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Connectivity and Challenges: Analyzing the China-Mozambique Partnership in the Global South

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Abstract. *Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1975, China has been an important contributor to Mozambique's progress. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) have strengthened strategic cooperation and economic ties between the two countries in a number of areas, such as infrastructure, energy, and agriculture. Important infrastructure projects and advancements in the mining and energy sectors have improved Mozambique's connectivity and ability to export resources. However, this collaboration also faces challenges, such as problems with transparency, governance, cultural disparities, and competition from Western nations, which have prevented it from reaching its full potential. This article explores the complex connection between China and Mozambique by emphasizing the political, economic, and historical factors that have influenced their collaboration. The findings highlight how crucial it is to adapt cooperative tactics in order to address issues in China-Mozambique cooperation, promote mutual gain, and promote sustainable development. The article also looks at potential future cooperation areas, especially in digital transformation and green energy, and offers ideas for how Mozambique might gain from China's expertise while strengthening local capabilities. As an indispensable player in South-South cooperation, Mozambique has the potential to establish itself as a key actor in regional stability and economic integration by participating in Global South frameworks. The China-Mozambique cooperation offers insights into how these collaborations might change to accommodate the evolving needs of developing countries, thus adds to the conversation on international relations in the Global South.*

Keywords: Mozambique; China; Global South; multilateral cooperation; global affairs

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Взаимосвязь и вызовы: анализ китайско-mozамбикского партнерства на глобальном Юге

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Аннотация. С момента установления дипломатических отношений в 1975 году Китай вносит важный вклад в развитие Мозамбика. Инициатива «Пояс и путь» (BRI) и Форум по китайско-африканскому сотрудничеству (FOCAC) укрепили стратегическое сотрудничество и экономические связи между двумя странами в ряде областей, таких как инфраструктура, энергетика и сельское хозяйство. Важные инфраструктурные проекты и достижения в горнодобывающей и энергетической отраслях улучшили коммуникационные возможности Мозамбика и его способность экспортировать ресурсы. Однако это сотрудничество также сталкивается с трудностями, такими как проблемы с прозрачностью, управлением, культурными различиями и конкуренцией со стороны западных стран, которые не позволяют ему полностью раскрыть свой потенциал. В этой статье исследуется сложная связь между Китаем и Мозамбиком с акцентом на политические, экономические и исторические факторы, повлиявшие на их сотрудничество. Выводы подчеркивают, насколько важно адаптировать тактику сотрудничества, чтобы решить проблемы в китайско-mozамбикском взаимодействии, обеспечить взаимную выгоду и способствовать устойчивому развитию. В статье также рассматриваются потенциальные области будущего сотрудничества, особенно в сфере цифровой трансформации и «зеленой» энергетике, и предлагаются идеи о том, как Мозамбик может воспользоваться опытом Китая и одновременно укрепить местные возможности. Будучи незаменимым игроком в сотрудничестве Юг-Юг, Мозамбик имеет потенциал для того, чтобы утвердиться в качестве одного из ключевых участников региональной стабильности и экономической интеграции путем участия в

рамочных программах Глобального Юга. Сотрудничество между Китаем и Мозамбиком позволяет понять, как может измениться такое сотрудничество, чтобы удовлетворить растущие потребности развивающихся стран, и тем самым внести вклад в обсуждение международных отношений на Глобальном Юге.

Ключевые слова: Мозамбик; Китай; Глобальный юг; многостороннее сотрудничество; международные отношения

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5.5.4. Международные отношения, глобальные, региональные исследования

Introduction

A long history of collaboration based on mutual support and common interests defines the bilateral relationship between China and Mozambique. China has been a staunch supporter of Mozambique since the country's independence in the 1970s, offering vital political, military, and financial support during the liberation fight. An important turning point was the official inauguration of diplomatic ties in 1975, which began a new era of friendship that has developed throughout the years. The relationship between China and Mozambique has grown considerably as the world has changed in the twenty-first century, especially with the introduction of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This effort not only represents China's determination to expanding its influence in Africa, but it also corresponds with Mozambique's development goals by increasing collaboration in critical sectors such as trade, infrastructure, education, and security. Today, Mozambique is a key strategic partner for China in Africa, highlighting the complexity and opportunities of South-South cooperation.

The goal of the article is to present a thorough examination of the background, present state, and potential future of China-Mozambique ties. It will examine how this partnership affects regional stability and global cooperation, highlighting the common objectives that guide their cooperation. In

order to improve the bilateral relationship while addressing new opportunities and challenges, the article will also provide insights and suggestions for additional involvement within frameworks like the Global South and BRICS Plus. We hope that this research will add to the larger conversation about global south development and international politics.

Methods and Materials

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the multifaceted relationship between China and Mozambique, focusing on historical, economic, political, and cultural dimensions. The following methods and materials were utilized to ensure a thorough exploration of the subject:

A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted to gather insights on the historical context and current dynamics of China-Mozambique relations. Sources included academic journals, books, government reports, and policy papers that discuss bilateral cooperation, the Belt and Road Initiative, and broader China-Africa relations. Previous studies on sectoral cooperation between China and African countries maintain a high level of academic focus. A group of scholars has revisited the Chinese presence in Africa over the last decade [1; 2; 3], as Moyo noted, “China has become influential in Africa at the level of trade, investments and geo-political relations, but it is far from being a hegemonic recolonizer [4].” In the context of rising South-South cooperation among developing countries, scholars have diverse perspectives on the Chinese model of political, economic, and financial interactions with African nations [5]. D. C. Murphy highlighted China’s role as a rising power in Sub-Saharan Africa in relation to international geopolitical competition with Western countries while analyzing how the Belt and Road Initiative links African nations [6]. R. Asante argued that China’s economic involvement in Africa, within the framework of South-South cooperation, is “less exploitative and more relevant to local needs than the North’s [7].” Academic contributions also indicate that regions of the Global South have become central to world politics and economics [8].

Secondly, the question of bilateral relations between China and Mozambique has been addressed, primarily focusing on economic and investment projects [9; 10], especially in comparison to other countries interested in agricultural business in Mozambique [11; 12]. F. Garcia views

Mozambique as a strategically significant country that holds considerable influence throughout East Africa and controls entry points into the Southern hinterland. In this context, Mozambique has developed mutually beneficial political and trade relations with China, potentially reducing its dependence on traditional donors for natural resources [13]. However, Chinese contributions highlight that differing social backgrounds and the lingering influence of colonial culture mean that China and Mozambique do not share a strong sense of mutual cultural identity, resulting in ongoing challenges in their exchanges [14]. This foundational review helped identify key themes and frameworks for analysis.

Additionally, this study employs case studies to localize several major projects of China-Mozambique cooperation, such as the Maputo-Catembe Bridge and natural gas development initiatives, illustrating the practical implications of their bilateral relationship. These case studies were selected based on their significance in enhancing Mozambique's infrastructure and resource capabilities, thereby reflecting broader economic cooperation between the two countries. The document analysis method facilitates understanding of the formal commitments and strategic objectives guiding this relationship by reviewing official documents, including agreements between China and Mozambique, policy frameworks from the Chinese government, and statements from Mozambican officials. Additionally, data related to trade volumes, investment flows, and project outcomes were collected from bilateral customs and commercial statistics to assess the economic impacts of Chinese investments and the overall trade dynamics between Mozambique and China.

Through this complex research approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the China-Mozambique relationship, contributing to the academic discourse on international cooperation and development strategies in the Global South.

Results

In recent years, under the frameworks of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries, China and Mozambique have engaged in fruitful cooperation in areas such as economy and trade, agriculture, culture, education, health, and infrastructure.

Historical Context of Bilateral Relations

Bilateral relations between China and Mozambique date back to the early 15th century when Zheng He's ships arrived off the coast of East Africa, laying the foundations for early Sino-African exchanges. In the 16th century, the arrival of the Portuguese initiated a gradual process of colonization and settlement, which persisted until Mozambique gained independence in 1975.

The People's Republic of China and the Republic of Mozambique established diplomatic relations on June 25, 1975, coinciding with Mozambique's proclamation of independence. Since then, the relationship has progressed smoothly, with China advocating for Mozambique in international forums and enhancing its global standing. This support not only deepened the Chinese-Mozambican friendship but also reflected China's broader foreign policy of supporting anti-colonial movements across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, reinforcing its image as a champion of national independence.

In the post-independence development phase, China and Mozambique engaged in extensive economic and technical cooperation, with China dispatching technical experts, establishing medical teams, and providing significant infrastructure assistance in transportation, agriculture, healthcare, and education [15]. The founding of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 and the Forum for Economic and Commercial Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao) in 2003 introduced new avenues for partnership, enabling China to enhance support for African infrastructure, agricultural development, and technology transfer. China and Mozambique have cultivated long-standing cooperation in diplomatic and political fields, characterized by mutual support in international organizations and forums. Currently, several Chinese and Mozambican regions have established friendly twin-city relationships: Hubei Province to Gaza Province, Hainan Province to Nampula Province, and Shanghai City and Chengdu City to Maputo City. In September 2014, Mozambique opened a Consulate General in the Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.

With the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, Mozambique became an integral part of China's global cooperation strategy. This partnership has led to significant advancements in infrastructure, resource development, and trade. Notable projects, including ports, roads, and railways, have emerged with

China's backing, greatly enhancing Mozambique's infrastructure. In May 2016, the two countries elevated their partnership to a comprehensive strategic level, continuously enhancing cooperation across diplomatic, political, cultural, economic, trade, and security domains [16]. In April 2019, President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi was invited by President Xi Jinping to attend the second Belt and Road International Cooperation Summit Forum in Beijing, during which the two leaders witnessed the signing of a series of documents, including a cooperation plan for China and Mozambique to jointly promote the BRI construction. In September 2024, President Xi Jinping met with President Nyusi, who was in China to attend the FOCAC Beijing Summit. The Mozambican side highly appreciates the global initiatives put forward by President Xi Jinping and is willing to increase mutual support with China on multilateral issues, promoting the establishment of a fairer and more reasonable international order [17]. This multifaceted collaboration has laid a solid foundation for the bilateral relationship and broader China-Africa cooperation. These high-level exchanges have strengthened friendly ties between the peoples of both nations and advanced their cooperative relationship.

In recent years, during the COVID-19 pandemic, China provided essential medical assistance, vaccines, and epidemic prevention materials to Mozambique, further solidifying the political relationship and highlighting China's influence in public health across Africa. Furthermore, cooperation between China and Mozambique in security and military fields has been enhanced, encompassing mainly counter-terrorism efforts and support for regional security. In response to increasing terrorist activities and extremist violence in northern Mozambique, China emphasizes strengthening Mozambique's capacity to respond to terrorist threats and transnational crimes.

Overall, in the early years of its independence, China supported Mozambique's struggle for international recognition, while Mozambique consistently backed China's positions at the United Nations, including adherence to the One China Policy and opposition to foreign interference in China's affairs [16]. Through FOCAC and BRI, China has deepened its cooperation with Mozambique within the framework of the African Union, offering support in various areas, such as economic development, infrastructure construction, and humanitarian assistance. This collaboration has significantly contributed to the strengthening of Global South cooperation.

Economic Projects and Collaborations

The economic relationship between Mozambique and China has grown significantly, characterized by numerous projects that enhance Mozambique's development while aligning with China's broader strategic interests. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, China has assisted Mozambique in the construction of various projects, including economic housing, the national stadium, rural schools, the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre, and more than 20 technical cooperation projects, such as agricultural technology cooperation.

By the end of 2022, the cumulative total of various types of investment by Chinese enterprises in Mozambique had exceeded \$8.5 billion, involving sectors such as energy, minerals, agriculture, processing and manufacturing, and housing construction. [18]. In 2023, China exported approximately \$3.71 billion in machinery, electronics, chemicals, and textiles to Mozambique, dominating the market share. Conversely, Mozambique's exports to China, primarily consisting of timber, minerals, and agricultural products, amounted to around \$1.77 billion [19]. This growth underscores the mutual needs of both countries regarding resources, technology, and manufacturing. China has intensified its investments in infrastructure and mineral resources in Mozambique, while Mozambique relies on Chinese markets and technology to drive its resource development and industrialization.

China's investment in Mozambique encompasses several priority areas, particularly infrastructure, energy, and agriculture, showing remarkable progress in recent years. China is a leading investor and contractor in Mozambique's infrastructure development [20]. Notable projects, such as the Maputo – Katembe bridge and the Beira-Machipanda highway – National Highway Number Six (EN6), have significantly improved Mozambique's transportation network and promoted regional connectivity [21]. China also plays a critical role in developing Mozambique's gas and coal resources. Within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has supported the development of natural gas fields and plans to invest in liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities to increase Mozambique's export capacity, positioning it as a significant global exporter of natural gas.

In agriculture, China has enhanced Mozambique's food production through the establishment of the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre

(ATDC), which has successfully introduced high-yield rice varieties and implemented farmer training programs. Since 2008, this project has provided vital technical support to local agriculture, laying the groundwork for food security and modernization [23].

Mozambique's rich reserves of natural gas, coal, and minerals are strong attractions for Chinese investment. The estimated 100 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves [24] positions Mozambique as a potential major exporter on the global stage. As China's demand for natural gas continues to rise, Chinese companies are heavily investing in LNG projects in Africa to secure domestic energy supplies while strengthening bilateral economic ties [25]. Moreover, Mozambique's coal resources offer China diversified energy import options, bolstering its energy supply while fostering local employment and infrastructure development. This resource attractiveness has fueled sustained Chinese infrastructure investments in Mozambique, ranging from transport to energy projects, facilitating future resource development and regional economic integration. There is significant potential for cooperation in renewable energy and environmental protection. Mozambique boasts abundant solar and wind energy resources, particularly in its southern and coastal regions. With China's clean energy technology support, Mozambique can efficiently develop these resources, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and advancing sustainable development [26]. China's expertise in environmental infrastructure and agricultural technology can assist Mozambique in areas such as wastewater treatment, water-saving irrigation, and sustainable farming practices. The transfer of Chinese technology can enhance Mozambique's environmental management, reduce carbon emissions, and boost local food production.

Digital transformation and science and technology cooperation are progressing rapidly in Mozambique, with China playing a visible role. Chinese investments in digital infrastructure focus on enhancing public service digitization, promoting financial inclusion, and modernizing the education system. For instance, the development of an e-government system has improved efficiency, transparency, and resource allocation within the Mozambican government [27]. Digital cooperation in agriculture and education has also advanced. China's precision agriculture technology and intelligent irrigation systems have improved agricultural productivity and reduced resource waste. In education, the establishment of a vocational and technical education platform

has expanded digital learning opportunities for Mozambican technicians and students, helping to close the educational gap and increase skills [28]. In March 2022, the Gorongosa Polytechnic Institute campus, funded by China, was handed over to the Mozambican government, marking a significant milestone in Sino-Mozambican cooperation in education and employment [29].

The Government of Mozambique announced in May 2020 the completion of a project to bring digital satellite television signals to 1,000 villages, benefiting over 20,000 families. This project, which started in 2018 and was co-funded by China, was implemented by the Chinese electronics and media company StarTimes. It trained 2,200 young people to maintain and provide assistance to beneficiaries. This initiative represents an important facet of China-Africa cooperation and is a notable outcome of the Belt and Road Initiative's people-to-people exchanges [30]. This educational and technical collaboration lays the foundation for modernizing Mozambique's economy while further deepening bilateral relations between China and Mozambique.

Fintech cooperation is another vital area. China's digital payment and banking technologies can address Mozambique's lack of traditional financial services, particularly in regions with underdeveloped banking infrastructure. The rise of mobile payments and digital wallets has significantly expanded financial inclusion and bridged geographic gaps in access to financial services. Furthermore, the New Development Bank (NDB), established by BRICS countries in 2015, can finance projects addressing urgent challenges in African countries [31]. The NDB's president, Dilma Rousseff, has emphasized the importance of joint infrastructure projects and the need for expanding payment mechanisms to build a more multilateral and inclusive financial system.

Challenges and Problems in Mozambique-China relations

China and Mozambique face several challenges in their cooperative relationship, particularly regarding policy differences, project implementation, and foreign assistance. Significant disparities exist in their political and economic policies. China demonstrates strong policy coherence and administrative execution, enabling it to swiftly advance large infrastructure projects. In contrast, Mozambican political environment is complex, with policies subject to change due to shifts in government. This volatility can create uncertainties for Chinese enterprises during investment and project

implementation, particularly concerning changes in tax policies, land use rights, and environmental regulations. Implementation issues are common in Sino-Mozambican projects, often stemming from challenges in management capacity, technical expertise, and local labor training [32]. Mozambique's relatively underdeveloped infrastructure capacity may not consistently meet international standards in project design, construction, and quality management, which introduces uncertainty regarding project quality and timelines.

Mozambique's economy is largely dependent on foreign help, particularly Chinese loans and financial aid. Infrastructure development has been made easier by this assistance, but it has also increased the amount of external debt owed. Because of its structurally fragile economy, Mozambique has a restricted ability to repay debt, which raises questions about the sustainability of its long-term debt. Furthermore, Mozambique's attempts to achieve independent growth and economic sustainability may be hampered by its dependency on international help.

Continuity and consistency are characteristics of Chinese policy, especially in economic planning, which facilitates the gradual advancement of major initiatives. On the other hand, Mozambique's political cycles sometimes result in shifting policies, which affect the continuity and stability of projects. For Chinese investors, this uncertainty presents risks because adjustments may have an impact on project management and anticipated returns. Mozambique's bureaucratic procedures can be complicated which frequently causes delays and higher operating expenses for Chinese enterprises, thus discouraging future investments. In contrast, China's administrative structure is effective in allocating resources and implementing policies. Differences in labor laws and culture make economic collaboration even more difficult. Mozambique's strict labor laws and social welfare requirements present additional operational challenges for Chinese businesses used to quick project progress [23].

Despite these obstacles, it is anticipated that as the Belt and Road Initiative advances throughout Africa, political ties between China and Mozambique would strengthen. China is probably going to increase its collaboration with Mozambique in vital areas including energy, agriculture, and infrastructure, especially in the areas of ports, railroads, and mining projects. China's capital and technical know-how can help Mozambique with resource development and industrial upgrading because of the country's natural gas resources and agricultural potential. The two countries' political ties and

strategic trust may improve as a result of this cooperative effort. China and Mozambique's partnership might grow to include renewable energy and green technology. Future investments in green finance, solar, and wind energy projects could promote ecological and environmental protection efforts [32]. This aligns with global trends in sustainability and may help reduce Mozambique's dependence on traditional resource exploitation.

However, China-Mozambique relations may face competitive pressures from other countries, particularly as the European Union and the United States increase their political influence and assistance to Mozambique. In this context, China needs adapt its cooperation strategy to ensure economic benefits while maintaining sustainable political relations. By fostering transparent cooperation and diversifying investment projects, China can assist Mozambique in mitigating debt risks and enhancing the stability of bilateral ties.

As the international political landscape evolves, China may also need to localize its cooperation model to better align with Mozambique's policy changes and the dynamic global environment. Addressing domestic security and political stability in Mozambique will be crucial. Strengthening risk prevention mechanisms and focusing on local social development needs will be vital for maintaining a robust and healthy bilateral relationship.

Discussion: Lessons for Global South Cooperation

The relationship between Mozambique and China offers valuable lessons for other nations in the Global South, particularly regarding the complexities of development partnerships. While foreign investment presents opportunities, several challenges characterize the business environment in Mozambique.

Firstly, the cost of living in Mozambique is higher than in many European and African countries, contributing to a low level of education among the labor force. A significant outflow of skilled workers, particularly middle-level technicians migrating to South Africa, Zimbabwe, and other countries, exacerbates this issue. Additionally, stringent labor laws, which mandate severance packages of at least three months' salary upon dismissal, elevate operational costs for businesses.

Foreign exchange management also presents challenges. Mozambique imposes strict restrictions on currency exchange, limiting operations to select banks. Such rules make foreign investment more difficult, even though some

businesses may keep some of their foreign funds for imports. Inadequate water, power, and transportation infrastructure also results in high logistical costs that have a detrimental effect on company operations.

Additional obstacles to market expansion are the population's low purchasing power and the economy's slow pace of development. Foreign investors are frequently hampered by bureaucratic inefficiencies, even in spite of government pledges to liberalize and the creation of the Investment Promotion Center to speed up approvals. Investor confidence is further undermined by worries about declining social security, rising crime rates, and inadequate police presence in cities.

Communication and project implementation are greatly impacted by the linguistic and cultural differences between China and Mozambique. The majority of Chinese employees usually speak just Chinese and English, yet Portuguese is the official language of Mozambique. Because of this language barrier, it is necessary to use interpreters, which makes information transfer more difficult and raises the possibility of misunderstandings. Cultural differences also pose difficulties. Project management expectations may be out of sync as a result of Chinese companies' tendency to place a higher priority on quick project completion and Mozambican employees' emphasis on work-life balance. Furthermore, in contrast to the Chinese approach, which can call for longer working hours, Mozambique's labor laws prioritize employee rights and downtime. These variations may lead to labor disputes, endangering the viability of the enterprise.

Western economic and political sway over Mozambique has grown in recent years, mostly as a result of financial aid and security backing. Mozambique's sustainable growth and integration into the global digital economy are intended to be enhanced by programs like the European Union's Global Gateway, which promotes renewable energy and digital infrastructure [33]. The United States has stepped up its support for security and public health initiatives, with a particular emphasis on counterterrorism and the fight against AIDS [34]. China's market position and the long-term viability of its collaboration are affected by the rivalry for investment from other countries. In order to improve the longevity of partnerships, European and American projects frequently include governance, transparency, and localization criteria. Overall,

other African countries pose major challenges to China's position as they strengthen their market appeal through better security and governance practices.

Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were the latest member states to join the BRICS at the historic Johannesburg Summit. President Filipe Nyusi stated during this meeting that Mozambique is willing to work with the BRICS nations and is looking for funds from the New Development Bank. He underlined that BRICS infrastructure projects may greatly meet the continent's developmental demands, hence boosting Mozambicans' economic circumstances [35]. China is a vital partner for Mozambique because of its strong economic relations with Africa and its active membership in BRICS. The interests of Russia and Mozambique coincide on international issues, according to José Mateus Katupha, Mozambique's ambassador to Russia [36], emphasizing collaboration in politics, diplomacy, research, technology, and economy. In addition to strengthening bilateral relations, ongoing cooperation in the fields of energy, infrastructure, and agriculture makes it easier for Mozambique to join larger BRICS Plus initiatives, which is crucial for gaining access to fresh investment possibilities and advancing regional stability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the China-Mozambique partnership is an important instance of a dynamic model of cooperation in the Global South, characterized by notable successes in trade and economic cooperation. Remarkable efforts have improved Mozambique's connectivity, infrastructure, and ability to export resources. China's calculated investments in the development of coal and natural gas have bolstered Mozambique's local economy and enhanced energy and food security.

This collaboration is not without its difficulties, though. Significant barriers that could compromise the long-term viability of this collaboration include implementation challenges, cultural differences, and growing competition from Western countries. Transparency and governance standards concerns have become important issues that need constant attention. Going forward, there are encouraging opportunities for growth due to the possibility for cooperation in the fields of green energy, digital transformation, and agricultural modernization. Digital technology developments and solar and wind energy initiatives can be extremely helpful in assisting Mozambique in achieving sustainable development

objectives. China will need to enhance its risk management techniques and take more regional approaches to its investments if it is to keep its competitive edge in the face of intensifying competition from abroad.

In the end, the development of China-Mozambique ties offers other countries in the Global South a useful case study, emphasizing the significance of adjusting to local circumstances and promoting reciprocal advantages in global alliances. The lessons learnt as both nations work through the challenges of their relationship could lead to more robust and just forms of South-South collaboration, which would support stability and growth in the region as a whole.

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