maintenance. Meanwhile, by the end of 1974, TAZARA had not yet been completed in full, but a movement to build new rural areas had quietly begun along the railway line. Chinese experts observed vast areas of land being cultivated, with preparations underway for planting. Subsequently, more and more residents migrated from surrounding areas to settle along the railway, reclaiming wasteland and constructing houses, leading to the emergence of numerous villages, towns, and even small cities forming a new economic belt symbiotic with the railway over decades.<sup>42</sup> Since its operation began in 1976, in five years, TAZARA transported 25 million tons of goods and 40 million passengers, accelerating socio-economic development in the surrounding areas.<sup>43</sup>

It must be acknowledged that during the construction of TAZARA, China was still a country in the process of industrialization, with a significantly backward industrial technology level. Although the project was completed ahead of

schedule, it still fell far short of the goal of being “fast, good, and economical.” Internal calculations conducted by China in early 1972 found actual investments of RMB 1.8 billion, nearly double the total estimated cost of RMB 988.37 million calculated after the survey in 1970, and Deng Xiaoping subtly criticized TAZARA for overspending.<sup>44</sup> In 1978, China revamped its approach to foreign aid, aligning it with its domestic economic reforms led by Deng Xiaoping. This entailed recalibrating the scale, arrangement, structure, and sectors of aid. With a focus on opening up markets and utilizing agricultural surplus, China bolstered its support to the least developed nations while placing greater emphasis on the economic and enduring impacts of aid initiatives.<sup>45</sup>

For decades, the railway line linking Tanzania and Zambia has served as a crucial artery, facilitating the smooth flow of goods and people. It has generated employment opportunities for hundreds of workers and contributed significantly to the economic advancement of the Southern Africa region.<sup>46</sup>

The construction of TAZARA occurred during a critical juncture in African history marked by the need for nation-building amidst the legacy of colonialism. Prior to World War II, African nations struggled with forging cohesive national identities, relying instead on traditional kinship-based communities. The era following colonial independence saw nascent attempts at nation-building, yet many African countries continue to grapple with fragmented identities despite over half a century of autonomy. Scholars attribute the challenges of national identity formation to a complex interplay of factors including economic development, colonial legacies, and anti-colonial struggles. While economic progress and resistance movements have aided identity formation, indirect colonial rule has posed obstacles. Chinese support during anti-colonial struggles, epitomized by the funding of TAZARA, when Western powers hesitated, underscores the intertwined nature of nationalist movements and infrastructure development.<sup>47</sup>

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Conceived to facilitate trade and foster connectivity between Tanzania and Zambia, TAZARA served a dual purpose: it aimed to bolster economic ties and to promote national unity in multi-ethnic societies. By traversing regions

inhabited by diverse ethnic groups, the railway provided tangible experiences of the state's presence, fostering a shared sense of identity among the region's inhabitants. TAZARA represents the ambitions of newly independent African nations to establish cohesive national identities. Its construction reflects state-led initiatives aimed at overcoming ethnic divisions and promoting national unity, marking it as a significant milestone in the process of nation-building in Africa.<sup>48</sup>

## The Rehabilitation of TAZARA and Its Implications for China

As the 11th anniversary of the BRI approaches,<sup>49</sup> China aims to establish itself as a purveyor of public goods and a promoter of tangible development assistance to its African partners.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, when Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema raised the issue of the rehabilitation of TAZARA during his visit in September 2023, the Chinese side agreed to assist in the upgrade and refurbishment of TAZARA, adhering to market and commercial principles.<sup>51</sup> Thus, China has recently signaled its interest to invest in the modernization of TAZARA, connecting Tanzania's Dar es Salaam port to Zambia's copper belt. Following this, the governments of Tanzania and Zambia have opted to grant the concession for operating TAZARA to a state-owned Chinese company on a commercial basis,<sup>52</sup> and the company has already started its on-site feasibility study.<sup>53</sup> During the Beijing Summit of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum held in September 2024, the initial agreement on the rehabilitation of TAZARA was signed between China, Tanzania, and Zambia. This MoU and other Chinese investments will position Tanzania as a showcase for enhancing high-quality Belt and Road collaboration between China and African nations,<sup>54</sup> and is one of the prime examples of China's transition from ideological aid to pragmatic global engagement. China is expected to invest US\$1 billion to renovate the railway through a public-private partnership approach,<sup>55</sup> signifying the convergence of historical aid strategies with contemporary geopolitical and economic objectives under the expansive BRI.<sup>56</sup> There is optimism that the "Friendship Railway" will flourish in the future, evolving into a key transport corridor within the region and transforming into a pivotal "Development Railway."<sup>57</sup> Reportedly, China's investment in this network reflects the major global powers' concerted efforts to oversee the supply of essential minerals that are crucial for the energy transition as the railway network plays a vital role in transporting segments of these resources extracted from Zambia to the Dar es Salaam port. This route will directly compete with the Lobito Corridor, which currently facilitates mineral transportation from Zambia through Angola.<sup>58</sup>

In recent years, Tanzania has consistently maintained a positive economic trajectory through concerted efforts. This economic growth naturally translates into a heightened demand for transportation infrastructure, where railways play an indispensable role in efficiently moving bulk goods and large numbers of passengers across extensive territories. The ongoing processes of industrialization and urbanization in Tanzania will further fuel the need for railway transportation. With a focus on reducing transportation costs and streamlining logistics networks, there's a shift in industrial production from traditional consumer countries to regions offering lower labor costs globally. As emerging industrial nations like China experience economic growth alongside increasing labor costs, there's a foreseeable relocation of labor-intensive industries to areas such as Africa. Given Tanzania's enduring political and social stability coupled with favorable macroeconomic conditions, the country stands as a prime destination for this industrial shift.<sup>59</sup>

In the broader context of China's BRI and the evolving China-Africa cooperation, Tanzania emerges as a pivotal hub for industrial capacity transfer and collaboration. Notably, in 2017, Tanzanian Foreign Minister Augustine Mahiga voiced support for China's BRI, highlighting Tanzania's readiness to facilitate its entry into Africa.<sup>60</sup> Industrialization stands as a strategic imperative for Tanzania's current socioeconomic development.<sup>61</sup> Urbanization has been a long-standing trend in the country, with the burgeoning development of urban areas, mineral exploitation, and other labor-intensive industries driving the establishment of numerous factories. Consequently, this surge in industrial activity underscores the increased demand for long-distance, high-volume transportation of bulk goods like containers, machinery, and automobiles. The strain on Tanzania's highways highlights the urgent need to reinvigorate railway transportation. Railways and highways serve as the primary modes of land-based freight transportation. Railways, in particular, stand out as the most crucial and suitable means for transporting bulk goods over long distances. With Tanzania's economy experiencing continuous expansion in recent years, the volume of freight has surged, causing highways to surpass their capacity limits. In response, the Tanzanian government has been actively

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investing in infrastructure, with a notable focus on railway construction. As previously discussed, Tanzania's railway development is influenced by a combination of political, economic, social, and regional factors.<sup>62</sup>

China's robust promotion of railway upgrade and renovation projects in Tanzania take into account several considerations. Politically, China acknowledges the Tanzanian railway as a historical symbol of Sino-African friendship, emphasizing the importance of preserving the values of unity, friendship, and dedication into the future. Economically, China believes that through comprehensive reforms in Tanzania's railway management and operations, coupled with effective integration of the railway with ports like Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo, and the creation of an industrial economic corridor along the railway, both countries can elevate the Tanzanian railway from a symbol of freedom and friendship to a catalyst for cooperation and prosperity. Strategically, the railway holds significant value in securing mineral resources in Zambia's Copperbelt Province and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where China has substantial investments. China's advocacy for the Tanzanian railway stems from a nostalgic sentiment for historical friendship and its recognition of the railway's symbolic importance in political discourse.<sup>63</sup> Formun Üstü

TAZARA holds a position of paramount strategic importance in Africa and serves as a flagship project for China's aid to Africa. Currently, it still plays a crucial role in enhancing China's image in Africa, promoting Chinese investment in Africa, and continuing to serve China's interests in the region. In terms of real economic value, copper is an important resource, and China's overseas dependence on it has reached 64%. The Copper Belt in northern Zambia, recognized as one of the world's premier copper-producing regions, has seen a resurgence in production, with output levels now returning to historical peaks of approximately 700,000 tons. With the rise in copper prices and increased investment, there is still great potential for copper production in this region.<sup>64</sup> Thus, China's investment in the northern Zambian copper mines and other mineral resources is rapidly increasing, and TAZARA remains an important export channel for Zambian copper, which is of significant economic importance in meeting China's demand for copper ore. In terms of strategic value, TAZARA's endpoint, Zambia's Copperbelt Province, borders the southern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which holds even greater potential mineral resources than northern Zambia. Currently, a "Southern Africa Transportation Network" originating from this area is being

planned and constructed, with the participation of countries like the U.S. and Germany. Therefore, TAZARA holds strategic value and should be integrated into China's overall strategy in Southern Africa.<sup>65</sup>

The revitalization of TAZARA within the BRI paradigm is profound as it promotes regional connectivity in Africa in terms of a rail-sea intermodal transport network.<sup>66</sup> Positioned as a key component of the BRI in Africa, TAZARA symbolizes China's contemporary strategic objectives. From a Chinese perspective, the revitalization of TAZARA stands to enhance trade and transportation across Africa significantly, facilitating the efficient movement of goods and services between nations. As Africa's economies continue to grow, there is an urgent need for improved transportation networks, and modernizing TAZARA will benefit Tanzania and Zambia as well as support landlocked countries in the region. This revitalization can transform the corridor into a vital trade link, making international commerce more seamless and contributing to regional economic integration.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, the TAZARA project reaffirms China's commitment to its long-standing partnership with Africa, showcasing its readiness to invest in initiatives of historical and strategic importance. By aligning this modernization with sustainable development goals, the project promises to reduce environmental impacts while promoting economic growth. The project also creates job opportunities and builds local capacities, ensuring that communities benefit from technological advancements. Ultimately, the revitalization of TAZARA is a symbol of resilience and cooperation, paving the way for deeper diplomatic ties and shared prosperity between China and Africa.<sup>68</sup>

The revitalization of TAZARA within the BRI paradigm is profound as it promotes regional connectivity in Africa in terms of a rail-sea intermodal transport network.

## Conclusion

The BRI has developed from a concept into various projects, reflecting China's engagement in global cooperation. With more than 200 cooperation agreements inked with numerous nations and organizations, the BRI has become a platform for connectivity, economic growth, and cultural exchange. China's involvement in the modernization of TAZARA exemplifies its win-win strategy when



fostering tangible development assistance, particularly in Africa.

The decision to invest more than US\$1 billion in the rehabilitation of TAZARA highlights China's role in improving regional infrastructure and connectivity within the context of the BRI. By granting a concession for operation to a Chinese state-owned company, Tanzania and Zambia signal their trust in China's expertise and reliability. The revitalization of TAZARA may serve as an important transport corridor and could contribute to economic development and cooperation in the region.

Furthermore, the strategic significance of TAZARA cannot be overstated. It serves as a vital link for the transportation of essential minerals, such as copper, from Zambia to the Dar es Salaam port. China's investment in this railway network aligns with its broader objectives of securing access to key resources and fostering regional stability and development.

Moreover, Tanzania's economic trajectory and its commitment to infrastructure development present opportunities for further collaboration under the BRI framework. As Tanzania seeks to bolster its industrial capacity and improve transportation infrastructure, China's expertise and investment may play a critical role in supporting these efforts.

In conclusion, the rehabilitation of TAZARA symbolizes China's multifaceted engagement in Africa under the BRI. It not only reflects China's strategy of fostering tangible development, but also highlights the strategic importance of infrastructure connectivity in driving economic growth and regional cooperation. As the BRI reaches its 11th year, the revitalization of TAZARA reflects the ongoing partnership between China and Africa and their mutual interest in prosperity and development.

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