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China's Zero – Tariff Policy: Prompting Africa's Modernization

Yang Baorong, Li Cheng, Wen Chunhui and Wei Min

Abstract: In May 2026, China's zero – tariff policy toward Africa officially came into effect. China thereby became the world's first major economy to extend unilateral, comprehensive zero – tariff treatment to all African countries with which it maintains diplomatic relations. This major initiative marks a further deepening of the outcomes of the Forum on China – Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and a concrete effort by China to help reshape the global development landscape by opening its own market. It is a milestone in the history of China – Africa relations. Today, changes unseen in a century are accelerating, while global economic governance faces severe challenges. As the continent with the largest number of developing countries, Africa has long remained on the margins of the international trading system. A structural gap persists between its development aspirations and the existing institutional arrangements. In this context, China's zero – tariff policy toward Africa goes beyond conventional trade concessions. It represents both a positive response to the common concerns of African countries and a proactive effort to redress implicit rules and institutional inequalities in international economic and trade cooperation. Through unilateral and broadly inclusive institutional arrangements, the policy provides African countries with a fairer starting point for participation in the international division of labor, while offering a practical example for exploring a more inclusive and balanced system of global governance. To provide an in – depth analysis of the institutional rationale, practical effects, and international implications of China's zero – tariff policy toward Africa, the journal has invited four experts and scholars specializing in China – Africa economic and trade relations to discuss the policy's pioneering significance at the institutional level, its impact on facilitating China – Africa trade, its implications for China – Africa agricultural cooperation, and its effects on the economic modernization of African countries. It is hoped that these

discussions will provide useful insights for further research on zero – tariff policies and for improving related policy practices.

Keywords: Zero Tariffs, International Trade Compensation, China – Africa Trade, China – Africa Agricultural Cooperation, African Modernization

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The Evolutionary Logic and Institutional Comparison of China’s Zero – Tariff Policy for Africa

Xiao Hao, Tuo Hanjun and Li Zijin

Abstract: Drawing on the successive announcements of the General Administration of Customs and the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council, this article parses every eight – digit tariff line and its most – favored – nation(MFN) rate across all rounds, reconstructing the policy’s evolution from 2005 to 2026 along the country and product dimensions and comparing it with the arrangements of the United States, the European Union, and Japan. Along the country dimension, coverage expanded from an initial 25 least – developed countries to 53 diplomatic partners, while the mode of entry shifted from bilateral exchange of notes to unilateral preferences, with the 2024 abolition of the exchange – of – notes requirement eliminating institutional access uncertainty. Along the product dimension, concessions followed a low – protection – first, high – protection – later logic, with the mean MFN rate of newly added items rising from 7.43% in 2010 to 11.83% in 2013, a sequence closely aligned with Africa’s

core export interests in the Chinese market. The four – party comparison shows that, once nominal rates converge toward zero, rules of origin and commitment stability become the decisive determinants of a preference's real value; China's scheme, with exclusion – free coverage, rules of origin recognizing the cumulation of Chinese intermediate inputs and a permanent commitment, exhibits the lowest exposure to the three sources of trade policy uncertainty, thereby offering the most favorable external conditions for African manufacturing investment; trade statistics show that China's zero – tariff treatment for Africa has generated observable export growth, with the effect being more pronounced for products in which beneficiary countries enjoy a preferential margin, although its effectiveness remains constrained by the structure of preferential margins, supply bottlenecks in Africa, and capacity for rules – of – origin compliance.

Keywords: Zero Tariff, China – Africa Economic Cooperation, Unilateral Preferences, Rules of Origin, Trade Policy Uncertainty

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Building the African Continental Free Trade Area: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects

Zhu Weidong and Qu Xuanyi

Abstract: Since its formal launch, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has played a key institutional role in advancing economic integration in Africa. Over the past five years, the AfCFTA has demonstrated strong institutional resilience and made significant progress in establishing a legal framework covering trade in goods, services, investment, and digital trade; setting up a formalized governance structure; facilitating actual intra – African trade flows; and improving financial infrastructure, including the pan – African payment

and settlement system. However, the process of deeper integration in Africa continues to face serious challenges due to multiple factors, including the slow incorporation of AfCFTA rules into national legislation, overlapping and conflicting rules, geopolitical instability in some regions, deficits in the provision of transport and digital networks, and persistent non – tariff barriers. To move from loose association toward deep integration, the AfCFTA needs to tap its internal potential by further strengthening institutional frameworks for supranational regulation, intellectual property rights, and other areas; advancing transnational infrastructure and digital connectivity; and enhancing regional political trust and governance effectiveness in line with African realism. At the same time, China and Africa should deepen high – quality strategic cooperation in such areas as industrial – chain integration, connectivity support, and expanded market access, thereby providing strong external support for unlocking the benefits of intra – African trade and achieving inclusive growth.

Keywords: African Continental Free Trade Area, regional integration, trade in goods, trade in services

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The Instrumentalization of U. S. Religious Human Rights Diplomacy: The Case of Nigeria

Lv Yaojun and Feng Lu

Abstract: Religion – related violence in Nigeria is deeply rooted in a complex set of factors, including ethnic structures, uneven regional development, competition over resources, cross – border infiltration by armed groups, and weak state governance, and therefore cannot be simply attributed to religious antagonism. However, the Trump administration characterized the situation as

“religious persecution of Christians” and placed Nigeria’s security governance issues on the agenda of U. S. religious human rights diplomacy through measures including public criticism, the redesignation of Nigeria as a “Country of Particular Concern” for religious freedom, visa restrictions, aid conditionality, counterterrorism cooperation, and military threats. This policy orientation not only responded to the political demands of religious conservatives and evangelical voters in the United States, but also provided the Trump administration with a moral rationale for exerting pressure abroad under the “America First” framework, while serving U. S. interests in security, resources, and strategic competition in West Africa. Its impact is reflected not only in unilateral U. S. pressure and sovereignty disputes in U. S. – Nigeria relations, but may also exacerbate religious identity – based divisions within Nigeria, intensify armed – group mobilization, and increase pressures on state governance. At the international level, the Trump administration’s approach has reinforced a narrative that interprets complex conflicts in terms of religious identity, revealing a tendency toward the instrumentalization, securitization, and selective application of U. S. religious human rights diplomacy.

Keywords: Religious human rights diplomacy, Trump administration, Nigerian conflicts, U. S. Africa policy

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The Structural Roots of the Geopolitical Fragmentation of the Maghreb

Shu Meng and Yu Xiaodong

Abstract: The Maghreb has long been trapped in a predicament of geopolitical fragmentation, making it a typical case of the setbacks encountered in the development of regional integration. This article explores the structural roots underlying the persistence and intractability of geopolitical fragmentation in the region from three dimensions: competition among political norms, the vertical flow

of economic resources, and transnational security dependence. Politically, the governance paradigm externally promoted by the European Union and localized expressions of political Islam have long remained in competition. Combined with differences among regional countries in their degrees of dependence on external geopolitical systems, this has resulted in persistently low levels of political mutual trust within the region. Economically, the region's countries are highly dependent on European and American markets for resource exports, while their industrial structures exhibit a tendency toward convergence, making it difficult for regional economic cooperation to generate endogenous momentum. In terms of security, multiple cross-border risks are intertwined within the region, while shortcomings in the governance capacities of individual countries have created conditions for the continued intervention of external actors in regional affairs. These three mechanisms do not operate in isolation; but rather are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, further deepening the region's dependence on external forces and entrenching its developmental predicament. As the regional landscape of the Maghreb continues to be reshaped, external actors have become increasingly diverse. However, the diversification of external actors has not been accompanied by a corresponding enhancement of the region's capacity for autonomous integration. Instead, it has further dispersed the resources and political attention required for internal regional integration.

Keywords: Maghreb, External dependence, Regional integration, Geopolitical fragmentation, Regional integration

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