

China is Jamaica's Partner in Development

Unbeknown to some, China and Jamaica has had a relationship that dates as far back as the mid-19th century when the British Government recruited agricultural workers from China and India.

It is reported that the earliest groups of Chinese nationals arrived on the island in 1854. By the early 1960s, the ancestors of Chinese immigrants had a strong command of the retail trade industry especially in dry goods stores, supermarkets, laundries, betting parlours and later in manufacturing. China and Jamaica formerly established diplomatic relations on November 21, 1972 – just ten years after the country gained its independence in 1962. In 1973 the Chinese Government established an embassy in the country's capital of Kingston. Last December President Xi Jinping appointed Niu Qingbao, as the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Jamaica while Her Excellency Fay Pickersgill was appointed as Niu's equivalent in Beijing last August. China's investment in Jamaica – Less than five months ago the China Exim Bank announced its willingness to provide approx. US\$ 10 billion to attract Chinese nationals interested in setting up businesses in Jamaica. The Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce, Anthony Hylton, the Jamaica Promotions Corporation (Jampro) and China's EXIM Bank, partnered to promote 'Brand Jamaica'. The Jamaican Government has promised that investors will be able to benefit from Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and Industrial Parks. During the event, Minister Hylton remarked that, 'A part of being open for business is demonstrated in the fact that the Jamaican Government has put in place the necessary policies and legislations to encourage investment … as we celebrate 43 years of friendship between our Governments, I can say with confidence that the Jamaican Government is committed to another 43 years and beyond.' To date, China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC Americas) is the largest Chinese company to invest in Jamaica having undertaken the 66 km Jamaica North South Highway Project. This is currently the largest infrastructure development project on the island with an investment of over USD \$600 million in loans from the China Development Bank and with equity from CHEC Americas. The public first had access to the first section of the highway on August 6, 2014 – the country's 52nd year of Independence. Jamaicans were able to utilize this leg of the highway free of cost for one month. The Prime Minister the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller officially opened the highway and remarked that: 'The Mount Rosser Leg of the North South Highway is an Independence gift to the Jamaican people. Today I am proud and happy to be a Jamaican. This project is very special to me and when the Chinese take on a task they never waiver until it is completed and you can take their word for it!' The newest segment of the highway is scheduled to be opened soon at no charge to motorists until March 10, 2016. In a recent Jamaica Gleaner report, Ivan Anderson, Managing Director of the National Road Operating and Constructing Company (NROCC) stated: 'So starting in January the first section of the highway, which will be opened free to traffic, is from Angels to Linstead. Then in February, we will open free to traffic from Caymanas to Angels and also from Mammee Bay to Unity Valley.' China's Commitment to Education Over the years the China Scholarship Council has awarded full scholarships to a number of Caribbean locals, Jamaica being no exception. However, in 2007 the Governments of the People's Republic of China and Jamaica formally adopted a bilateral scholarship agreement. Student applications were first assessed by officials at the Chinese Embassy and the Ministry of Finance and Planning before submission to the relevant authorities across China. In a 2012 Jamaica Observer report, former Political Counsellor at the Chinese Embassy in Kingston, Xia GuoShun, noted that the Chinese Government had provided over 100 scholarships to Jamaicans and that this was an excellent way of fostering mutual understanding between the two countries: 'Chinese people want to learn from Jamaicans and Jamaicans also want to learn from the Chinese, so it is a channel for us to learn from each other.' Once in China students receive privileges that their Chinese counterparts do not, including private rooms and free admission to cultural and high profile events. The author (a Jamaican) had the privilege of attending a trip to the world renowned Temple of Heaven followed by participation in the 2016 New Year's Reception for Foreign Journalists in China. Both events were organized by Professor Zhang Yanqiu, Deputy Dean for the Faculty of Journalism and Communication and Director of the African Communication Research Centre at Communication University of China.