

Latest Chinese Investments in the South Pacific Area

Yingying Wu*

1. Overview

In recent years, the Chinese government has been investing an enormous amount of money in infrastructure development across many of the island states in the area of the South Pacific. This essay will review such investments of China in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Timor, Samoa, and Vanuatu (Annex) and further analyze the underlying rationale.

2. Papua New Guinea

Since 2012, China has made investments in Papua New Guinea (“PNG”), including Rim Nickel Mine, Laicheng Port Project, International Conference Center and Highland Highway Project¹ In particular, the Agreement on Construction of Infrastructure, concluded between China and PNG on November 20, 2017, launched the highlands economic corridor development program, with USD 330 million from China for roads, agricultural parks, and other infrastructure.² In June 2018, PNG and China signed a memorandum on the construction under the framework of the “Belt and Road” initiative.³ The Chinese government began to build a public road and repair the airport expressway in PNG in June 2018.⁴ The PNG National Power Grid Power Transmission and Transformation Project, the first energy cooperation project between China and PNG, was initiated

* Lecturer, School of International Law at China University of Political Science and Law. LL.M. (NYU), J.S.D. (Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9094-7238>. The author may be contacted at: wyyfada@163.com /Address: School of International Law, CUPL, No. 25, Xitucheng Road, Haidian District, Beijing, P.R. China 100088.

by a Chinese company named TBEA Co. under the auspices of the Chinese government's preferential export buyer's credit funds.⁵ In 2018, two road projects in Mendicity, funded by the Asian Development Bank, are under construction by China Railway International Corporation.⁶ China Port Bay Company in PNG completed the APEC Roads Projects in August 2018.⁷

Map 1: South Pacific Islands Countries which welcome Chinese Investments



3. Fiji

China has become the largest investor in Fiji, accounting for 41-45 percent of all foreign investments in this country in the years of 2014, 2015, and 2016, respectively.⁸ The Stinson Bridge and Vatuwaka Bridge Project, which started in 2015 and was completed in 2017, was a free aid project of the Chinese government to Fiji, undertaken by China Railway Construction 14th Bureau Group Co., Ltd.⁹ The Somo Hydropower Project was started in 2013 and completed in 2016 on the third largest island in Fiji. As a free aid program of the Chinese government to Fiji, it was built by China Hunan Construction Engineering Group Corporation.¹⁰ Chinese preferential loan funded projects such as Naboaru Highway in 2016 and Buzabe Highway in 2015. Both of them were built by the China Railway First Bureau, which is a state-owned enterprise.¹¹ In 2017, Zhejiang Wanguo

Architectural Design Institute Co., Ltd invested in the Fiji Friendship Plaza project.¹² Construction contracts cover hydropower stations, roads and bridges, sewage pipelines, and other projects.¹³ The China Railway One Aviation Institute is undertaking the iron ore port project in the second largest city of Fiji. It is currently the largest contracted project among Chinese companies in Fiji.¹⁴

In the agricultural sector, there are many oceanic fisheries companies owned by Chinese.¹⁵ The Fiji North Island Agricultural Development Assistance Project is a free aid project funded by China since 2015 that has been implemented by Shandong Foreign Economic Group. The project provides assistance to Fiji through rice breeding and cultivation demonstration, agricultural materials, and personnel training.¹⁶ Similar projects include China's assistance to Fiji's fungus technology cooperation project, which was completed in 2016.¹⁷ The Memorandum of Understanding on Agricultural Cooperation between China and Fiji furthered abovementioned cooperation.¹⁸

4. Timor

The Chinese government has provided free aid to fund the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building, the Presidential Palace, and other projects in Timor.¹⁹ Chinese enterprises won bidding for the construction of the East Timor National Power Plant and the National Grid Project in 2008 with a contractual value of USD 360 million.²⁰ There are also many contract projects undertaken by Chinese enterprises²¹ such as Hunan Dongsheng Lubo Investment Group Co., Ltd. and Macao Deguang Electronics Development Co., Ltd. For example, these two firms signed an agreement to jointly invest in the construction of the East Timor Tibai Port Logistics.²²

Under the framework of the China-Portugal Forum, Chinese agricultural enterprises have cultivated rice fields in East Timor.²³ The project, which is named "China's East Timor Manatto Laraan South Fishery Port Aquaculture Park," was invested by Guangxi Yixin Fisheries Development Co., Ltd. It includes a fishing port construction, fishing boat shipyards, marine fishing operations, seafood sorting and processing plants, etc.²⁴ In 2017, the Shrimp Farming Project was invested and operated by China Longping High-Tech Co., Ltd.²⁵ The Sino-East fishery cooperation on shrimp seedlings was launched in 2016, as well.²⁶

5. Samoa

In 2011, the construction of Samoa government office building and the International Conference Center was undertaken by Shanghai Construction Engineering Group, with preferential loans from the Export-Import Bank of China.²⁷ The two governments signed an agreement in 2012 for three projects, i.e., Ocean College of Samoa National University, restoring primary school, and the training center for the disabled. The projects were undertaken by Hunan Construction Engineering Group of China in 2014.²⁸ In 2013, Chinese companies invested USD 13 million to build solar power plants in Samoa.²⁹ In 2013, AVIC International Aviation Development Co., Ltd. signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Engineering Transportation and Infrastructure Department in Apia, Samoa. According to the memorandum, China would provide aircraft, technical training, spare parts, etc. for Samoa.³⁰ In 2014, the two governments concerned signed a concessional loan agreement for upgrading and reconstructing the Rio International Airport, which was initially built under China's free aid. The Samoa National Medical Center, located in the capital, was completed in 2015 with preferential loan assistance from the Chinese government.³¹ China's assistance to the Samoa sports facilities maintenance and renovation project was completed in 2015.³² In 2016, the first phase of the upgrade and reconstruction of the Valeoolo International Airport in Samoa was successfully completed by Shanghai Construction Engineering Group Co., Ltd. In the same year, the Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation between the two governments concerned was signed.³³ In 2017, the Leone Bridge project, jointly funded by Australia and the World Bank, was completed by China Railway First Bureau Group Co., Ltd.³⁴

6. Vanuatu

China's investment and aid in Vanuatu were started long before. In 2002, Zhongshui Group Ocean Shipping Co., Ltd. signed a bilateral fishery cooperation agreement with Vanuatu. It has sent 17 fishing boats to carry out tuna fishing business in the waters of the basin.³⁵ The Project of office building of the Melanesia Pioneer Group Secretariat and the Port Vila China Medical Team Dormitory, were aided by China in 2007. The expansion project of Vanuatu Nantai University

Emmaus, assisted and aided by China, was launched in 2013.³⁶ The new Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement between China and Vanuatu was signed in 2015.³⁷ Since then, China has launched aid projects including the parliament building project, the Nantai University law school building project, the Santotu dental clinic project, the Santonon Agricultural College, rice and vegetable planting technology cooperation projects, medical technology cooperation, table tennis technical cooperation projects, etc.³⁸

7. Analysis

Examples provided in the article regarding Chinese investments in the South Pacific Area are not exhaustive. These islands, which are historically and geographically close to New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, are less developed. Before China became a large investor in these islands, New Zealand and Australia had dominated the foreign investments there. For instance, Australia is a large investor in Papua New Guinea. New Zealand invested a lot in Samoa prior to Chinese investment in Samoa. Australia invested in gas and oil industry in Timor given that Australia imported gas from Timor through pipelines.

Both Australia and New Zealand not only invest but also provide aid out of politically driven motives. For instance, the establishment of Timor was supported by Australia against Indonesia in a geopolitical sense. Nevertheless, there are also some domestic issues that trouble these islands. Furthermore, as the sea level rises due to global warming, posing a threat to those islands, investment in this region is becoming less advantageous from an economic perspective. Hence, Australia and New Zealand may not be upset by Chinese investments in those islands in recent years. The other side of this equation is that Chinese investments have not encountered many difficulties from locals in these islands, and neighboring nations such as Australia, New Zealand, and Indonesia.

China has made investments in these islands through various means. Some projects are free aid by China to these islands. Others are funded with preferential loans from Chinese state-owned and controlled banks. Furthermore, the World Bank, the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, the Asian Development Bank have funded these projects based on the membership of some of these islands countries.

All these projects, no matter where the funding sources are deriving from, are primarily undertaken by Chinese companies, in particular, state-owned and controlled companies with free aid by the Chinese government, preferential loans, and construction contracts. These cover the areas of agriculture, fishing, infrastructure, roads, bridges, ports, airports, highways, agricultural technologies, hydropower, stations, and sewage pipelines. Also, the infrastructure projects, to some degree, facilitate and promote the development of tourism, which is one of the main pillar industries in these islands, such as Timor and Fiji. China seems to be interested in developing tourism in these islands, as well as building a close relationship with them in a geopolitical viewpoint. Chinese overseas investments is more likely to be accelerated in this region.

Annex

Chinese Investments in South Pacific Islands Countries

Countries	Major Investment Projects	Participants	Size (amount of fund: USD)
Papua New Guinea	Agreement on Construction of Infrastructure (2017)	Two governments of China and PNG	330 million
	PNG National Power Grid Power Transmission and Transformation Project (2018)	TBEA Co.	Preferential export buyer' credit funds from China (4 stations, Grid Power Transmission of 189 miles)
	Renovation of the Expressway to the Airport, and Build A Public Road (2018)	China Harbour Engineering Company Ltd.	1.2 million
	Two Roads Projects in Mendi city	China Railway International Corporation	Asian Development Bank
	International Conference Center (2012)	China Jiangxi International Economic and Technological Cooperation Company; China Overseas Holdings Limited;	Aid from China
	APEC Roads Projects (2018)	China Harbour Engineering in PNG	Free aid from China
	Laicheng Port Project	China Harbour Engineering Company Ltd.	320 million (72% of funds comes from the Asian Development Bank, and the rest from PNG Government)
	Rim Nickel Mine (2009)	China Metallurgical Construction Group	1300 million
	Stinson Bridge and Vatuwaka Bridge Project (2015-2017)	China Railway Construction 14th Bureau Group Co., Ltd.	Free aid from China

Fiji	The Somo Hydropower Project (2013-2016)	China Hunan Construction Engineering Group Corporation	Free aid
	Naboaru Highway (2016)	China Railway First Bureau	Chinese preferential loan; Highway is of 70 miles.
	Fiji Friendship Plaza project (2017)	Zhejiang Wanguo Architectural Design Institute Co., Ltd	30 floors, with 46000 square meters
	Iron ore port project in the second largest city of Fiji.	The China Railway One Aviation Institute	The largest Chinese contracted project in Fiji
	Fiji North Island Agricultural Development Assistance Project (2015)	Shandong Foreign Economic Group	Free aid
	Buzabe Highway (2015)	China Railway First Bureau	Chinese preferential loan

Timor	Construction of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building and the Presidential Palace (2007-2009)	China Shandong International Economic & Technical Cooperation Group	Free aid
	East Timor National Power Plant and the National Grid Project (2009)	China Nuclear E&C Group	360 million
	East Timor Tibai Port Logistics (2017)	Hunan Dongsheng Lubo Investment Group Co., Ltd.; Macao Deguang Electronics Development Co., Ltd.	
	China's East Timor Manatto Laraan South Fishery Port Aquaculture Park (2017)	Guangxi Yixin Fisheries Development Co., Ltd	400 million
	Shrimp Farming Project (2017)	China Longping High-Tech Co., Ltd.	

Samoa	Leone Bridge project (2017)	China Railway First Bureau Group Co., Ltd.	4.3 million (funded by Australia and World Bank)
	the first phase of the upgrade and reconstruction of the Valeoolo International Airport in Samoa (2016)	Shanghai Construction Engineering Group Co., Ltd	
	The Samoa National Medical Center (2015)	Shanghai Construction Group	Preferential loan assistance from the Chinese government.
	Sports Facilities Maintenance and Renovation Project (2015)	Shanghai Construction Group	Free Aid
	Upgrading and Reconstructing the Rio International Airport (2015)	Shanghai Construction Group	Free aid for construction; concessional loan at governmental level for upgrading (50 million)
	memorandum of cooperation with the Engineering Transportation and Infrastructure Department in Apia, Samoa (2013)	AVIC International Aviation Development Co., Ltd.	China would provide aircraft, technical training, spare parts, etc. to the Samoa
	The Construction of Solar Power Plants in Samoa (2013)	China Fujian New Energy Development Ltd. Co. (a subsidiary of Guodian Power Development)	13 million
	Construction of Ocean College of Samoa National University, Renovation of primary school, and the training center for the disabled (2012-2014)	Hunan Construction Engineering Group of China	Governmental agreements
	Construction of Samoa government office building and the International Conference Center (2011)	Shanghai Construction Engineering Group	Preferential loans from the Export-Import Bank of China

Vanuatu	Bilateral fishery cooperation agreement (2002)	Zhongshui Group Ocean Shipping Co., Ltd	
	Project of office building of the Melanesia Pioneer Group Secretariat and the Port Vila China Medical Team Dormitory (2007)		Aid from China
	Expansion Project of Vanuatu Nantai University Emmaus (2013)		Aid from China
	Construction and Design of National Conference Center (2011)		Aid from China
	The new Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement between China and Vanuatu (2015)		

Source: Compiled by the author.

Note: The table is based on all information available to the public. Some information, however, is limited or missing, such as the companies that participates the project and the size of the project.

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