



# **The geopolitics of China's engagement with African development**

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**Abstract:** China, in its quest for a closer strategic partnership with Africa, has increasingly dynamic economic, political and diplomatic activities on the continent. Chinese leaders and strategists believe that China's historical experience and development model resonate powerfully with African counterparts and that the long standing history of friendly political linkages and development co-operation offers a durable foundation for future partnership and development co-operation. This paper examines the changing historical position of Africa within Beijing's foreign policy strategy and its vision of the evolving international political system and looks in particular at China's bilateral and state-centric approach to working with African partners. Chinese practice is uncomfortable and unfamiliar with the notion of 'development' as an independent policy field of the kind that emerged among Western nations in the course of the 1950s and increasingly China has come to be viewed as a 'rogue creditor' and a threat to the international aid industry. Rather than highlighting one strand of Chinese relations with African states (such as aid or governance) we propose here that it is necessary to critically reflect on the wider geopolitics of China-Africa relations (past and present) in order to understand how China is opening up new choices and altering the playing field for African development for the first time since the neo-liberal turn of the 1980s.

## Introduction: Chinese growth and foreign policy: 'soft power' and rogue aid

I would like to reiterate here what China stands for. We will continue to hold high the banner of peace, development and cooperation, unswervingly follow the road of peaceful development, firmly pursue the independent foreign policy of peace and dedicate ourselves to developing friendly relations and cooperation with all countries..... China's development, instead of hurting or threatening anyone, can only serve peace, stability and common prosperity in the world (Hu Jintao, 2005).

China's growth has required a concerted economic internationalisation and with it a changed geopolitics bringing China closer binationally and multilaterally to other countries. Its development discourse has also changed, although not as drastically as one might imagine, being still premised on 'peaceful' and 'harmonious' cooperation with the developing world as Hu's speech demonstrates. Our paper is concerned with how China's growth alters its political relationships with Africa and what this tells us more broadly about development.

Part of China's internationalisation is the extension of a 'new', 'pragmatic' development model, but one that is rooted discursively in longer-standing views of politics and development. The 'new' development model is growth-oriented and market-based, so some have termed it a form of neo-liberalism, though one with 'Chinese characteristics' (Harvey 2005, Sautman 2006) to refer to the traces of Maoism and the lingering role of the state. We are grappling with this issue of

how to characterise China's development model in another paper and welcome your thoughts.

In the growth-oriented model, selected African countries become first and foremost locations of raw materials to fuel China's growth. In this way China's foreign policy is described by some as moving from 'ideology' to 'business' with the use of what Nye (2004) terms 'soft power' to cajole client states into accepting Chinese contracts. Interestingly Nye has been an advisor to the Chinese on how best to deploy soft power. For observers like Alden (2007) and Taylor (2006) soft power is part of China's 'oil diplomacy' in which notionally unconditional aid, low interest loans, and technical co-operation agreements (King, 2007) are used to cement bilateral deals over oil supply, engineering contracts, and trade agreements. As summarised by Tull (2006: 476), 'Beijing uses the pillars of its foreign policy, notably unconditional respect for state sovereignty and its corollary, non-interference, in the pursuit of its interests, be they energy security, multipolarity or the "One China" principle. To achieve these goals, Beijing is prepared to defend autocratic regimes that commit human rights abuses and forestall democratic reforms for narrow ends of regime survival".

It is the governance effects of China's aid and investment packages that have exorcised most commentators in the west. In some policy circles, mainly those inhabited by what Nye (2006) terms the 'China hawks', China's new aid offensive has been greeted with scepticism and concern, captured in the concept of 'rogue aid' (Naim 2007). One of the biggest criticisms of Chinese aid is the lack of political conditionalities, which some argue will lead to deepened debt and governance crises in Africa (Chidause 2007, Schoeman 2007). Naim (2007: 95) represents China as a 'threat to healthy, sustainable development' arguing that they 'are effectively pricing responsible and well meaning organizations out of the market in the very places they are needed most' whilst 'underwriting a world that is more corrupt, chaotic and authoritarian'. Similarly the US Treasury Department has called China a 'rogue creditor' practising 'opportunistic lending' (Phillips, 2006). Many observers and commentators (e.g. Manji and Marks 2007, Trofimov 2007, The Economist March 2008) have taken this focus on aid and conditionality further to argue that China is potentially a neo-colonial power, where African resources are 'plundered' by Beijing and sent back in the form of Chinese goods which cements the long standing uneven division of labour between Africa and the rest of the world.

In this paper we want to explore the relationships between China's development, its foreign policy and Africa's political economy and more broadly assess whether current theories in IR, political geography and development studies can adequately address these evolving relationships. While we are by no means apologists for China we pursue an international political economy perspective which sees China's interests in Africa as not substantially different from those of other industrialised countries vying for the continent's resources, either now or in the past. The tendency to demonise and over-determine China's role by western

critics reflects their worries about competition from China rather than realities on the ground.

Our first question is what theoretical tools are available in IR, political geography and development studies to begin the analysis of contemporary China-Africa geopolitics? Within this we argue for a broad political economy perspective, which is not deterministic but treats the unrolling of 'neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' as a political *process*. As such we need to focus on the mechanisms and discourses through which it is transmitted. For IR this means deconstructing numerous discourses, notably how the Chinese view geopolitics and how this informs practice. It also requires us to understand the mechanisms linking foreign policy discourses and events on the ground. For this we propose a state centred political economy informed by post-colonial theory that (amongst other things) examines how 'markets' are engendered and legitimated through seemingly non-market processes.

Our second focus is essentially empirical in terms of using these theoretical insights to analyse contemporary China-Africa relations. We ask how 'new' is China's aid offensive in Africa and to what extent does China re-work older discourses of politics and development to legitimise its current engagement with Africa? We also assess how China's development model 'travels' and how its local manifestations differ through interaction with African institutions. This approach recognises the differences between African polities, the agency of African political actors, the flexibility of the apparently rigid 'Beijing Consensus', and the extent to which China's insistence on 'non-interference' really allows for locally relevant and nationally-owned development policy.

### **International relations, political geography and development: beyond reductionism and trusteeship in Africa**

This section addresses our first question concerning what theoretical tools are available to analyse contemporary China-Africa geopolitics. If China's growth changes the geopolitics of its relationship with African states we need to investigate a range of disciplinary perspectives (Shambaugh 1994). A problem so far in this area is an intellectual division of labour (Chan 2007); namely, that between 'experts' of African politics and development and those working in and on China. Given that China's growing interest in Africa is driven by both its domestic needs and global aspirations it has been left to Africanists and African-based analysts – like Marcus and myself - to make sense of and connections between what goes on in China and in African countries. Hopefully, this is a temporary lacuna, which should eventually be resolved once Africa 'experts' become *au fait* with Chinese political economy and vice versa, or at least more collaborations between area specialists emerge.

In this sub-section we examine how IR and development studies have comprehended African politics and development, agreeing with Will's excellent

paper (Brown 2006) that we need a structural analysis. We also challenge the prevailing wisdom that knowledge about international relations and regions are somehow culturally determined and geographically bounded. Hence, rather than reify and/or exoticise theories 'with Chinese characteristics' or 'western rationality' we need a more hybrid and emergent view of how theories of international relations evolve. This opens up a space to analyse Chinese IR theories, albeit a tentative one given our relative ignorance of Chinese literature and the lack of work in translation. An important point about theory and policy in China is that "The significance of a scientific theory lies in its ability to guide human behaviour" (Wang 1994: 482, see also Leonard 2008) so that there has been, and still are, strong links between the outputs of Chinese foreign policy research centres and the CCP. From there we move to understanding the mechanisms for analysing how these normative policy concerns coming from China are made real in Africa and how we can explain differences between African states. This relies on a more traditional political economy, but one tempered by the idea of neo-liberalisation as a political process that relies on a range of market and non-market discourses and practices to become real.

#### *IR, Africa and the virtue of hybrid theories*

The linkages between development discourses and theories of international relations are often implicit rather than explicit. However, both share something of a Eurocentrism and reductionism, which places Africa as the subject of history and modernity (see Pieterse 1999; Escobar, 1995; Hart 2001). In turn this forecloses a wide range of different African forms of political agency, agency which is actually completely necessary to any understanding of the dynamics of international relations. That said there have been a number of attempts in recent years at thinking past 'Western' IR which has increasingly been seen as "ethnocentric, masculinised, northern and top-down" (Booth, 1995: 125, see also Chowdhry and Nair 2002, Mbembe 2000) with many critics arguing that it has consistently ignored or misrepresented Africa in particular. International Relations remains configured, as it was in Hoffman's (1977) designation of over thirty years ago, as "An American Social Science." (cf. Tickner, 2003). There have been some parallel debates about 'critical geopolitics' and its neglect of the periphery of the world system (particularly Africa) in focusing on European or North American geopolitical discourses (Perry, 1987; Grundy-Warr and Sidaway, 2003; Berg, 2004; Kofman, 1994; Kelly, 2006; Dalby, 2007; Sidaway, 2007). Writing a few years after the establishment of the journal *Political Geography*, Perry (1987, 6) claimed that: "Anglo-American political geography poses and pursues a limited and impoverished version of the discipline, largely ignoring the political concerns of four fifths of humankind." Kofman reiterated this in the mid-1990s, noting "the heavily Anglocentric, let alone Eurocentric, bias of political geography writing." (1994, 437). In this political geography is not alone; the same critique has periodically been levelled at "Anglo-American" human geography more widely (e.g. Berg 2004; Minca, 2003; Slater, 1989; Robinson, 2003). In this Orientalist-inspired sense knowledge *about* the international functions to legitimise the structuring of international relations in which Africa is marginalised and managed.

Dunn (2001) argues that western IR ignores Africa, because of its neorealist insistence on placing the state at the centre of explanations. For Africa the state is largely absent and so, Dunn argues, IR is incapable of comprehending the 'real' political dynamics of the continent. This is in contrast, he argues, to the clearly delimited and coherent states of Europe which makes IR relevant to them. Dunn argues that Africa 'does generate meaningful politics' (p.4) and so we need 'better' IR, which problematises questions of sovereignty, power and nations. While Brown (2006) is sympathetic to the broad project of a meaningful analysis of Africa in the world, he criticises Dunn and others for conflating IR with neorealism. Brown's argument is that neorealism suffers from serious limitations that are evident even before one transplants it to Africa. In particular the normalisation of the European state as the benchmark for analysis creates certain teleological arguments in which Africa, and some other regions, can only be found wanting (Mercer *et al* 2003). And the effect of arguing that Africa shows up the limitations and is so different that it requires an, as yet, unspecified 'new' theory only serves to marginalise Africa from core debates of IR. We wholeheartedly concur with Brown when he cites various examples of where IR has focused on global structures rather than states which has been fruitful for both IR and an analysis of Africa.

So, critiques of certain IR theories mirror those of development for an implicit statism and constructing knowledge in hegemonic ways. But we would argue that there are other ways of approaching the development/international politics nexus and that China-Africa relations offer the opportunity for de-centring the west from accounts of global politics and looking more closely at the 'entwining' of knowledges (as many post-colonial theorists have urged). In developing the critique of the likes of Dunn, Bilgin (2008) argues that these laudable attempts to insert the periphery into IR are based on a reversal of 'Western' theorising. Bilgin (2008) argues that such attempts should not limit their task to looking beyond the spatial confines of the 'West' in search for insight understood as 'difference', but also ask awkward questions about the 'Westernness' of ostensibly 'Western' approaches to world politics and the 'non-Westernness' of others. The same may also be said about the 'Westernness' of ostensibly 'Western' approaches to development and the 'non-Westernness' of others. For there may be elements of 'non-Western' experiences and ideas built in to 'Western' ways of thinking about and doing development and world politics. The reverse may also be true. What we think of as 'non-Western' approaches to world politics or 'development', in other words, may be suffused with 'Western' concepts and theories (e.g. the importance of modernisation discourses to China's scientific or technocratic vision of 'development'). Bilgin argues that this requires becoming curious about the effects of the historical relationship between the 'West' and the 'non-West' in the emergence of ways of thinking and doing that are in Bhabha's words 'almost the same but not quite' (REF). 'Mimicry' may emerge, in other words, as a way of 'doing' world politics or development in a seemingly 'similar' yet unexpectedly 'different' way.

Here then we have been trying to comprehend contemporary approaches to IR coming from China. As stated earlier there are close but not unidirectional links between IR theory and foreign policy (Jisi Wang 1994). In reviewing the state of Chinese IR Zhang identified three contrasting schools. One argues that 'Chinese scholars needed to "catch up" by "importing Western IR theories" (p.102). By contrast there is another seeking to re-work Marxism-Leninism in order to develop an IR 'with Chinese characteristics', what Leonard (2008) refers to as the 'neocomms' (neo-communists). While potentially interesting this is still mired in what Zhang sees as an 'increasingly anachronistic' Maoist orthodoxy based on Lenin's reading of imperialism tempered with world-systems theory, which he believes fails to produce any new insights. The third approach also seeks to capture the specificity of China's development trajectory and argues that most IR theory has been developed in particular geopolitical contexts which serve to extend the hegemony of the dominant powers. While seeking to capture what is unique about China this third body of theory should "participate in theoretical debate in the global IR community while addressing theoretical issues in terms of China's national experience" (p.104). Although not explicit and still in what Zhang terms a 'primary stage' this mutual engagement may lead to a more 'international' IR theory.

China's integration into the liberal world order we would argue has produced hybrid results that require us to think carefully about 'non-Western' similarity/difference. Further, much of the critical literature on development has focused on the US as holding a dominant and centralising position in the international development business and has explored the continuation of imperial power relations though the contemporary pursuit of 'development'. But as Hardt and Negri (2004:323) have argued, in today's world "imperial geopolitics has no centre and no outside", which opens up an analysis of China as a potential 'imperialist', although we would argue that such analysis must be rooted in actually existing effects and not read off *a priori* from a set of ideological and strategic prejudices. However, in valorising 'non-western' perspectives we are not advocating an uncritical relativism, which treats, for example, the proclamations of the Chinese government as any more legitimate than claims by rival governments vying for African resources. This necessarily has to be historicised and to analyse continuities and identify traces of the past that influence (or are manipulated by) contemporary actors. This avoids *de novo* accounts that suggest what China is doing is, first, out of the blue in terms of Chinese foreign policy and, second, a significant departure from past practices of other external interests on the continent

#### *Political economy and an emergent Chinese neo-liberalism in Africa*

While the first theoretical intervention is essentially deconstructive our second attempts to develop a framework for analysing how China-Africa interactions actually play out. This is vitally important since too many mainstream accounts of this interaction take a binaristic stance arguing that China acts uniformly

venally across Africa and that the impacts on economies, politics and environments are essentially the same.

In understanding the dynamics of Chinese engagement with African states we need to understand the nature of the Chinese business ventures operating there. Whereas in the past Chinese firms and the state were coincidental, now there is some relative autonomy of Chinese firms from state agendas, but still the ties between the CCP and the large Chinese multinationals is strong. However, smaller private Chinese firms, which have proliferated in Africa, are independent of Chinese state agendas to a degree even though they are encouraged (Brautigam 2003).

An overview of China's links with SSA distinguishes different channels of impact transmission, the distinction between complementary and competitive impacts, and between direct and indirect impacts (Kaplinsky 2008). Six key channels stand out in importance:

- through trade links
- through investment flows (FDI and portfolio investments)
- through aid
- in institutions of global governance
- through flows of people (including migrants)
- through environmental spillovers

In each of these channels of interaction, there is a mix of complementary and competitive impacts. For example, with regard to trade, China may both provide cheap inputs and consumer goods to SSA, and be a market for SSA's exports. On the other hand, imports from China can readily displace local producers. Similarly, financial flows, environmental spillovers and migration may be either complementary or competitive. The complementary-competitive axis of impacts is readily comprehended and widely recognised. Less well acknowledged is the distinction between direct and indirect impacts. In part this is because the indirect impacts are difficult to measure. Indirect impacts occur in third country markets and institutions. For example, China's trade with the US may open or foreclose the opportunities for SSA economies to export into that market. As in the case of the complementary/competitive access, the impact of the direct and indirect impacts can be gauged either at the country level, or at intra-national levels.

These channels of interaction affect class dynamics, or the issue of 'who benefits?'. China's presence in Africa is bringing economic growth for some, but we know little of its distribution or the political ramifications. We can speculate that enhanced resource extraction will strengthen rentier elites, but what of the smaller firms involved in trading? And, what is the racial dynamic of these economic activities in the sense of ownership and extraction of surplus since we know African leaders have had a mixed relationship with diasporic entrepreneurs.



Hence, our analysis must tease out the changing class and racial dynamics of Chinese economic engagement.

The political outcomes of China's involvement in Africa will primarily be shaped by state-capital dynamics, particularly how Chinese capital and parts of the Chinese state intertwines with fractions of capital and political blocs within Africa. This is also important as Chinese policy responds to local political conditions while the Chinese doctrine of respecting sovereignty and non-interference is implicitly based on an assumption that a state exists in the first place. While we saw earlier that Dunn (2001) explains away IR *per se*, because of an assumed lack of adequate state-ness in Africa we would argue that state forms exist but that they are different from the liberal ideal recognised by most political theory (Tull 2006).

To this end Alden (2007) has developed a broad typology of states, which help us map these dynamics (See also Tull 2006 and Taylor 2007). First, for 'pariah states', notably Sudan and Zimbabwe, China's presence may prolong authoritarian rule through aid and investment. Second, 'illiberal regimes and weak democracies', such as Angola and Zambia are likely to become more centralised as mineral rents accrue to state elites and Chinese aid allows them to rebuff or renegotiate with the major multilateral lenders. Finally, for 'democratic countries with diversified economies' like South Africa and Ghana, there is likely to be direct competition between Chinese businesses and African ones so that the impacts will come down to how effective the state and individual enterprises are at working with or against the Chinese. So, understanding the political institutions that actually exist and with which the Chinese do business is crucial. This also has future implications for governance, because if China seeks 'stability' in which to do business and is not bothered how it achieves it then the state may not be the vehicle to attain this.

But we want to avoid a determinism that simply treats Chinese involvement in Africa as some *deus ex machina* and implicitly robs African actors of any agency. In this regard there have been some insightful debates in economic geography about the nature of neoliberalism and the variety of forms it can take. Peck and Tickell (2002) make the case for a process-based analysis of "neoliberalization", arguing that the transformative and adaptive capacity of this far-reaching political-economic project has been repeatedly underestimated. Amongst other things, this calls for a close reading of the historical and geographical (re)constitution of the process of neoliberalization and of the variable ways in which different "local neoliberalisms" are embedded within wider networks and structures of neoliberalism. Despite having become the ideological 'commonsense' of the times (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001), and contrary to its casual elision with 'Americanisation', neoliberalism is far from a monolithic, undifferentiated project. It too has a geography, with its centres of discursive production (in places like Washington DC, New York City and London), its ideological heartlands (like the United States and the United Kingdom), its

constantly shifting frontiers of extension and mediation (such as South Africa, Eastern Europe, Japan and Latin America) and its sites of active contestation and resistance (Seattle, Genoa, Cuba). Neoliberalisation, like globalisation, should be thought of as a *contingently realised process, not as an end-state or 'condition'* (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Neoliberalism operates at multiple scales and more attention needs to be paid to the *different variants* of neoliberalism, to the *hybrid nature* of contemporary policies and programmes and to the *multiple and contradictory aspects* of neoliberal spaces, techniques and subjects (Larner, 2003). We hope to analyse China as a contingent variant that is neither universal nor particular.

There is a need to carefully specify the *discourses, processes and mechanisms of neoliberalisation*, to understand its different institutional variants, and to examine how these are interconnected through new, translocal channels of policy formation (Peck and Tickell, 2003). Neoliberalism has both a creative ('roll out') and a destructive ('roll back') moment (see also Brenner and Theodore, 2002) and any adequate treatment of the process of neoliberalisation must explain how these moments are combined under different historical and geographical circumstances (Peck and Tickell, 2003). The destructive-deregulatory moment of neoliberalisation was the dominant one in the 1980s, and its creative-proactive moment has been ascendant in the subsequent period.

### **Histories of the present: China's geopolitics and the invention of history**

In this section we want to examine China's current engagement with African states and assess how foreign policy discourses travel and are made real in concrete situations. If China's development model requires a revitalized internationalism, which moves away from but builds upon past development trajectories, then we need to examine two issues. First, an historical one that examines the current situation through the lens of history to evaluate how 'new' this development approach really is and what mechanisms were put in place that conditions the forms of engagement we see today. Second, we want to examine how this history functions as a discursive field through which current foreign policy is legitimized.

We argue that there needs to be an intensification of the dialogue between critical geopolitics and critical development theory. Geopolitics and development theory are conventionally kept apart by a well established social scientific division of labour which assumes that the domain of the (geo)political is discrete and separable from the supposedly economic and technical domain of development (Toal, 1994). Picking up on our earlier discussion of development and IR it is impossible to understand the contemporary making of development theory and practice without reference to geopolitics and the geopolitical imagination of non-western societies. As Slater (2004: 224) argues: "power and knowledge ... cannot be adequately grasped if abstracted from the gravity of imperial encounters and the geopolitical history of West/non-West relations'. This

is not to say that development is little more than the continuation of politics by another means since we cannot dismiss aid as simply part of some past and therefore “outdated sideshow in the repertoire of geopolitics” (Sogge, 2002: 10). Yet all major conceptualisations of development in the post-war period contain and express a geopolitical imagination which has had a conditioning effect on the enframing of the meanings and relations of development (Slater, 1993).

In what follows we argue that China has always engaged strategically with Africa and used the continent to bolster its national and geopolitical interests, which marks it out as similar to other superpowers (Harding 1994, Taylor 2006). Ross (1994: 437) sees a consistency in these interests; namely “to make China stronger, more modern and more self-reliant”. This drive for modernity may have been unwavering, but the means for achieving it has changed drastically even if the older rhetoric of co-operative development is used to justify it. So, rather than separating the (geo)political from economic and technical development policy we explore *the geopolitics of China’s development relations* in a more open and inclusive way rather than to speak only of ‘aid’ or ‘development assistance’. Davies *et al* (2008) make a distinction between ‘aid’ and development assistance, but it is not always as easy as they suggest to differentiate between the two. ‘Aid’ was historically used as an important geopolitical tool for the Chinese in the contest with Taiwan (also an aid giver) and the USSR (where the Chinese aimed to shame the Kremlin by stepping up their charity and economic aid and by providing fewer arms). ‘Aid’ thus became an important way of exposing the limitations of China’s opponents, both Western and Soviet. However, whilst Chinese ‘aid’ is used to further geopolitical claims it has been different from western approaches, by being based on bilateral and south-south ‘co-operation’. China’s strategy is ‘one of humanitarian and development aid plus influence without interference, in contrast to the West’s coercive approach of sanctions plus military intervention’ (Qian and Wu, 2007).

China’s engagement with Africa has changed and expanded significantly in the last decade or so – and we will return to these in the next section - but it also builds on longer geopolitical traditions and histories of co-operation and interaction with the continent. While this history of China-Africa linkages is important for shaping contemporary development it is used ideologically by China to legitimise its recent commercially centred activities. As recently as 2006 Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said during a tour of Africa that for over 110 years “China was the victim of colonial aggression. The Chinese nation knows too well the suffering caused by colonial rule and the need to fight colonialism”. It is this shared sense of colonialism that is used to defend China’s current interventions in Africa and to situate China discursively as part of both the developing and developed world. Beijing has also argued that both China and Africa are cradles of civilisation, that both ‘belong to the developing world’ and face common enemies and that as a result they have common strategic interests and a shared perspective on major international issues. Both Chinese and African people have found common ground in the belief that the West’s historical experiences in

achieving 'development' are distant from the African experience and offer few transferable lessons. Beijing has also argued that as a result China and Africa should support each other in close co-operation on key global issues and seeks to mobilise and maintain African support on those issues

The shape of current China-Africa relations can be traced back to the 1950s and the connections forged during the anti-colonial struggles for independence and the revolutionary period of Chinese foreign policy from 1950 to the early 1970s. Harding (1994) identifies China's foreign policy as both conflictual and cooperative, with the lines blurring between the two. Within the more cooperative approaches that have tended to typify China's African relationships Harding identified benefactors, clients and partners. The benefactors have been the Cold War superpowers at different times. The clients of Chinese policy in Africa have been various liberation movements, which it used to foster an alliance in Africa and preached nationalism as the guiding principle (Snow 1994). There have been many partners in Chinese foreign policy, which received less support in terms of concessional aid than the client states and who had an uneasy relationship with China during the Maoist period.

At this time China's foreign policy was fiercely critical of the bi-polar Cold War world and was seeking to wrest the leadership of the non-aligned nations away from Moscow (Snow, 1988; Jung & Halliday, 2006). According to Lyman (2005), the early days of PRC diplomacy primarily involved attempts to counter the international recognition of Taiwan and to compete with Western and Russian influence in the continent. China's confrontation with the United States in the 1950s and 1960s and with the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s were particularly important. Two key historical moments stand out here - the Asian-African Conference that met in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955 and the establishment of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) which held its first conference in 1957. More broadly, the roots of this engagement are to be found in the wider climate of 'third worldism' (that advocated solidarity between the peoples of Africa and Asia) and the Non-Aligned Movement (that advocated a struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism and sought to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of non-aligned countries).

Afro-Asian solidarity in particular, forged in the crucible of independence struggles, would go on to provide an important political foundation for the evolving China-Africa relationship. Given China's colonial history and struggle against poverty, the Chinese claimed that their unique understanding of Africa's economic dilemma lies at the root of Sino-African solidarity and could serve as a strong foundation for cordial relations (Tjonneland et al, 2006: 75). Bandung thus became "a symbol of Afro-Asia as a viable political concept" (Larkin, 1972: 28) and China invoked the Bandung spirit (which saw Africans and Asians sharing common political and social tasks) to gain support for initiatives that China favoured. It does not appear that Africa was important to China at Bandung however and although it marked the beginning of significant Chinese initiatives in

Africa there is little evidence that China foresaw this with clarity (Larkin, 1972). Further, Chinese wishes were often stubbornly and effectively resisted within these organisations and by no means did China fully control them (Neuhauser, 1968; Larkin, 1971).

In 1964, following a tour of ten African countries, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai (speaking in Ghana) confirmed Beijing's support for African struggles against imperialism (which he called 'the poor helping the poor') setting the stage for Africa as an ideological battleground with both Washington and Moscow (Adie, 1964; Ismael, 1971; Snow, 1988). The principles for aid and co-operation reflected China's own experience as an aid recipient itself over the preceding sixty years where the Chinese had not appreciated their 'client' status (Snow, 1988) and were partly calculated to "show up the North" (Snow, 1995: 287) by contrasting with the assistance then provided by 'first world' countries. By spreading the gospels of nationalism and independence and in its good works, China set out to knit the African countries together into a Third World alliance with China at its head as a counterbalance to the Cold War superpowers and wealthy advanced economies of the North. According to Snow (1988) Chinese assistance to Africa at this time was considered to be a "heroic endeavour", with the continent as the "object of a philanthropic crusade" (Snow, 1988: 146) and China seeking to discharge its "missionary duty of setting Africa free" (Ibid: 153).

However, Peking's failures in Africa during the late 1960s may partly be attributed to the ignorance of PRC leaders and their failure to grasp the significance of regional antagonisms and cultural and historical differences between the various countries while trying to apply a general model of revolution to all African 'liberation movements'<sup>1</sup> (Neuhauser, 1967). Similarly Snow (1995) argues that the Chinese were not especially interested in domestic developments in African countries let alone in actively propagating Communism there. China's relations with its 'third world partners' and 'poor friends' were "either thin or troubled through much of the Maoist period" (Harding, 1994: 394) as it refused to join key organisations like the G77 or the Non-Aligned Movement.

China's emphasis on South-South co-operation has long been seen as a key element in its efforts to oppose unilateral global dominance and an important way of building a relationship that will support Beijing's diplomatic offensive against 'hegemonism'. For Taylor (2006) the link connecting all Chinese foreign policy over the past 50 years is a desire to diminish and contain the influence of hegemonic powers and also to carve out a rightful place for China in the world, born from a sense that China has been 'muscled out' of international relations. Alden (2005, 2006) also suggests that a key dimension of Chinese foreign policy at the global level is an overriding concern with American hegemony. Zhou Enlai foreshadowed the concept of 'South-South' co-operation in his African tour by attacking the bullying of small and weak countries by the 'big and

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<sup>1</sup> Peking also suffered other diplomatic setbacks in the Congo, Burundi, Angola and Mozambique and following the military coup in Indonesia.

strong' (Snow, 1995). China staged its own conference on South-South co-operation in Shanghai in April 1983 and Beijing's rhetoric of unity and practical backing have constituted an area of broad consensus on which African leaders have been happy to agree.

Some authors (Meville and Owen 2005, Alden 2005, Carroll 2006, Marks 2006) are sceptical about China's interest in Africa as a form of 'south-south cooperation'<sup>2</sup>, which is more progressive and less selfish, suggesting it might be the more familiar and hegemonic 'north-south relationship'. For all the Chinese rhetoric of seeking to assist African development as a form of South-South co-operation, it is very much the case that development in China itself is immensely uneven, and that the domestic basis for Chinese prosperity is in fact politically volatile (Chan, 2007). So does China represent a new form of development 'partnership'? As we have shown, throughout history the Chinese have used Africa strategically and for its own geopolitical ends. Therefore, perhaps this is not a new form of South-South development co-operation, but rather something quite similar to what other countries have done (and do) with respect to Africa.

### **The geopolitics of China's Africa policy**

While China's engagement with Africa is premised upon this long-standing 'solidarity' it is but one way in which its development model is exported and embedded. As we have argued there are multiple ways in which development is governed and the mediation of China's model with individual African states is the key to the development effects of this engagement. Hence, we want to shift focus to China's recent involvement in Africa that emerged in the post-Cold War period and to examine Chinese discourses around aid and governance in particular. Then we examine how development is 'delivered' and how political discourses around respect of sovereignty are used to legitimise these intervention and briefly to flag how Chinese practises seem to be changing, largely as a result of its experiences in Sudan. We may be seeing a growing multilateralism by the Chinese and one where its non-interference dogma is breaking down.

#### *Chinese neoliberalism?*

The idea of China being 'neoliberal' is often queried given the traditional understanding of 'neoliberalism' as entailing strict market features unimpeded by state planning which is seen to be irreconcilable with the reality of the Chinese experience. Our characterisation of China's economic vision as 'neoliberal' is

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<sup>2</sup> Although China steadfastly refused to join key institutions of South-South co-operation like the NAM or G77, since joining the WTO in 2001 China has become active in trying to address some of the trade symmetries between North and South. It has attempted to address these questions through the 'G77 plus China' and the G20. China is also a major advocate of the MDGs (which have their own relevance to China itself) and is contributing more to discussions about development policy within the UN (although it still has its own development assistance programme). China has cancelled nearly US\$1.3 billion in debt to 31 African countries and abolished tariffs on 190 kinds of goods from 29 African countries.

necessarily tentative and provisional and our research is very much interested in understanding further the applicability and appropriateness of this classification. In this process we look to and seek to learn from the experiences of other 'post-socialist' states undergoing transformation (particularly the USSR). China's development of the past half century has always relied on international markets whether for raw materials or technology transfer (Ross 1994), although the 1960s was a period of more internally focused development which saw the building up of the military and a devolution of development in order to make provinces self-sufficient, both of which were responses to China's perceived threat of invasion. Since the late 1980s, the economy has been liberalised a great deal although regional government has stayed powerful and unaccountable (Leonard 2008), and been one of the driving forces behind African investment in engineering and infrastructure. But how can we characterise this development trajectory and what processes and mechanisms are deployed to drive this? In joining the WTO, seeking to attract FDI, in its articulations of belief in marketised economies, in its dependence on cheap labour and in its disregard for the environmental consequences of growth, China would seem to be 'neoliberal'. In China the state remains officially critical of neoliberal ideology, even as it encourages the forces of neoliberalism, whilst the state also counters neoliberalism with nationalism. For Kwong (2006) neoliberalism is not the latest form of Deng's 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' and neither is capitalism the most appropriate term. Rather "it is high-tech feudalism with Chinese characteristics".

The whole period since 1989 represents the beginnings of an historical process that the Chinese government has called 'transitional'. For David Harvey, the economic liberalization in China started by Deng Xiaoping was initially intended as an attempt to empower China in relationship to what was going on in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore as the Chinese were very aware of these developments and wanted to compete in some ways with those economies. Initially, Harvey argues, the Chinese did not want to develop an export-led economy, but what their reforms led to was the opening up of industrial capacity in many parts of China, which then led to China becoming able to market commodities on the world stage, due to very cheap labour, very good technology and a reasonably educated labour force. The Chinese quickly found themselves moving into the global economy and in doing so they gained much more in terms of foreign direct investment, so suddenly China became more interested in the neoliberalization process. Whether it was by accident or design, is not clear, but it certainly has made a huge difference to how the global economy is working.

Wang Hui (2003) observes that 'transitional' refers to an historical process and a government-inspired historical 'myth.' He argues that it is a myth to say that China's transition from socialism is a natural and spontaneous historical development brought on through the introduction of market mechanisms. Wang argues that terms like 'free trade' and 'unregulated' are ideological constructs masking coercive government actions that favour particular groups and classes. This supposed ideological neutrality is found in analyses of China's Africa policy,

which is presented as commercial, pragmatic and rational (Zhao 2007). Moreover Harvey's argument that neoliberalism functions by redistributing wealth (capital accumulation by dispossession) rather than generating it in the first place (accumulation by wage labour) is important here. Has China's 'going out' overseen a flight of capital from its productive to its money form? Does China fit the accumulation by dispossession concept in its neoliberalisation of Africa? It is true that those who control capital, whether in China or in any other part of the world, are also those who wield political power. The 'transitional' period in China may thus be more accurately described as a time of 'violent state intervention.' There can be no 'natural' transition from economic to political reform, because the process is driven by certain power-dynamics and social forces foreshadowing a new era of state-capitalism and neo-liberal economics in which both the means of production and political power will be controlled by a few. In his discussion of Chinese neoliberalism, Wang Hui (2003) notes that: '...under the continuation of the system of state political power, Chinese society has pushed forward a process of market extremism, and under the guidance of state policy has become an active participant in the world economic system'. Economic liberalisation and continuing political repression have gone hand-in-hand in China: market-extremism, radical privatisation and economic corruption on the one hand, and strict control over politics and policy on the other.

#### *Liberal Internationalism and China's foreign policy*

A key driver of Chinese overseas interests has been energy, which by the mid-1990s became the mainstay of China's foreign policy. If we look at what is called 'oil dependency' we see that China began importing oil in 1993. The graph on the PPT slide shows a deepening reliance on imported oil and gas so China is looking at ways of obtaining supplies and securing transport routes. This need to increase and diversify sources of oil is clearly not unique to China (Klare and Volman, 2006), and has seen a renewed interest in Africa as a source of oil and other strategic minerals such as copper and cobalt. More lately discussion is around agricultural production and the need to supply China's growing demand for food.

Over the past decade China's stance on foreign relations has shifted. China's transformation from a revolutionary power to a post-revolutionary state is reflected in the apparent shift in national priorities since the birth of the PRC in 1949 between the two major periods of PRC history: the era of 'revolution' under Mao Zedong (1949-76) and the era of 'modernisation' under Deng Xiaoping (since 1978) (Zhao, 1996). In the first of these two periods, Chinese foreign policy discourses were very much centred on multipolarity. Beijing's advancement of the concept of multipolarity, defined as the construction of more or less flexible alliances to contain every form of hegemony and to build a new and just international order, has often motivated increasing China's engagement in Africa (Tull, 2006).



In the second phase Leonard (2008) sees a broad left-right schism within the PRC, with old guard communists being much more belligerent towards other international powers and seeing the need to enhance domestic military capability. The 'new right' are a small but influential group (although their influence has waned since the mid-1990s) who want complete liberalisation and a market oriented foreign policy. The current leadership are variously described as 'populist' (Wang and Lye 2007) and 'new left' (Leonard 2008), because they espouse a belief in markets but tempered by the need to reduce inequality. Within them is a liberal internationalist group that want engagement with the norms of the international community based on the idea of 'peaceful ascendance'.

Since late 2003, top-level Chinese officials have used the term 'peaceful rise' to describe an ideal growth plan for Chinese economic, political, and military expansion but the implications of this policy remain ambiguous. The populist concept of 'scientific development' currently guides the socio-economic ideology of the CPP, seen as the latest version of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' and an extension of the ideas of Mao and Deng, one that was ratified into the party's constitution at the 17<sup>th</sup> party congress in October 2007. It is dominated by egalitarian concepts such as the creation of a 'harmonious' and 'person-based' society, sustainable development, increased democracy and social welfare. Very much associated with Hu Jintao, it seeks to shift the focus of the official government agenda from 'economic growth' to 'social harmony'. What does 'pursuing development in a scientific way' mean? Could it be modernisation discourse dressed up as something different, something Chinese (with its focus on science, industrialisation, education, health, training and the focus on the technical and questions of efficiency or its belief in the 'law of development')? As Hu noted in his address to the 17<sup>th</sup> party congress: "Today socialist China is standing rock-firm in the East, oriented toward modernization, the world and the future". He also went on to reiterate the five principles of peaceful co-existence:

"For developed countries, we will continue to strengthen strategic dialogue, enhance mutual trust, deepen cooperation and properly manage differences to promote long-term, stable and sound development of bilateral relations.....we will continue to increase solidarity and cooperation with them, cement traditional friendship, expand practical cooperation, provide assistance to them within our ability, and uphold the legitimate demands and common interests of developing countries. We will continue to take an active part in multilateral affairs, assume our due international obligations, play a constructive role, and work to make the international order fairer and more equitable. We will also continue to conduct exchanges and cooperation with the political parties and organizations of other countries".

These general principles are reiterated in the more focused policies towards Africa.

### *China's Africa policy*

China's 2006 *Africa Policy* is the most recent focus of China's engagement with the continent. The policy is premised on respect for sovereignty and 'non-interference' in national political processes, which marks it out as different from western approaches that inevitably come with conditions. Indeed, non-interference has been claimed to be a long-standing principle of China's engagement with Africa (ever since the principles of co-operation laid out by Zhou Enlai in the 1960s) but has this ever been more than just rhetoric used to conceal/camouflage deeper interests? The current policy backed up by a raft of financial and technical initiatives talks in terms of a new partnership with Africa, and again is this genuine partnership or a rhetoric masking other interests?

Respect for sovereignty and non-interference represent two key phrases that have been repeated in China's rhetoric surrounding its aid disbursements to Africa. This rhetoric encourages the impression that China is not imposing its political views, ideals or principles onto recipient countries (Davies et al, 2008: 57). According to Liu Guijin "To begin with, China has no intention to undermine Africa's democracy. China is working hard to build a socialist democracy and promote human rights and good governance at home. And China is a responsible major country in the world. I doubt there is any tiny political gain China can get by doing such things against the historical trend and the common wish of the people of all countries.' (Liu Guijin, Chinese government's special representative to Africa, 2006). And later he argued 'We [China] have never, and will never in the future, attach any kind of political conditions to these aid and development projects, because we think that providing assistance is just for the benefit of the people, it is not for political purposes, not for showing off to the outside world'. (Xinhua News, 26 February 2008). This forms the core of its non-interference policy and the perception that China is now 'non-ideological' and pragmatic, since its concerns are for securing resources rather than transforming hearts and minds.

At the same time there is a discourse of mutual interdependence, which fits with China's foreign policy doctrine of peaceful ascendance. At the core is an acknowledgement that "Although Africa might need China, China definitely needs Africa more for her development process" (Li Anshan 2006). This reveals the essentially commercial and transparent nature of China's engagement with Africa. It is less about a managed process of 'catching up' with more developed nations, but an even-handed recognition that Africa's resources are vital for China's growth and that this is a 'win-win' situation for both parties. This commercialism over aid model infuses much policy, but it remains to be seen if the dividends from this growth reach poorer sections of African societies (Kaplinsky 2008).

We would argue that non-interference has always been a flexible practice, depending on the circumstances, and also that such a principle necessarily

cannot be permanent. Where deals are signed with unpopular dictatorial regimes that could later be revised by a new government, it becomes necessary for the Chinese to protect such regimes. Karumbidza (2005) is probably correct then when he says that “the Chinese are themselves well aware” that their non-interference stance is untenable in Africa. Given that the economic relationship matters to China, its government has a vested interest in long-term stability, and its current rhetoric suggests an understanding that this is best procured by “harmony” and the careful balancing of interests, not by force. Non-interference is a principle that is certainly breaking down as the Sudan case shows. The fact that China is doing so goes against some of the ‘rogue aid’ type arguments since China is now acting more ‘responsibly’ in seeking to resolve internal governance issues.

Sudan is a case in point for how China’s stance has changed (Large 2008). China’s stance on human rights was framed in its anti-imperialist rhetoric, which has two elements. One is historical, which argues that Western powers are hypocritical given the colonial abuses. As Li Anshan (2006) argues “This is indeed ironic, coming from western countries talking about abuse of human rights, when they have committed relentless human right abuses during their colonial periods.... It is almost shameful for these countries to accuse China of human rights abuses, when they have committed much more atrocious acts in the past”. The second rebuttal is related and in that any conditionality around human rights is seen by the Chinese as necessarily an abuse of human rights.

It is this defence of sovereignty that characterized China’s Sudanese engagement. Over the past 10 years China’s ‘blind-eye’ support for various Khartoum governments in return for uninterrupted running of the oil industry by CNPC has had massive political impacts. Sudan’s oil rich regions generate considerable revenue, but there have been negligible improvements in service delivery for affected civilian populations. Moreover China has supplied arms to Sudan and helped develop northern Sudan’s arms manufacturing industry. China’s diplomacy on Darfur became more public from 2006 to the point where it cannot be said to be not interfering. Beijing underestimated the political risk posed by Darfur to its interests in Sudan, as well as its standing in Africa and on the international stage. The appointment of a new special ambassador in May 2007 was part of China’s efforts to bolster its image and contribute to solutions. For example, more aid has been given to Darfur. Such moves also enabled China to promote its own interests through more vocal diplomacy and participation in multilateral forums and initiatives on Darfur. But China’s more proactive diplomacy was accompanied by continuity in defending the sovereignty of Sudan and arguing against further sanctions, as well as deepening economic links. Thus for this ‘pariah state’ (Alden 2007) the impact of oil has been to further concentrate wealth rather than achieve broader development, and this seems likely to worsen even if, as a result of diplomacy, it may lose some of its pariah status. The Sudan case is pivotal for not only showing how China is

changing, but also for the ways that western donors are seeking to co-operate with China in finding solutions to African development.

Hence, we have questions about the delivery of Chinese 'aid' and possibilities of development cooperation between donors. The view that China is not imposing its political views, ideals or principles onto recipient countries is further cemented by the complexity of disassociating Chinese aid and investment and the lack of transparency in China's overseas aid allocation and disbursement. There is clearly no official definition of 'aid' in China and some considerable ambiguity about what constitutes 'aid' (MOFCOM is currently trying to define this) (Davies et al, 2008). The realities which are selected for critique are the lack of transparency on how Chinese aid is allocated, its amount and level, and effectiveness. Compounding the perception of China as a 'rogue creditor' is the lack of details about the level and terms of its own aid to other countries—so data and information in that regard are sketchy (Jacoby, 2007). The volume of Chinese aid is often regarded as a state secret (Lancaster, 2007) and data on this is not collected in the same way as it is by western aid donors. According to Lancaster (2007), the Chinese justify this secrecy to avoid criticism and competition from major donor countries, and domestic criticism of providing aid to foreign countries instead of eradicating poverty domestically. China is not a member of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which reports on members' international aid (Jacoby, 2007). Very little is yet known for example, about the new round of major infrastructure projects in Sudan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Angola, Tanzania, Zambia and Gabon (King, 2007). It seems entirely possible that while it may seem appropriate for Westerners to pick out the education and health sectors as obvious categories to be treated as 'aid', China's own preference has been to think of its relations with individual countries in a much more holistic way (King 2007). Chinese practice is unfamiliar (or at least uncomfortable) with the notion of 'development' policy as an independent policy field of the kind that emerged among the Western nations in the course of the 1950s.

Aid is also often tied up with other forms of assistance and economic co-operation and neither is it given by a single Ministry (the Ministry of Commerce provides most bilateral aid through its Department of Foreign Aid but it also comes from the Ministries of Health and Education whilst the Ministry of Finance provides multilateral aid). Additionally, aid and development assistance do not just come from central government sources but also from provincial governments (e.g. through twinning arrangements).

In concrete terms the blurring of aid, investment and development is realised through the mechanisms for funding projects. Sautman and Hairong (2006) contend that in contrast to western aid, which increasingly goes directly to national budgets as 'sectoral support', Chinese aid is usually assigned to designated projects (usually infrastructure related) and is therefore harder to siphon off. The Chinese also usually part pay for their oil and other resources in

infrastructure which means there is less free-floating cash for unscrupulous diversion. There is limited evidence however that the move to direct budget support and Sector-Wide Approaches by western donors is any better than the bilateral, project based approach of the Chinese. One argument for project-led development approaches is that they are bounded and one can more easily see if they are not completed, whereas the other approaches potentially put money into a rather opaque pot where it can be siphoned off at every stage of implementation. Budget support may increase 'ownership' by recipient governments but it might also be seen as introducing donors more deeply into the heart of government (Batley, 2005) meaning that donors are now engaged in all aspects of the policy process, having access to key documents and information and influencing government policy 'from within'. There has thus been a blurring of 'outside' and 'inside' in this era of 'post-conditionality' (Harrison, 2004) as the institutions and mechanisms of governance become increasingly inseparable from the international mechanisms of governance with which they are engaged. In some ways it could be argued that China (with its emphasis on non-interference) has not sought to blur inside and outside in quite the same way as western donors and by its insistence on bilateral relations has actually done something rather different.

The routes for aid and investment are the privileged Chinese corporations selected as part of the Chinese Government's 'Go Out' Policy of 2002 (Reilly and Na 2007). These 'national champions' form the brunt of China's internationalisation strategy, but as more companies internationalise it becomes harder for the Chinese state to maintain a coherent strategic and regulatory hold over them. China's corporate engagement with Africa has been exaggerated whilst the 'China Inc. model' is far less efficient and monolithic than is often assumed (Gill and Reilly, 2007). There is also the increasing presence of smaller, provincially backed companies operating overseas (Reilly and Na 2007). Thus as China's Africa strategy comes to rely on a growing number of bureaucratic principles and corporate agents, contradictions will increase. Beijing is relying on an increasingly complex set of government oversight agencies to accomplish its Africa policy but this is ever harder to manage (including the State Council, Chinese embassies, FOCAC, the Ministries of finance, commerce, foreign affairs, chambers of commerce, state owned companies and a variety of commercial and 'development' banks). McGregor (2008) reports, for example, that a range of diplomatic scholars in Beijing have recently noted how the SOE's have often 'hijacked' China's diplomatic initiatives in Africa (especially in Sudan), pursuing profit at the expense of broader national interests. These oversight agencies do not enjoy direct lines of authority over Chinese corporations overseas:

“As it deepens, the Chinese government will more likely find itself hamstrung by...an increasing set of tensions and contradictions between the interests and aims of government principals—the bureaucracies based in Beijing tasked with advancing China's overall national interests—and the aims and interests of ostensible agents—the

companies and businesspersons operating on the ground in Africa” (Gill and Reilly, 2007: 38).

China has clearly upset the dominant aid regime but donors cannot be too critical for fear of upsetting China so they instead call for and promote ‘dialogue’ and partnership. DFID are very active in this and rather than pledge much aid to Chinese development are more concerned with Millennium Development Goal 8 – building a global partnership for development. Here the assumption is that China can be ‘socialised’ into the norms of the international aid business/community. Such critics contend that China’s engagement with Africa should still be guided by Western values and should conform to established patterns of Western involvement on the continent (Wilson, 2005), but rather than outright criticism they prefer a ‘dialogic’ approach (see Tjonneland, 2006 etc). China, for example, is a signatory of the 2005 Paris declaration (evidently from a recipient perspective), which seeks to improve aid effectiveness through increased harmonisation and alignment between donors and between donors and recipients. While China does do things differently how much do they really upset other donors?

### **Conclusion: Questioning development partnership and the geopolitics of aid**

We have examined China’s neoliberalisation and the discourses and mechanisms through which it is realised. China uses the idea of partnership to capture both the idea of cooperation and respect for national sovereignty. To what extent is this a genuine partnership compared to the partnerships espoused by western governments to conceal all manner of lingering imperialisms?

Western donors increasingly promote development ‘partnerships’ and the local ‘ownership’ of development agendas, articulating an equalising rhetoric that attempts to disavow and displace European paternalism (Baaz, 2005) and remove the emphasis on external accountability for policy and its outcomes. As long ago as 1962 Renè Dumont argued that the change in rhetoric from the paternalistic concepts of ‘help’ and ‘aid’ to ‘co-operation’ in the West was mere ‘hypocrisy’ (Dumont 1962). The concept of partnership, made its first appearance in the context of British imperialism before World War I and draws on imperial hierarchies and discourses of trusteeship. More often than not it has not been a partnership of equals but rather an older model of ‘a rider and a horse’. Partnership also serves an important ideological role in the neoliberal policy framework in that it “papers over contradictions in the roll back of government” (Pieterse, 2001: 17). Arguably partnership and conditionality are contradictory objectives meaning that development partnerships with western donors are often “intrinsically one sided” (Slater and Bell, 2002: 346). Donor-recipient power relationships are inherently uneven therefore.

It is not yet clear whether Chinese discourses around south-south co-operation and partnership are different to this but there is clearly a much longer history of thinking about co-operation within the South in China (although Socialism also had its own forms of trusteeship). Clearly China's growing economic strength means that it is unlikely to have a partnership of equals with its new African friends but we need to know much more about how China understands 'co-operation' and more about the oft-invoked 'win-win' claims made for this. We also need to look more closely at the much heralded 'mutually beneficial' development that China seeks to broker in Africa (although this clearly is much less centred upon notions of a rider and a horse or of China as trustee and there is perhaps less of a historical sense of paternalism to escape from).

However, China's involvement in Africa does permit the 'revival of triangulation' (Large, 2007), which means African states can pursue relations with more than one external state (epitomised by Angola's turn to China as its negotiations with the IMF faltered in 2003) and play donors and investors off against one another.

China's geopolitics of partnership also relates to its role in multilateral organizations and its contestation of hegemony and desire to become a major pole in a multipolar world. As part of its liberal internationalism its recent ascension to the WTO, China recognises it need to court votes to protect and promote its interests<sup>3</sup>. According to Shimbun (2008) a major shift is currently underway in Chinese foreign policy as the discourse of multilateralism overtakes that of multipolarity, which underpinned much of the Mao era:

"Multipolarity, anti-hegemonism and noninterference are the old concepts of a relatively weak and isolated China. The new concepts of a strong and globally engaged China--peaceful rise, win-win diplomacy, and harmonious world-- are more consistent with multilateralism, not multipolarity" (Shimbun, 2008: 12).

When it comes to Africa China has tended to pay lip service to the various multilateral initiatives it has signed up to. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness concerns donor coordination, which the Chinese signed up to, but China's Africa Policy is focused on bilateral aid. A not dissimilar issue around the politics of aid is China's relations with the AU and NEPAD, both of which China actively supports and are test-beds for its changing stance on multilateral politics. What ever the efficacy of NEPAD, it posits a multilateralist approach to solving Africa's development problems. While the Chinese state-backed investors are relatively lax about transparency, accountability and sustainability of investments, NEPAD has been developing the African Peer Review Mechanism. This is an effort to encourage African countries to set standards and put in place procedures for vetting and monitoring investments. Again, there are potential

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<sup>3</sup> African votes have been crucial in blocking resolutions at the UN Commission on Human Rights condemning alleged human-right abuses in China or garnering sufficient support to win a second bid to host the Olympics in 2008.

tensions and it seems likely that in the rush to attract and maintain Chinese investments, African countries will be tempted into a race for the bottom in terms of labour and environmental standards.



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