

From “Stadium Diplomacy” to Tough Economic Diplomacy? A Decade of Relations between China and Cameroon

Firmin Mbala¹

¹·Catholic University of Central Africa, Yaounde, Cameroon

firminmbala@hotmail.com

The recent evolution of Sino-Cameroonian relations offers an interesting insight into the overflow of theories suggesting an inescapable rise of emerging powers paired with a supposedly quick transformation of the African and global scene. At first sight the two countries have indeed many reasons to strengthen their cooperation, as effectively experienced this last decade. China is actually considered to lead a global strategy driven by the search of commodities, access to new markets and even migration fronts. Cameroon for its part is obviously interested by a partnership diversification likely to decrease its economic, political and normative “dependency” vis-à-vis historical partners, namely the EU and USA. Despite the prevailing rhetoric extolling the virtues of the “South-South cooperation” and a “win-win partnership”, a closer review of the trajectory of Sino-Cameroonian relations suggests an ambivalent process of depoliticization. On the one hand, the spectacular increase of Chinese economic interests in the country during the past decade, has so far failed to increase Cameroon’s room for manoeuvre towards the EU and the USA. On the other hand, China’s famous “stadium diplomacy” formerly associated with prestigious infrastructure building seems to be gradually giving place to an economic diplomacy where the interests of the two parties are toughly negotiated.