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Aid within the China-Africa Partnership: Emergence of an Alternative to the NEPAD Development Paradigm?

Sara Van Hoeymissen

Abstract

This paper analyses the aid aspect within Sino-African relations against the backdrop of the neoliberal development vision behind the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and asks to what extent China-Africa relations, as a model of South-South cooperation, propose an alternative to this development paradigm. It identifies three types of development-related issues that have emerged in this context and that can be seen as characterising the emerging development paradigm within the relation. This paradigm appears shaped by both neo-liberal principles and the mutual benefit concerns proclaimed under the South-South partnership. Not unlike China's own development model, the paradigm seems to be developed in a pragmatic and gradualist way and lacks a clear theoretical foundation or negotiated consensus. Agency by African countries with regard to creating the right conditions for development will therefore be as important as in their relations with any other partner. (Manuscript received February 29, 2008; accepted for publication July 14, 2008)

Keywords: Africa, China, foreign relations, NEPAD, development, development paradigm

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Studie

Entwicklungshilfe innerhalb der chinesisch-afrikanischen Partnerschaft: Aufkommen einer Alternative zum NEPAD-Entwicklungsparadigma?

Sara Van Hoeymissen

Abstract

Der vorliegende Aufsatz analysiert den Aspekt der Entwicklungshilfe innerhalb der sino-afrikanischen Beziehungen vor dem Hintergrund der neoliberalen Entwicklungsvision, die hinter New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) steht. Es wird die Frage diskutiert, in welchem Ausmaß die chinesisch-afrikanischen Beziehungen als ein Modell von Süd-Süd-Kooperation eine Alternative zum NEPAD-Entwicklungsparadigma darstellen möchten. Es werden drei Typen von entwicklungsrelevanten Problemstellungen aufgezeigt, die in diesem Zusammenhang aufgetaucht sind und die als charakteristisch für das aufkommende Entwicklungsparadigma in dieser Beziehung gelten können. Das Paradigma erscheint dabei sowohl von neoliberalen Prinzipien als auch von den Bemühungen um gegenseitigen Nutzen geformt, wie sie im Rahmen der Süd-Süd-Partnerschaft proklamiert werden. Chinas eigenem Entwicklungsmodell nicht unähnlich scheint das Paradigma auf eine pragmatische und allmähliche Weise entwickelt zu werden und entbehrt einer klaren theoretischen Grundlage und eines verhandelten Konsenses. Vonseiten der afrikanischen Staaten wird daher die Macht, richtige Entwicklungsbedingungen zu schaffen, die gleiche Bedeutung haben wie in den Beziehungen zu anderen Partnern. (Manuskript eingereicht am 29.02.2008; zur Veröffentlichung angenommen am 14.07.2008)

Keywords: Afrika, China, Auslandsbeziehungen, NEPAD, Entwicklung, Entwicklungsparadigma

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Introduction

African continental initiatives such as the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) attempt to establish commonly agreed priorities and principles with regard to key issues facing the African continent, such as development, peace and governance. Launched in 2001 and subsequently adopted as a development programme of the AU, NEPAD proposed a new type of development partnership between the continent and its internationally donor community, most notably the Group of Eight (G8). Under this partnership the continent was to receive more aid, more private investment and fairer international trade terms in return for greater adherence to human rights, democracy and good governance. However, the agenda has been criticized by African academics and civil society, many sections of which viewed the initiatives as top-down and lacking popular support (Bond 2002; Chimphango 2002; Taylor 2005). Although presented as new and African-owned, the agenda was also condemned for reiterating the same Western-imposed liberal and neoliberal development models that had required the continent to integrate into world markets (Adesina 2004, 2006; Obi 2002; Taylor & Nel 2002). These models were accused of having perpetuated the continent's international marginalization for two decades and having had a devastating social impact on African societies. NEPAD was therefore often seen as maintaining Africa in a subordinate position to the West. Adebayo Adedeji, for instance, characterized the agenda as "a feudo-imperial partnership between the strong and the weak" (Adedeji 2002).

Since the end of 1990s China has re-appeared on the African continent as a partner seeking access to African resources, markets and political support. On the surface, the new partnership is highly promising since China showcases a highly successful development model that does not blindly accept neoliberal precepts but combines state-led gradual market reform and export-led industrial expansion with a closed political system preoccupied with stability. China also brings no colonial baggage to the continent but instead declares to share African resentment of Western hegemony and power politics. Africans disillusioned with Western-imposed neoliberal policies often see the partnership that China is offering the continent as a highly welcome alternative to the inequalities and imbalances of North-South cooperation (Sautman & Yan 2007:83-84). China-Africa relations offer the prospect of building a new, "South-South" cooperation

model that aims to meet the development needs of both sides and is based on common interests, reciprocity and equality. For example, in contrast with most Western and institutional donors, China imposes no macro-economic or political conditions on the assistance it provides to Africa as part of its longstanding policy of non-interference in state sovereignty.¹ China's approach towards the developing world has been termed the "Beijing Consensus" by Joshua Cooper Ramo. Over time different authors have attributed different meanings to the phrase "Beijing Consensus" (Sautman & Yan 2007:81-85) but in Ramo's original view the concept meant that:

China is marking a path for other nations around the world who are trying to figure out not simply how to develop their countries, but also how to fit into the international order in a way that allows them to be truly independent, to protect their way of life and political choices in a world with a single massively powerful centre of gravity. I call this new physics of power and development the Beijing Consensus. (Ramo 2004:3-4)

Although not formally proposed as such by the Chinese government (French 2005), the Beijing Consensus can to some extent be seen as countering the principles of the Western-imposed Washington Consensus and post-Washington Consensus (Ramo 2004:4).

In this paper I ask whether we are indeed witnessing the emergence of a new cooperation paradigm and development model that could act as an alternative to NEPAD. China itself claims that it is "firmly behind NEPAD" (Xinhua 2006a). I therefore first of all look at existing links between the existing framework of China-Africa relations and NEPAD by tracking Chinese views of NEPAD and the role the development agenda plays in the emerging context of Sino-African relations. This analysis mainly focuses on the continental level, rather than the level of individual African states and therefore considers the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) as the main institutional framework for cooperation between China and the African continent.² In the second part of this paper I turn to the question of whether China could be seen as proposing an alternative to the development paradigm behind NEPAD. To this end I identify

¹ Apart from acceptance of the one-China principle, a precondition for the establishment of diplomatic relations and participation in the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.

² On some of the problems associated with analyzing China-Africa relations at the continental level, see Lumumba-Kasongo 2007:9.

three specific types of development issues that have arisen in the current context of Sino-African relations and ask whether they can be seen as signalling the emergence of a new cooperation and development paradigm for Africa.

Existing Links Between NEPAD and China-Africa Relations

It were mainly the countries which were at the forefront of reform-minded African continental initiatives, notably South Africa and Nigeria, that promoted the incorporation of the priorities and principles of these initiatives into China-Africa relations (Alden 2007:68). South African President Thabo Mbeki introduced NEPAD to then Chinese President Jiang Zemin during a visit to China in December 2001. Jiang praised the initiative saying that China supports every effort by African countries towards peace and development (Zhang 2002:13).

The question of closer cooperation with NEPAD emerged in the framework FOCAC as early as 2002 (Guo & Wang 2003; Da 2003:12). At the 2nd FOCAC Ministerial Conference in Addis Ababa in December 2003 it appeared as one of the key points of the Action Plan signed by both parties. Since then China has expressed its support for and willingness to cooperate with NEPAD in key FOCAC documents and its 2006 "China's African Policy" policy paper (MoFA 2006; FOCAC 2006b:par.2.5). In fact China has always grasped the rhetorical and symbolic significance of support to pan-Africanism to African leaders (Alden 2007:32). The most visible and symbolic manifestation of this appreciation on the part of China is perhaps the ongoing design and construction by China of a conference centre for the AU at its headquarters in Addis Ababa.

Recently, both the AU and NEPAD have stepped up their efforts to engage "emerging partners" such as China more closely in their activities. In September 2006 the AU Commission convened a high-level task force to examine the question of building strategic partnerships with so-called "emerging partners" (*AUC News* 2006:3). One of the recommendations of the task force was that these strategic partnerships should be "consistent with the clearly articulated vision and development strategy of the AU as embodied in the Strategic Plan of the Commission and the NEPAD programme" (Sako 2006). At the AU Summit in Addis Ababa in January 2007 the AU Commission was subsequently given a mandate to assess the partnerships with emerging powers every two years and to play a coordinating role in the preparation, conduct and follow-up of FOCAC Summit meetings.

The first steps to build institutional and cooperative links between FOCAC and NEPAD were taken with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the NEPAD Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Chinese Follow-Up Committee of FOCAC. Human resources development was identified as a key area for long-term cooperation in the MoU, which was followed by a Chinese donation of 500,000 USD to NEPAD for a training programme for African nurses and midwives. In spite of this cooperation, there reportedly remained a certain apprehension about the Chinese presence in Africa among the personnel of NEPAD. They perceived it as potentially threatening to broader development, governance and security goals aspects of the agenda (Alden 2007:78). These concerns have been echoed by some Western and African analysts, who believe that China's rhetorical commitment to African multilateralism is still to be tested through genuine exchange and cooperation on key issues (Fues et al. 2006:2; Tjønneland et al. 2006:x; Chidaushe 2007:113). They feel that China could be implementing economic and political principles and practices on the continent that the AU and NEPAD are seeking to replace with stronger commitments to human rights, good governance, ownership and transparency (Taylor 2006:953, 958-959; Konings 2007:19; Alden 2007:78). In the next section these concerns are addressed more closely by looking at the place of development, governance and security issues within the partnership that China is offering to Africa.

Development Issues in the Context of Sino-African Relations

Since the reinvigoration of ties between China and Africa at the end of the 1990s, aid is but one aspect of the multifaceted relation and probably not the most central one. Considering the aid dimension of the relationship in isolation is therefore somewhat artificial since it is closely related to other aspects such as trade and investment (He 2006:26), as exemplified by the recent landmark aid, investment and trade agreement between China and DR Congo (*BBC News* 2007; *African Research Bulletin* 2007). China itself has not worked out a precise definition of what exactly constitutes aid and the aid initiatives it undertakes in Africa take different forms ranging from debt relief, interest-free or concessional loans and grants to technical cooperation (Lancaster 2007; Tjønneland et al. 2006; Davies et al. 2008). The following analysis exceeds a narrow definition of aid and focuses instead on "development assistance" as defined by Davies et al. in the context of China-Africa relations, i.e. all types of Chinese initiatives that are aimed at supporting African development (Davies et al. 2008:1). Three

types of development-related issues are identified that have surfaced within the context of China-Africa relations and that could be viewed as characterising the emerging development paradigm in this relationship.

To Draw on Each Other's Strengths for the Benefit of the Two Peoples: Economic and Social Issues

In the FOCAC Addis Ababa Action Plan of December 2003 China announced plans to strengthen its cooperation with Africa in a number of priority sectors. They included infrastructure development, prevention and treatment of communicable and infectious diseases, human resources development and agriculture and fisheries. In selecting these sectors, China was to a large extent building on its past cooperation with Africa. In the agricultural sector, for instance, China had, according to incomplete official statistics, already launched nearly 200 agricultural aid projects and sent more than 10,000 agricultural technicians to Africa by 2002 to exchange agricultural technology such as high-yield crops and assist in the building of farms (*People's Daily* 2002; Xinhua 2002). However, the priority sectors selected by the Chinese government were also part of NEPAD. They were therefore also cast as signalling China's willingness to coordinate its assistance with the priorities set by African multilateral initiatives (FOCAC 2003:par.3.2.2).

By the FOCAC Summit in Beijing in 2006 cooperation in the selected priority areas was well under way and they had effectively developed into the focal point of Chinese development assistance to Africa. In both the fields of agriculture and infrastructure for instance, China had, according to official Chinese figures, undertaken over 130 projects from 2000 until mid 2007 (Han 2007). Chinese companies have constructed more than 6,000 kilometres of roads and more than 3,000 kilometres of railroads across the continent. Some sources even suggest that in 2006 alone the state-owned company China Roads and Bridges Corporation undertook around 500 projects in Africa (Pham 2006:245). China has also built power plants across Africa and has undertaken hydropower dam projects in Sudan, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Nigeria. It is involved in housing and water supply projects in Africa as well as prestigious building projects such as soccer stadiums in Angola, Mali and the Central African Republic; parliament buildings in Gabon, Ivory Coast and Mozambique; and a foreign ministry building in Uganda.

Interesting to note is that the discourse within the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan approaches infrastructure more as a business issue than as an aid issue. Chinese companies are mentioned as the main actors for infrastructure development in Africa while the Chinese government provides “encouragement and support” to them. Africa on its side pledges to “further open” its infrastructure sector. No concrete projects in the infrastructure sector are announced in the Plan, the concrete launching of these probably being left to further negotiations at national and business level. There are only a few references to infrastructure that are cast in terms reflecting an aid rather than a business paradigm. They are the mentioning of infrastructure as playing “a crucial role in Africa’s development” and of the Chinese government as focusing on “technical and managerial cooperation with African countries to help improve their capacity for self-development”. The Chinese government has, however, allocated a sizeable budget for grants and low-interest loans to be divided among individual African governments to facilitate infrastructure projects. These loans are often repaid in natural resources and some are also cancelled later on.

According to the NEPAD interpretation of “human development”, this priority area for cooperation comprises education, health and ICT. China’s cooperation with Africa under FOCAC pays attention to all three aspects. Chinese companies such as Huawei Technologies and Zhong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Company Ltd. (ZTE) have been quite successful in winning ICT related contracts in Africa, often with the aid of Chinese government issued loans. In Ghana for example, Huawei Technologies has been contracted for a 30 mio. USD fibre-optic cable project under the Ghanaian government’s e-Ghana project while ZTE has provided 105 mio. USD worth of telecommunications equipment funded by two Chinese government provided loans (Davies et al. 2008:40, 44).

Besides investments in telecommunications infrastructure, China has also provided aid in the social policy fields of education and health. For example, China offered 2,000 scholarships a year to African students in 2006 and has promised to increase the number to 4,000 by 2009. China will also build 100 rural schools across Africa by 2009. Agreements to this end have been signed with Ghana, Zambia and Angola, amongst others (Davies et al. 2008:46, 50). In the period of 2004 to 2006, 10,000 Africans received academic and technical training from Chinese instructors through the African Human Resources Development Fund, which China launched in 2001. This figure is to increase to 15,000 by 2009. In order to promote agricultural training China committed to build ten agricultural

technology demonstration zones and send 100 senior agricultural experts to Africa at the FOCAC Summit in Beijing in November 2006. The number of demonstration sites was later increased to 14 and Zimbabwe and Liberia amongst others have already been identified as hosts. It is important to note that there also is an increasing commercial dimension to China's agricultural presence in Africa. China State Farm and Agribusiness Corporation (CSFAC) already runs operations in a number of African countries including Tanzania, Zambia, Ghana, Guinea and Zimbabwe. Recently the Chinese government expressed an interest in launching more major commercial agricultural investments in Africa (*China Daily* 2008). However, concerns about the sensitivity of land ownership by foreigners in many African countries and a negative cost and risk assessment are reportedly preventing the launching of a large-scale government plan to promote such investments (Niu 2008).

In the public health sector China already had a long-time tradition as a provider of basic healthcare to African patients (Thompson 2005:3-4). At the beginning of 2007 more than 950 Chinese medical professionals were providing healthcare services in 36 African countries (Li 2007). The sending of medical personnel to Africa has been complemented with financial aid, capacity building and training in the fields such as clinical medicine, disease control and rural health management. China is also involved in the building of hospitals in Congo, Angola, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Zambia, Ghana etc. (Bavier 2007; Center for Chinese Studies 2006; Davies et al. 2008). Malaria has emerged as a key area for cooperation between China and Africa. China provides grants to African countries to buy medication to treat the disease and is building prevention and treatment centres across Africa.

In summary, the economic and social policy areas where there has been substantial support and cooperation are those to which the philosophy of mutual benefit can be relatively straightforwardly applied: China has knowledge, suitable technologies and financial support to offer, often in return for resources, business opportunities for its companies and political support in international affairs. In FOCAC discourse, this type of cooperation is called "to draw on each other's strengths for the benefit of our peoples" (FOCAC 2006a). To facilitate cooperation the Chinese government has set up programmes and development funds and allocated sizeable budgets for projects, as well as grants and low-interest loans. China's efforts help to remedy some of the structural obstacles African countries are facing to develop their industries, such as a lack of infrastructure

and a skilled workforce. Its willingness to invest in infrastructure in Africa sets it apart from western investors and aid providers who have long neglected areas of basic infrastructure development. China is also willing to support state-initiated development projects in contrast with the neoliberal approach of relying heavily on private corporate initiatives (Sautman & Yan 2007:83). In the sector of infrastructure and to some extent also with regard to agriculture, China's projects often reflect a business rather than an aid approach. Chinese companies are the main actors while the Chinese government has called for a further opening up of African infrastructure markets. However, at the same time there remains a strong governmental dimension to the cooperation as projects are facilitated by grants and low-interest loans provided by the Chinese government and are often carried out as part of a wider package of trade and investment arrangements negotiated between the Chinese and African governments.

South-South Cooperation and the Link between Development, Governance and Security

A second type of development-related issues that have emerged within the context of China's development assistance to Africa generally pertain to the link between development and governance on the one hand and development and security on the other hand. It is with regard to these issues that the specific characteristics of the South-South partnership are most prominent. China's own development model does not start from the NEPAD core assumption that "development is impossible in the absence of true democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance" (NEPAD 2001:17). Furthermore, non-intervention in internal affairs and respect for national sovereignty are core principles of China's foreign policy. China sees both Africa and itself as members of a broader Third World coalition against perceived Western hegemony (Wang 2002:25). In its cooperation discourse with Africa China stresses non-interference in the internal affairs of African countries and the rejection of any imposition of conditionalities on aid as key principles of the South-South partnership that both sides are building. This common interest with African countries has helped China carve out its political and economic position in Africa in spite of its late arrival as a trade partner of the continent. As Chinese Africa expert He Wenping asserted:

Common sense about human rights and sovereignty is only one of the common values shared by China and Africa. There is no doubt that China's success in Africa has partly benefited from it, and those common

values have laid solid foundations for further promoting bilateral relations in future. (Cited in Servant 2005:7)

NEPAD is based on the assumption that good governance is essential to development. In line with this view, a number of donors such as the G8, the African Development Bank and several bilateral donors provide aid more generously to countries with a better governance record, for instance those that receive good peer reports under the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). China's African policy merely states that China and Africa should "learn from and draw upon each other's experience" in the areas of development and governance. In marked contrast with the ample support provided to training for individuals, aid aimed at strengthening African countries' institutions and regulatory frameworks does not appear to be a priority for China (Tjønneland et al. 2006:21). Neither the FOCAC action plans nor the policy paper contain any reference to the APRM. Cooperation on the fight against corruption between China and Africa on the ground so far has equally remained limited. It has mainly taken the form of limited or informal bilateral exchanges such as an "exchange of views" between a visiting Chinese anti-corruption delegation and the Zambian authorities in 2005. China's Africa policy paper states that China will "work together with African countries to combat transnational organized crimes and corruption". However, in the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan, which sets out the cooperation agenda for China and Africa in the years to come, only the issue of transnational organized crimes is mentioned, with regard to which both sides pledge the strengthening of "exchanges and cooperation". In spite of the growing presence of Chinese companies in Africa, there is no specific mention of cooperation on transnational economic crimes or corporate governance in the framework documents of China's Africa policy. In the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan China only promises to encourage and support:

well-established and reputable Chinese companies in making investment in projects in Africa which will contribute to local technological progress, employment opportunities and sustainable socio-economic development. (FOCAC 2006b)

Chinese Africa analysts see a convergence between the political values promoted by the AU and NEPAD – mainly democracy, human rights and good governance – and the long-standing demands of Africa's development partners in the West. According to them this explains the enthusiasm of Western nations for these initiatives (Zhang 2002:11). Wang Yingying of China Institute of International

Studies sees Western donors' insistence on good governance as a means to bring African countries into their sphere of influence (Wang 2006:24). Her colleague Wang Wei even sees Western countries' linking of aid with political conditionalities and Africa's continuing reluctance to accept these as a threat to the implementation of NEPAD (Wang 2002), which is considered first and foremost an economic programme by many Chinese analysts.

There often is a contradiction between what African leaders practise at home and what they have committed themselves to implement within initiatives such as the AU and NEPAD. At the same time there is according to one analyst "actually a great deal of convergence between Chinese norms on governance related to human rights and democracy and much African practice" (Taylor 2007:144). Moreover, China is eager to point out the instances where its views are in line with the practice emerging from Africa, for example with regard to the issue of Zimbabwe (He 2007:29). China is therefore unlikely to call upon Africa to practise what it preaches on governance issues. The spirit of China's unconditional acceptance of African political systems is also reflected in the Chinese practice of sending election observers to African countries at the invitation of African governments, starting from the Ethiopian general elections in 2005 (Xinhua 2005). The Chinese observers' uncritical endorsement of the election process and outcomes has been welcomed by incumbent leaders seeking to relegitimize their rule through elections.

While China's cooperation with Africa does not support a link between governance and development, more attention is paid to how security can contribute to development. The AU's Constitutive Act constituted a paradigm shift from the traditional view on national sovereignty and non-intervention within its predecessor the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Although the Act retains the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention which were central to the OAU, it qualifies them in a far-reaching way. The principles embedded in the AU's Constitutive Act are more progressive than China's own thinking and practice on the issue of international intervention on humanitarian grounds (Wild & Mephum 2006:62). Admittedly, China views the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference with more flexibility than ever before and this flexibility has allowed Chinese participation in UN peacekeeping missions (Pang 2005). Nevertheless China still maintains host nation consent as a precondition for intervention by a peacekeeping mission (Gill 2000:44, 46).

China's support to peacekeeping in Africa has evolved together with its changing stance on peacekeeping in general. The FOCAC Addis Ababa Action Plan expressed the wish that China "give consideration" to supporting African peacekeeping capacity. In its 2006 Africa policy paper China went further by promising to provide assistance "within our own [China's] capacity" to the positive efforts by the AU to settle regional conflicts. Because of the budgetary constraints of the AU, many of its programmes depend heavily on donor support. Although China has provided support to AU peacekeeping missions in Somalia and Sudan, its assistance in this regard, although increasing, remains fairly limited and ad hoc in comparison with other donors such as the EU. China does not provide structural funding to AU peacekeeping in Africa. It does, however, currently take part in seven UN peacekeeping missions in Africa and it has more peacekeepers in Africa than any other permanent member of the Security Council.

In the Beijing Action Plan China promised for the first time to "actively participate in bilateral and multilateral assistance plans in post-war reconstruction" (FOCAC 2006b:par.5.1.2). In post-conflict settings China so far prefers a commercially oriented, bilateral approach to assist in reconstruction efforts. China's engagement is strongly focused on infrastructure reconstruction, as exemplified by its engagement in Angola. In post-war Sierra Leone, China was one of the few countries to show interest in commercial investment when it renovated the Bintumani Hotel in Freetown. China's contribution to multilateral post-conflict initiatives is often limited to participation in UN peacekeeping activities, for instance in Liberia, Southern Sudan and DR Congo (Large 2007:2-3).

Chinese concerns about sovereignty are likely to remain obstacles for changing the current ad hoc nature of Chinese support to African peacekeeping into support of a more structural nature in the short run. However, China does take the negative effects of a lack of peace and security on African development – and the effects of its limited contribution to African peace and security on the PR standing of its Africa policy – seriously. A number of openings therefore appear. This is also reflected in the analyses of African development challenges by Chinese Africa experts. They see the founding of the AU as a sign of Africa's readiness to use its own strength and capabilities to deal with security issues (Sun 2003:63; Sun 2004:51). In Chinese analysts' view the AU is a catalyst for integration and a stabilizing political force on the African continent (Wang 2006:22, 24; Li 2007b:7). Stability being considered a key factor for development, they commend

the beneficial effects of the AU's peace building and peacekeeping efforts on the overall economic situation in Africa. Chinese analysts are concerned about the AU's limited financial resources which put a serious constraint on its capacity to launch effective initiatives to protect and restore peace and security on the continent and force it to turn to the international community for assistance. The challenge they see in this regard is how to balance reliance on the international community with the principle of using Africa's own strength to solve regional security issues (Sun 2004:51).

In spite of the openings for China to contribute more to African security initiatives, Chinese Africa expert Li Anshan nevertheless cautions that:

China respects the AU's principles and the goal to end conflict on the continent, but views itself as having no right to intervene in the domestic affairs of African countries as an outsider. And though there are many critics of China's absolute adherence to the principle of non-interference, even in the face of human rights violations and political corruption in African countries, China does not consider itself qualified to make judgments on the domestic affairs of African countries and considers the AU more qualified to do so. China's policy of non-interference does not equate to ignoring humanitarian disasters, rather that China respects the sovereignty of nations and acknowledges its limits in solving such a crisis. (Li 2007a:76)

Contentious Issues: Market Access and Technology Transfer

A third type of issues that have emerged in the framework of China's cooperation with Africa were not originally part of the FOCAC cooperation agenda but have gradually emerged. Their insertion is mainly a result of the questioning of the business-like approach based on competitive advantage from the point of view of the mutual benefit logic of South-South cooperation. There is a growing perception among African civil society, media and political circles that there can be a contradiction between "drawing on each other's strengths" and "benefiting the people". Calling on the pledged mutual beneficial nature of the South-South relationship with China, they request an adjustment of Chinese policies. A number of issues stand out in this regard, such as labour and environmental concerns, market access and technology transfers.

On the topic of market access there has been increasing African apprehension that giving full play to China's competitive advantages in the trade relationship

risks casting the continent in its traditional role of a mere provider of energy and raw materials (He 2006:23-24). In a high-profile speech in 2006 South African President Thabo Mbeki warned that China risked contributing to African “underdevelopment” because of its policy of importing only raw materials from Africa into China while exporting Chinese manufactured goods to Africa. According to Mbeki this would mean “a replication” of Africa’s relationship with its former colonial powers (*BBC News* 2006). Ghanaian Trade Minister Alan Kyerematen warned the continent again in mid-2007 not to enter into a “colonial” relationship under which China buys raw materials for the continent while market opportunities for African countries in China remain unexplored (Thomson 2007).

China started paying attention to the market access problem as early as 2003 (Da 2003:12). In the FOCAC Addis Ababa Action Plan signed that year it was stated that both sides “recognize the importance of greater market access” and that China had therefore decided to grant zero-tariff treatment to 190 categories of commodities of African Least Developed Countries (LDCs). China’s African Policy of 2006 appeared to indirectly admit the insufficiency of the measures taken by promising “more effective measures” to facilitate African commodities’ access to the Chinese market. In the Beijing Action Plan later that year China pledged to further open up its market to African products and increase the number of export items to China eligible for zero-tariff treatment to 440. The aim of this expansion was described as “to grow China-Africa trade in a more balanced manner”. Despite these tariff concessions, tariff escalations and peaks on certain African exports such as raw cotton nevertheless remain in force (Zafar 2007:117).

A dynamic similar to the one surrounding the topic of market access appears to have occurred with regard to transfers of technology from China to Africa. On this topic segments of African society and political circles began to criticise the lack of such transfers from 2006 onwards. The AU Commission’s Task Force on Strategic Partnerships with the Emerging Powers, for example, stated in September 2006 that China was “making no serious effort” to “transfer skills and knowledge to Africa” (Amosu 2007). This point has been raised with regard to China’s aid in terms of infrastructure, which is very often tied or given in kind rather than in cash. The projects are carried out by Chinese companies, who in many cases also prefer to use Chinese labour (Holslag 2006:162-163). China states that this type of aid is less prone to lead to corruption and increases

efficiency (Sidiropoulos 2006:109; Alden 2007:83-84). However, its approach has been criticised for denying African workers job and training opportunities and potentially leading to difficulties with regard to servicing and maintaining the Chinese-built infrastructure after China has handed it over. In a recent example in the health care sector Zambian authorities requested a Chinese-owned Friendship Hospital to employ Zambian doctors when it was found that all doctors at the institution were either Indian or Chinese, a situation that allegedly caused local residents to shun the hospital (*Lusaka Times* 2008).

China's African policy paper and the FOCAC documents mention the "promotion of cooperation" on technology transfers through investment and joint ventures of Chinese companies and technological cooperation to contribute to African industrialization. Such technological cooperation projects are to be carried out "in accordance with the principle of mutual respect, mutual learning and mutual benefit" (FOCAC 2006b:par.2.5). So far technological cooperation is mainly concentrated in areas that have been identified as priority areas for development assistance, such as agriculture and healthcare, and sectors in which China has a strong investment presence in Africa such as energy and mining. Apart from training for environmental officers under FOCAC and a few initiatives taken under the auspices of UNEP, environmental cooperation does not figure prominently on the cooperation agenda of China's Africa policy.

To offset some of the concerns raised by Africans China proclaimed a number of concrete cooperation projects at the FOCAC Beijing Summit in 2006. These included the establishment of a China-Africa Development Fund and of three to five overseas economic and trade cooperation zones. Agreements for the setting up of these zones have already been signed with Mauritius, Tanzania and Zambia. The Development Fund's first finance projects, announced in January 2008, included a power station in Ghana, a glass factory in Ethiopia, a joint venture ferrochrome plant in Zimbabwe and cement and glass production facilities around Africa. It is important to note that the fund does not provide support to African businesses but is interested in establishing themselves on the Chinese market.

In conclusion, technology transfers and market areas are two examples of areas where sections within African societies have come to realise that cooperation under which China can fully play out its comparative advantages as a provider of cheap labour, highly affordable consumer goods and cheap capital could cause Africa to miss out on broader development objectives such as industrialisation,

technology acquisition, environmental concerns and skills development. They have asked for more efforts from China to help the continent move away from its role as a disadvantaged supplier of primary resources and dependent recipient of aid.

Conclusion: Emergence of an Alternative Partnership Paradigm?

The above analysis reveals a certain level of overlap between Chinese cooperation with Africa and some aspects of NEPAD. Chinese Africa experts argue that both NEPAD and China's cooperation with Africa share the goal of establishing "a new type of strategic partnership" that is based on promoting African peace, stability, democracy and sustainable economic development (Zhang Chongfang 2006:51) and they also point at the institutional linkages and similarities in the sectoral priorities of both. However, they also view NEPAD as a corollary of Africa's traditional relationship with the highly industrialized countries and international financial institutions (Zhang 2002:13). Although they consider support from the international community to African development initiatives as crucial for these to stand any chance of success (Wang 2002:24; Sun 2003:62; Yao 2005:71), they believe it is important for Africa not to rely on externally imposed Western development models but to take control of its own development path (Yang 2001:10; Yao 2005:70). They see it as one of the most important developments at the onset of the 21st century that Africa's "internal motivation for development is prevailing over external pressure for Africa's reform" (Yang 2006:25).

In spite of the convergences, it is clear that many principles generally accepted within NEPAD and the AU are currently not incorporated in the Sino-African relationship. Proposals to draw up a code of conduct between China and Africa that encompasses these principles to govern the Sino-African relationship (Alden 2005:8-9) are therefore unlikely to be implemented in the short run. More importantly, the process of integrating African multilateral priorities and values in China-Africa relations is likely never to be completed since, at a more fundamental level, part of the cooperation paradigm that is emerging between China and Africa opposes important aspects of the thinking behind NEPAD. Most prominent in this respect is the supposed link between governance and development. The Chinese experience so far appears to prove that a democratic political system is not a precondition to development. China explicitly rejects the imposition by donors of conditionalities to aid. This stance has enabled it

to carve out its position vis-à-vis other partners of Africa and consolidate its position as a late arrival on the continent. Apart from a diplomatic PR tool, China's principled stance also pertains to fundamental Chinese interests (Carlson 2005). Anti-hegemony and sovereignty concerns are in that sense "shared interests" between China and Africa. As one Chinese scholar observed (quoted in Ramo 2004:27): "Developing nations are the main force of countering against hegemonism and safeguarding world peace". China has signalled its commitment to work together with Africa to promote a more just multilateral trading system and to make the voices of developing countries heard in the decision-making of international institutions.

To what extent China does the Beijing Consensus constitute an alternative to the development cooperation partnership model in NEPAD? At present the partnership between China and Africa is merely beginning to take shape and so far a cooperation paradigm does not yet seem to have crystallized out of the cooperation. A number of characteristics and consequences can be tentatively inferred, however.

Firstly, the interests China is pursuing in Africa are manifold and include access to resources, markets and political support in international settings. In this sense China's relation with Africa is a strategic partnership, of which development cooperation is but one and probably not the most essential aspect. The different aspects of the partnership such as aid, trade and investment interact with each other in many ways and gains in one area can be impacted by activities in another area. For example, although China's investment in African infrastructure and training remedy some of the competitive disadvantages of the continent in building an industrial base, the presence of its highly competitive businesses in Africa can also undermine African industrialization (Carmody & Owusu 2007:517). The impact of low-priced Chinese textiles exports on African textiles companies in their home and world markets showed that African industries are hardly in a position to compete with Chinese producers (Alden 2007:79-82). At the same time, voices from China caution Africans against overreliance on aid and call upon the continent to embrace trade and investment. At the Seventh World Social Forum in Nairobi, Cui Jianjun of the China NGO Network replied to allegations that Chinese companies are threatening African industrialization and contributing to African unemployment that China had had to make similar difficult decisions about whether or not to accept foreign investment. He cautioned that should Africans fail to take the right decisions, the continent will

stay mired in poverty (Bello 2007). As China's newly appointed ambassador to Malawi warned Malawians:

No country in the world can develop itself through foreign aid. This is a fact. To develop your economy is your job you have to do it yourselves. (Masina 2008)

In another example, a Chinese Africa specialist observed in a recent article that although China's presence in Africa brings new development opportunities to the continent, Africa should view neither China nor the West as a saviour who can eradicate poverty on the continent (Liu 2007:14).

Secondly, as Chris Alden reminds us, China wantedly or unwantedly exports the development model it is most familiar with, with both its merits in terms of rapid development and its flaws in terms of poor labour and environmental standards (Alden 2007:131-132). The Chinese development model of gradual market reform and export-led industrial expansion under a closed political system may not fit the realities of African countries and can therefore not simply be transplanted to Africa. No African country can boast the vast labour supply, exceptional savings rates and high influx of FDI from neighbouring regions that drive Chinese development. Many African countries are also faced with a chronically weak state capacity (Clapham 2001) as well as higher inequality rates, higher dependency rates and a lower population density than China at the outset of its reform period (Ravallion 2008:4). On the other hand, some African countries have much more dynamic civil societies than China. China itself, although clearly flattered by the inference that it is touting a development model that could suit Africa (Sautman & Yan 2007:84-85), appears to carefully stick to Deng Xiaoping's line of advice to Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings that African countries should not copy the Chinese model but formulate policies in light of their own national conditions (Zhang Wei-Wei 2006).

Thirdly, in their newly emerging relationship with China agency by African countries with regard to creating the right conditions for development will be as important as in their relations with any other partner. The Chinese partnership is proclaimed to be characterised by mutual benefit and equality. China has been keen to stress the equality of all sides in its relations with Africa and to avoid any reference to donor or recipient in its discourse. This view possibly explains the absence of the concept of "ownership" in the partnership discourse within the FOCAC documents and China's African policy paper. In a relation of equals, both parties are supposedly expected to "own" the partnership. However,

each partner also shoulders the responsibility of ensuring its benefit from the relationship. In effect, the development aspect of partnership appears to evolve in a pragmatic and gradualist way. It seems to lack a clear theoretical foundation or thoroughly discussed consensus as to how Chinese involvement can benefit and empower Africa in ways that are conducive to its sustainable long-term development (Tjønneland et al. 2006:x). This is markedly different from the NEPAD approach, which had the ambition of constructing a comprehensive, integrated social, political and economic plan for Africa to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable growth. However, there are clear similarities between the gradualist approach applied to development objectives within the China-Africa relationship and China's own development model which applies a "trial-and-error" strategy often characterized by Deng Xiaoping's famous phrase "crossing the river by groping the stones".

There is a growing awareness on the African side that China is coming into the continent with clear interests while African countries still have a much less clear understanding of what they want to gain from the partnership (Rocha 2007:31). In as far as China's emergence in Africa offers an alternative to the neoliberal policies that inspired NEPAD, it also provides more questions than answers about a viable development paradigm for Africa and how the continent's relations with external partners can contribute to this. Whether it is about requesting China to increase the benefits of its economic activities to the local economy through the creation of employment opportunities, skills transfers and the formation of joint ventures (Mbeki 2006), or to supplement and assist AU efforts on conflict resolution and peacekeeping in a more structural and predictable way, it will be up to African countries to engage with China and shape the newly emerging cooperation paradigm. Just as China negotiated favourable conditions for access to the country with foreign companies in the process of opening up and reform, African governments will need to set conditions that favour development in their negotiations with foreign investors. African governments that have come to rely on China as their main political and economic lifeline are hardly in a position to do so. So far it appears that countries with strong civil societies such as South Africa have been most able to address imbalances in their relationship with China.

Fourthly, it is important to note that up to this point many of the cooperative ventures between China and Africa resemble the institutions and frameworks employed by developed countries (Sautman & Yan 2007:83) and that China's

cooperation mode with Africa appears not to have been less elite-based than NEPAD. Civil society is hardly consulted or involved in drawing up and implementing the relationship. This is worrisome considering the stance on governance and transparency that is evolving within the partnership. A member of Sierra Leone's National Accountability Group commented (Amosu 2007): "We've spent 15 years working on conventions against corruption and now the Chinese come in and they haven't signed any of it". Thwarting democratic setbacks and ensuring that China's presence in Africa will be beneficial to ordinary Africans has therefore often been identified as a central challenge for African civil society in the next few years (Obiorah 2007; Campbell 2008:101-102). Broadening cooperation from elite to mass and from official to civilian level is also considered as one of the main challenges for China's future Africa policy by Chinese Africa analysts (He 2006:27; Xu 2008:72-75).

Observers have noted that FOCAC remains to a large extent a Chinese-driven process where agenda-setting is still mostly done by China and the balance of power tilts in China's favour (Tjønneland et al. 2006:x; Naidu 2007:291; Obiorah 2007:49). FOCAC therefore at times appears to serve mainly as a forum for China to launch and coordinate its Africa policy initiatives (Naidu 2007:294). Nevertheless, China's engagement with Africa is not a one-way street. China declares itself prepared to engage in a close dialogue with African governments and to take their concerns seriously (Davies 2007:79, 83). In recent years policy adjustments have been made and new policy initiatives have been launched in response to concerns raised by African countries. Following consultations with the South African government, for example, China agreed in 2006 to impose restrictions on its textile and clothing exports to South Africa to allow local industries a 3-year breathing space from Chinese competition. China also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Zambia in 2006 promising increased labour law abidance and contributions to workers' welfare by Chinese investors (Xinhua 2006b). It is important to note, however, that while there may be growing awareness on the Chinese side of the negative impact of certain practices on the overall standing of China's Africa policy (He 2006), the capacity of the Chinese government to control or influence the behaviour of individual Chinese companies and other Chinese actors in Africa, is often much more limited than commonly asserted (Gill & Reilly 2007). This again points at the need of agency by African governments. A 2006 study has shown that when African countries impose rules and conditions on Chinese construction companies and call on

them to respect local laws, they tend to abide by these regulations. The study reported a majority of Chinese construction firms recruiting up to 85 percent of their labour force locally, with locals being employed even at managerial level (Center for Chinese Studies 2006).

The China-Africa relationship is very much in flux. Over time issues which are not contentious at the moment may be questioned on their contribution to the development of the continent. The projects in which China engages in Africa and the modes under which these are carried out at times have a deep impact on the local economy, society, environment and governance in African countries. As China gets drawn into the domestic economic and political situation of its African partners it may increasingly have to take the preferences of broader African circles with regard to key issues such as development, peace and even governance into account. If China's engagement is seen as going against these preferences, there is a risk of it being perceived as a form of unwarranted intervention in internal affairs by at least some sectors of African society. China should seek ways to limit negative backlashes from its perceived intervention in the domestic situation of its African partners or its perceived lack of contribution to their development. One way to do so would be initiating a more substantial dialogue with African civil society. Another would be trying to deepen cooperation with continental and regional African initiatives such as the AU.

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