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## Chapter 3

# China and the Geopolitical Imagination of African 'Development'

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### 1. Introduction: China's 'Soft Power' and 'Rogue Aid'

"China's development, instead of hurting or threatening anyone, can only serve peace, stability and common prosperity in the world" (President Hu Jintao, 2005).

China's growth has required a concerted economic internationalisation as well as changing foreign policy discourses in which China has invoked long-standing principles of 'partnership' and 'solidarity' with a wide range of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. As a result the orientation of China's vision of 'development', both nationally and internationally, is shifting. Although still premised on historically significant claims of 'peaceful', 'win-win' co-operation, part of China's recent internationalisation is the extension of a 'new', 'pragmatic' vision of development, which is centred on economic liberalisation and is growth-oriented, leading some observers to characterise it as market extremism (Wang Hui 2003), even a form of neo-liberalism (Harvey 2005).

In its pursuit of this growth-oriented model, a number of African countries have come to occupy centre stage in Chinese foreign policy, as potential sources of raw materials to

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fuel China's growth or as emerging markets for Chinese goods. In this way China's foreign policy is understood by some to be shifting from a concern with 'ideology' to a preoccupation with 'business', using what Joseph Nye (2004) terms 'soft power' to cajole client states into accepting Chinese contracts. For observers like Alden (2007) and Taylor (2007) soft power is part of China's 'oil diplomacy' in which notionally unconditional aid, low interest loans, and technical co-operation agreements (King 2006) are used to cement bilateral deals over oil supply, engineering contracts, and trade agreements.

It is the effects on governance of China's overseas aid and investment packages that have particularly vexed 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 idea that China is some kind of 'rogue creditor' practising opportunistic lending (Phillips 2006) and proliferating problematic forms 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 a deepening of the debt and governance crises in Africa (Chidaushe 2007, Schoeman 2007). Naim, for example, represents China as a "threat to healthy, sustainable development" (Naim 2007: 95), arguing that the Chinese "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". Many observers and commentators have taken this focus on aid and conditionality further to argue that China is potentially a neo-colonial power (Manji and Marks 2007, Trofimov 2007, *The Economist* 2008), where African resources are 'plundered' by Beijing and sent back in the form of Chinese goods thereby cementing the long standing uneven division of labour between Africa and the rest of the world.

In this chapter 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 international relations (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 relations? Within this we argue for a broad political economy perspective, which is not deterministic but treats the unrolling of 'neo-liberalism with Chinese characteristics' as a political *process*. For IR theory this means deconstructing numerous discourses (notably Chinese discourses of geo-politics) alongside an analysis of how these discourses inform policy and 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 (geo)politics and development to legitimise its current engagement with Africa? Additionally we seek to 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', the fractures and tensions within the supposedly monolithic 'China Inc', as well as the extent to which China's insistence on 'non-interference' really allows for locally relevant and 'nationally-owned' development policy.

## **2. International Relations, Political Geography and Development: Beyond Reductionism**

### 2.1 Context

We want to begin by addressing our first question concerning what theoretical tools are available to analyse contemporary China-Africa relations. If China's growth is changing its relationship with African states it is necessary to investigate a range of disciplinary perspectives on China's engagement with the continent. In this sub-section we examine how IR and development studies have comprehended African politics and development, arguing that a structural analysis (Brown 2006) is needed. We also challenge the prevailing wisdom that knowledge about international relations and regions is so culturally determined and geographically bounded that it is unable to illuminate conditions elsewhere. 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 tentatively. 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.

### 2.2 International Relations, 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 (Pieterse 1995). That said there have been a number of attempts in recent years at reconceptualising development and thinking past 'Western' IR which has increasingly been seen as "ethnocentric, masculinised, northern and top-down" (Booth 1995: 125;

Chowdhry and Nair 2003) with many critics arguing that it has consistently ignored or misrepresented Africa in particular. In terms of development our starting point is Hart's (2001) distinction between 'D' and 'd' development whereby, "'big D' Development (is) defined as a post-Second World War project of intervention in the 'Third World' that emerged in the context of decolonisation and the Cold War, and 'little d' development or the development of capitalism as a geographically uneven, profoundly contradictory set of historical processes" (pg. 650).

While acknowledging the parallels with Cowen and Shenton's (1996) framework, Hart takes a Polanyian view that the unleashing of markets generates a 'counter-movement'. Hence, "Far from the counter-movement representing some sort of external intervention in an inexorably unfolding teleology, these opposing tendencies are contained *within* capitalism" (Hart 2001: 650). This forces us to consider not only how global capitalism must be actively "created and constantly reworked" (ibid.), but in a Gramscian sense how it can be resisted and made otherwise.

Within this counter-movement the relationship between power and knowledge is a form of governmentality which refers to "the emergence of particular regimes of truth concerning the conduct of conduct" (Rose 1999: 21). In practice, this means analysing "the rationalities of rules, the forms of knowledge and expertise they construct, and the specific and contingent assemblages of practices, materials, agents and techniques through which these rationalities operate to produce governable subjects" (Hart 2004: 92). Work from other scholars extends the concept of governmentality to examine international NGOs and multilateral agencies, and the intersection of different spaces of governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Watts 2003). Hence, knowledge about development and its practical application is very much about control and discipline and feeds into what we later discuss as the process of neo-liberalisation.

International Relations remains configured, as it was in Hoffman's designation over 30 years ago, as "An American social science" (Hoffmann 1977, Tickner 2003). There have

been some parallel debates about ‘critical geopolitics’<sup>2</sup> 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*, Peter Perry 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” (1987: 6). Eleonore 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. 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 neo-realist insistence on placing the state at the centre of explanations. Dunn goes on to argue that for Africa the state is largely absent and so 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. Brown is sympathetic to the broad project of a meaningful analysis of Africa in the world, he criticises Dunn and others for conflating IR with neo-realism (Brown 2006). Brown’s argument is that neo-realism 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. The effect of arguing that Africa shows up the limitations and

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<sup>2</sup> As a body of scholarship that first emerged in the early 1990s, ‘critical geopolitics’ sought to bridge the disciplines of Geography and International Relations and was initially inspired by the pioneering work of ‘dissident’ scholars including Simon Dalby, John Agnew and Gearoid Ó Tuathail. Grounded in a corpus of work emerging from the discipline of International Relations in the 1980s and bolstered by post-structuralism and political economy, these contributions sought to radically reconceptualise ‘geopolitics’ as a complex and problematic set of discourses, representations and practices (Ó Tuathail 1996). Through the 1990s a number of geographers used the term critical geopolitics to encompass a diverse range of academic challenges to the conventional ways in which political space was written, read and practiced. Since then, the research agendas of ‘critical geopolitics’ have flourished and developed considerably.

is so different that it requires an, as yet, unspecified 'new' theory only serves to marginalise Africa from core debates of IR.

So, critiques of certain IR theories mirror those made of development in recent years in their identification of an implicit statism and their construction of hegemonic knowledges. We would however argue that there are other ways of approaching the development/international relations 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 'intertwining' of knowledges. 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 argues we should also ask awkward questions about the 'Westernness' of ostensibly 'Western' approaches to world politics and the 'non-Westernness' of others. 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 (1994) words "almost the same but not quite" (p. 86). Rather than becoming fixated with China's exceptionalism, it is possible that a process of '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. We know there are close but not unidirectional links between IR theory and foreign policy (Shambaugh 2002, Wang 1994). In reviewing the state of Chinese IR Zhang (2002) identified three contrasting schools. One argues that "Chinese scholars needed to catch up by importing Western IR theories" (pg. 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 'neo-comms' (neo-communists). While potentially interesting this is still mired in what Zhang (2002) 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 – see for example Callahan's (2008) discussion of *tianxia* – 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" (Zhang 2002: 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 has produced hybrid results that require us to think carefully about 'non-Western' similarity/difference. However, in valorising 'non-Western' perspectives we are not advocating an uncritical relativism, where, for example, the proclamations of the Chinese government are treated as any more legitimate than claims by rival governments vying for African resources. We would argue for the critical importance of historical context here in order to analyse continuities and identify traces of the past that influence (or are manipulated by) contemporary actors. What we want to avoid here is the suggestion that what China is doing has no historical precedents in terms of Chinese foreign policy or that it is a significant departure from the past practices of other external interests on the continent.

### 2.3 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. 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. The internationalization of capital makes the relationships between capital and the state more complex, and breaks away from a rigid territorialisation of the political and economic which assumes capital has a nationality (Glassman 1999). In the case of China we need to be conscious of the limits of a state-centred perspective given the importance of transnational actors, connections and processes and the increasing importance of China's role in global production networks (Cheung 2009, Pan 2009). We argue that it is necessary to examine the different fractions and combinations of capital and what role states play in enabling these to succeed or how capital itself exploits (unintended) differences in state policies. This is clearly a profoundly political process as different classes seek to transform the state in pursuit of their interests. 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. 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.

By examining the state and its relations to capital 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 neo-liberalism and the variety of forms it can take. Peck and Tickell (2002, 2003) make the case for a process-based analysis of "neo-liberalization", 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 neo-liberalization and of the variable ways in which different local neo-liberalisms are embedded within wider networks and structures of neo-liberalism (Peck and Tickell 2002). Neo-liberalism operates at multiple scales and more attention needs to be paid to the *different variants* of neo-liberalism, to the *hybrid nature* of contemporary

policies and programmes and to the *multiple and contradictory aspects* of neo-liberal spaces, techniques and subjects (Larner 2003). We hope to analyse China as a contingent variant that is neither universal nor particular.

### **3. Histories of the Present: China's Geopolitics and the Invention of History**

In this section, we examine China's current engagement with African states and assess how foreign policy discourses 'travel' or circulate 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 explore two key 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.

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 geo-political 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 (2006) remarked 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” **[page and source??]**. It is this shared sense of colonialism that is used to defend China's current interventions in Africa against accusations of imperialism, 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 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.

The particular shape of current China-Africa relations can be traced back to the 1950s and the connections forged during the anti-colonial struggles for independence during the revolutionary period of Chinese foreign policy (see Chapter 1). Harding (1995) identifies China's foreign policy as both conflictual and co-operative, with the lines blurring between the two. Within the more co-operative approaches that have tended to typify China's African relationships, Harding identifies 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 1995). 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 and Halliday 2006). More broadly, the roots of China-Africa engagement are to be found in the wider climate of Third Worldism and in the Non-Aligned movement. According to Cheng and Shi (2009) the earliest forms of Chinese diplomacy in the post-Cold War period primarily involved attempts to counter the international recognition of Taiwan and to compete with Western and Russian influence in Africa. 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 (Lyman 2005) here as was the Asian-African Conference that met in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955, and the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) which held its first conference in 1957. 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). Bandung thus became "a symbol of Afro-Asia as a viable political concept" (Larkin 1971: 28) and China invoked the Bandung spirit to gain support for initiatives that China favoured.<sup>3</sup>

In 1964, following a tour of ten African countries, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai 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). The principles for aid and co-operation reflected China's own experience as an aid recipient itself over the preceding 60 years where the Chinese had not appreciated their 'client' status (Snow 1988) and were partly calculated to "show up the North" (Snow 1995: 287). According to Snow (1988: 146) Chinese assistance to Africa at this time was considered to be a "heroic endeavour", with the continent as the "object of a philanthropic crusade" 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 China's 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' (Neuhasuer 1968). During this time, China tried to provide support to liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique and South Africa, for example, but "backed the wrong horse in all three cases" (Cheng and Shi 2009: 89). 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

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<sup>3</sup> 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. Further, Chinese wishes were often stubbornly and effectively resisted within these organisations and by no means did China fully control them. See Neuhauser (1968), Larkin (1971).

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<sup>4</sup> 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 ‘muscle out’ of international relations.

Some authors (Alden 2005; Melville and Owen 2005; Marks 2006, 2007) are sceptical about China’s interest in Africa as a form of ‘South-South co-operation’ while development in China itself remains immensely uneven and the domestic basis for Chinese prosperity is in fact politically volatile (Chan 2008). So does China represent a new form of development ‘partnership’ extending across the South? 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). 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.

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<sup>4</sup> Zhou Enlai foreshadowed the concept of ‘South-South’ co-operation in his 1964 African tour by attacking the bullying of small and weak countries by the ‘big and strong’. 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.

## **4. The Geo-Politics of China's Africa Policy**

### 4.1 Context

While China's engagement with Africa is premised upon this long-standing 'solidarity' it is but one way in which its 'vision' of development is exported and embedded. As we have argued there are multiple ways in which development is governed and the mediation of China's vision as it is refracted through individual African states is the key to the development outcomes 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 interventions and briefly to flag how Chinese practices seem to be changing, largely as a result of its experiences in Sudan. We may be seeing a growing engagement with multilateralism by the Chinese and one where its non-interference dogma is beginning to break down.

### 4.2 Chinese Neo-Liberalism?

The idea of China being 'neo-liberal' is often queried given the traditional understanding of 'neo-liberalism' 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 'neo-liberal' is 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 Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Nigeria in June 2009 was the first ever visit to Africa from a Russian President and underlines the increasing importance Russia attaches to being able to access the continent's natural resources (particularly oil and gas in view of China's recent engagement with Africa) and in seeking to bolster its status as a global power.

China's development over the past half century has always relied on international markets whether for raw materials or technology transfer although the 1960s was a period of more internally focused development which saw intensive militarisation and a devolution of development in order to make provinces self-sufficient, both of which were responses to China's perceived threat of invasion from outside. Since the late 1980s, the economy has been considerably liberalised although regional government has stayed powerful and unaccountable (Leonard 2008) and has been one of the driving forces behind investment in engineering and infrastructure projects in Africa. Yet how to characterise this development trajectory and the processes and mechanisms 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 apparent disregard for the environmental consequences of growth, China would seem to be 'neo-liberal'. In China the state remains officially critical of neo-liberal ideology, even as it encourages the forces of neo-liberalism, whilst the state also counters neo-liberalism with nationalism. The form of primitive capitalism (Huang 2008) that has emerged in China is not the latest form of Deng's 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' as some have tried to argue but it is one where state actors, often at the local level, remain central to the functioning of an economic system. As Breslin (2004) puts it, the emergence of this system "owes more to the agglomeration of numerous initiatives to interpret and implement economic change to serve particular interests than it does to the plans and strategies of national level decision making elites" (pg. 2).

The whole period since 1989 represents the beginnings of an historical process that the Chinese government has called 'transitional'. For Harvey (2005), the economic liberalisation in China started by Deng Xiaoping was initially intended as an attempt to empower China in relation to what was going on in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore as the Chinese were very aware of these developments and wanted to compete 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, resulting in China's ability to market commodities on the world stage, due

to good technology, a reasonably educated and certainly very cheap labour force that was often spatially concentrated in the newly designated Special Economic Zones (SEZs). The Chinese quickly found themselves moving into the global economy and in doing so they gained much more in terms of FDI, leading to greater interest in the neo-liberalization process. Whether it was by accident or design it is not clear, but it certainly has made a huge difference to how the global economy is working.

Wang (2003) observes that 'transitional' refers to an historical process and a government-inspired historical 'myth'. 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. Wang 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 when this is actually the product of violent state intervention. Wang argues that terms like 'free trade' and 'unregulated' are ideological constructs masking coercive government actions that favour particular groups and classes. This supposedly ideological neutrality is found in analyses of China's Africa policy, which is presented as commercial, pragmatic and rational (Zhao 2007). Moreover Harvey's (2003) argument that neo-liberalism functions by redistributing wealth (capital accumulation by dispossession) rather than generating it in the first place (accumulation by wage labour) is important here. Accumulation by dispossession in Africa dates back many centuries when value transfers began via the appropriation of slave labour, natural resources and raw materials. These processes often amounted to a kind of 'primitive accumulation', by which the capital available to Northern countries grew by virtue of looting Africa (Bond 2006). In recent decades, wealth extraction through imperialist relations has intensified and some of the same kinds of primitive 'looting' tactics are arguably now once again evident. Concerns remain that the neo-liberalised trade and investment relationships established between China and Africa might soon turn into systems of dispossession. There has been considerable debate about whether China's recent engagement with Africa might be described as imperialist in some ways but it is perhaps not imperial in the sense that China does not intend to

actively manage the societies of Africa but rather primarily seeks to access the continent's natural resources.

#### 4.3 Liberal Internationalism and China's Foreign Policy

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 2007). According to Shimbun (2008: 12) Chinese foreign policy discourses are shifting as multilateralism is prioritised over concerns with multipolarity, which underpinned much of the Mao era:

“Multipolarity, anti-hegemonism and non-interference 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”.

Beijing's advancement of the concept of multipolarity, which can be 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 China's increasing engagement in Africa (Tull 2006, Cheng and Shi 2009). 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 Lim 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 ascendance’ 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 Chinese Communist Party (CCP), 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 belief in the law of development and its focus on questions of efficiency, science, industrialisation, education and the technical?

#### 4.4 China’s Africa Policy

These general principles are reiterated in the more focused policies towards Africa, a key driver of which has been demand for energy supplies and natural resources. By the mid-1990s this had become a mainstay of China’s foreign policy. China began importing oil in 1993 and what has followed is a deepening reliance and dependency on imported oil and gas so that China has increasingly been 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.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> More recently discussion is around agricultural production and the need to supply China’s growing demand for food.

China's 2006 Africa Policy document is the most recent focus of China's engagement with the continent. The policy is premised on partnership and a 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 deeper interests? Arguably partnership and conditionality are contradictory objectives meaning that development partnerships with Western donors today are often “intrinsicly one sided” (Slater and Bell 2002: 346).

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 across the South within 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. That said, China's involvement in Africa does permit the revival of triangulation (Large 2008), 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. Chinese discourses of partnership also relate to its role in multilateral organizations, to its contestation of hegemony and to its desire to become a major centre of influence 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>7</sup>

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

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<sup>7</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.

encourages the impression that China is not imposing its political views, ideals or principles onto recipient countries (Davies *et al* 2008). According to Liu Guijin, the Chinese government's special representative to Africa, speaking in Pretoria in 2006:

“[t]o 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” (Guijin 2006: 3).

In a later speech in Sudan in 2008, then acting as the Chinese government's special representative for Darfur, Liu Guijin added: “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”.<sup>8</sup> 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 “[a]lthough Africa might need China, China definitely needs Africa more for her development process” (Anshan 2006: 10). 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).

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<sup>8</sup> *Xinhua News*, 26.02.2008, ‘Chinese envoy: China to provide more humanitarian aid to Darfur’.

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, China feels obliged to protect such regimes. Karumbidza (2007) is probably correct in his view 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 shown by China's recent involvement in Sudan and by the emerging strategy of proactive non-interference that has been used in negotiations for a post-Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe.<sup>9</sup> The fact that China is doing so goes against some of the 'rogue aid' discourses 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. 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 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” (10).

The second rebuttal is related 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 has characterised 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 the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has had massive

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<sup>9</sup> In June 2009 Zimbabwean Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangarai announced that credit lines worth nearly US\$950 million had been secured from China (BBC 2009).

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 has however 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. Yet 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 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 (Alden 2007). 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, there are questions about the delivery of Chinese aid and possibilities of development co-operation 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, and the Ministry of Commerce 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, 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 Co-operation and Development, which reports on members' international aid (Jacoby 2007). Very little is yet known for example, about the new round of major Chinese-led 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 (Mohan and Power 2008). 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: China's 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 and urban administrations, 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 (2007) 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. Budget and sectoral support may increase 'ownership' by recipient governments but it might also be seen as introducing Western donors more deeply into the heart of government (Batley 2005). 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. There is

also limited evidence that the move to direct budget support and sector-wide approaches by Western donors is any better than this bilateral, project based approach favoured by the Chinese.

The Chinese also usually part pay for their oil and other resources in infrastructure which potentially means there is less free-floating cash for unscrupulous diversion. 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. One example of this is the oil-backed US\$2 billion credit line from China's ExIm bank to the Angolan government in 2004. When the Chinese received intelligence that the ExIm loans were being misappropriated by officials at the Angolan Ministry of Finance these concerns were relayed to the Angolan state and a *Gabinete de Reconstrução Nacional* (GRN, Office for National Reconstruction) was set up to administer the loan and to increase transparency.<sup>10</sup>

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). Schuller and Turner (2005) argue that Chinese companies are seen by the State as part of its geopolitical positioning in Africa since state-owned enterprises (SOEs) contribute to an overall programme of foreign economic policy. Yet many of the companies concerned do not see their role in Africa as part of some wider geopolitical practice, and there are multiple points of disjuncture between the activities of some SOEs and this wider foreign

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<sup>10</sup> Ironically the NGO, Global Witness, has raised concerns about the transparency of the procurement process of construction tenders managed by the Office for National Reconstruction (Global Witness 2009).

policy. 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, the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (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 SOEs 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.

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. The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) are very active in this and rather than pledge much aid to Chinese development they 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 and 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), yet rather than outright criticism they prefer a 'dialogic' approach (Tjonneland *et al* 2007). China, for example, is a signatory of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness – evidently from a recipient perspective – which seeks increased harmonisation and alignment between donors and between donors and recipients. Despite this commitment, however, China's Africa Policy remains focused on bilateral aid. A not dissimilar issue around the politics of aid concerns China's relations with the African Union and New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), both of which China actively supports and are test-beds for its changing stance on multilateral politics. Whatever 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 in an effort to encourage African countries to set standards and put in place procedures for vetting and monitoring investments. Again, there are potential tensions and it seems likely that in the rush to attract and maintain Chinese investments, African countries may be tempted into a race for the bottom in terms of labour and environmental standards.

## **5. Conclusion: The Geo-Politics of China's Relations with African Development**

From the case of China in Africa we believe that there needs to be an intensification of the dialogue between critical geopolitics/IR and critical development theory. International Relations 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 (Ó Tuathail, 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 geo-politics and the geopolitical imagination of non-Western societies. As Slater (2004) 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” (224). 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-1945 period contain and express a geopolitical imagination which conditions and frames their meanings and relations (Slater 1993). China's contemporary vision of development does not envisage a domain completely separate from foreign policy concerns and actively mobilises historical discourses of geo-politics (respect for sovereignty, non-interference in political affairs, anti-hegemonism) and the

language of commonality and mutuality (solidarity, friendship, anti-imperialism) in order to justify its contemporary Africa policy.

Rather than separating out the (geo)political from the economic and technical aspects of development theories and practices we have critically explored *the geo-politics of China's relations with African development* in a more open and inclusive way than to speak only of aid or development assistance in isolation. This required unravelling the complexity of China's aid disbursement and disentangling the blurring of aid, trade and overseas investment, which themselves have complex routes to Africa. 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 (Brautigam 2007). Aid was historically used as an important geopolitical tool for the Chinese in the contest with Taiwan (also an aid giver) and the Soviet Union, 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. A critical geopolitics of China-Africa engagement must therefore examine how China's historical imagination of international relations and its discourses of foreign policy have enframed the meanings attached to development and the relations forged with African partners as a result. This historical imagination of geopolitics remains crucial since it forms a discursive field through which current foreign policy is legitimised. Further engagement with Chinese (and African) approaches to International Relations is an important first step in this regard.

Whilst Chinese 'aid' is used to further geopolitical claims it has been different from Western approaches. A continuing point of distinction is the bilateral disbursement of aid and the emphasis on 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). A critical geopolitics of China-Africa relations must acknowledge the Orientalisms at work in Western characterisations of China as an exception and acknowledge that there may be aspects of China's vision of development that are almost the same as those of Western

donors but not quite. To a certain extent a process of mimicry is at work in China's 'neo-liberalised' vision of successful economic development which may be producing seemingly similar yet unexpectedly different outcomes.

Further, China is not the only show in town and Chinese engagement with Africa needs to be understood in the context of the wider contemporary scramble for Africa of which it is a part. This includes the efforts of the EU, of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), the India-Africa Forum, the Turkey-Africa Summit and the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD).<sup>11</sup> Allied to this is the need to disaggregate 'China' and 'Africa' since neither represents a coherent and uniform set of motivations and opportunities (Mohan and Power, 2008). We also need to know much more about the range of impacts China is having on forms of African governance, the role China takes in situations of conflict, and about the relations China has with local, regional and global institutions. A critical geopolitics must also engage with the media discourses on China's engagement with Africa that draw on a range of Orientalist assumptions that essentialise China and over-simplify its motivations whilst remaining deeply uncritical of Western interactions with the continent. This requires a post-colonial analysis of the constructed imaginaries of China and Africa, and the geopolitical images and representations of Chinese and African ideologies, foreign policies and cultures. Allied to this is a concern for the dynamics of class and race in particular African countries.

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<sup>11</sup> In this regard we might also explore the recent efforts of Brazil and Russia in Africa.

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