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**New African choices? The politics of Chinese engagement in Africa and the changing architecture of international development**

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**Abstract**

The role of China must be understood in the context of competing and intensified global energy politics, in which the US, India and China are among the key players vying for security of supply. Contrary to popular representation, China's role in Africa is much more than this however, opening up new choices for African development for the first time since the neo-liberal turn of the 1980s. As such it is important to start by disaggregating 'China' and 'Africa' since neither represents a coherent and uniform set of motivations and opportunities. This points to the need for, at minimum, a comparative case study approach which highlights the different agendas operating in different African states. It also requires taking a *longue durée* perspective since China-Africa relations are long standing and recent intervention builds on Cold War solidarities, in polemic at least. It also forces us to consider Chinese involvement in Africa as ambivalent, but contextual. We focus on the political dimensions of this engagement and set out a research agenda that focuses on class and racial dynamics, state restructuring, party politics, civil society responses and aid effectiveness.

## I: Introduction

“If one day China should change her colour and turn into a superpower, if she too should play the tyrant in the world, and everywhere subject others to her bullying, aggression and exploitation, the people of the world should identify her as social-imperialism, expose it, oppose it and work together with the Chinese people to overthrow it” (Deng Xiaoping Speech at special session of the UN General Assembly, 1974).

The words of Deng Xiaoping uttered at the height of the cold war, but only 5 years before China initiated far-reaching economic reforms, raises the issue of whether China could ever become an imperialist in the same way as other major powers. Assuming Deng was being ironically rhetorical and intended to stress China's inherent anti-imperialism, a series of recent responses to his warning suggest that China has become something of an aggressor and exploiter. During a trip to Nigeria in February 2006, Britain's then foreign secretary, Jack Straw, remarked that what China was doing in Africa now was much the same as Britain had done 150 years before (Straw, 2006)<sup>1</sup>. Echoing Deng, and issuing a warning shot, South African president Thabo Mbeki (speaking in December 2006 prior to the visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao) argued Africa would be “condemned to underdevelopment” if China replicates in Africa “a colonial relationship” of the kind that existed under white rule (Brookes, 2007; Servant, 2005).

Not surprisingly the Chinese government has been quick to refute such claims. For example, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said that the cap of neo-colonialism could never adorn the head of China adding 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” (Jiabao, 2006; see also Guijin, 2007). China's memory of being colonised by Western powers and long history of support to anti-colonial movements in Africa is thus invoked to ‘prove’ China does not want to control Africa's economic and political systems.

On all sides then, it appears, China's role in Africa is treated as political capital to be used in order to caution, cajole or comfort. But setting up the debate in such Manichean ways is not helpful in analysing the multiple and complex effects China has, and will have, on the political economy of African states. As Kaplinsky *et al* (2006: 2) warn “it is important to understand that China's impact on SSA (sub-Saharan Africa) cannot be seen as purely an economic phenomenon”, which means also focusing on wider questions of aid, geopolitics and development. This paper focuses on the political implications of China's growing presence in Africa. It is an intentionally broad-ranging piece which seeks to establish a research agenda for studying the political economy of China's involvement in Africa. This is vital since much discussion of China's role tends to be based on limited knowledge or crude extrapolations, which tend to take one negative event in the China-Africa relationship and project this onto the entire continent.

We begin by articulating our theoretical framework for understanding the political economy of Sino-African relations. This is premised on a bringing together of critical political economy with certain insights from postcolonial theory. From here we map out the historical contours and contexts of contemporary China-Africa relations before examining the intersections between the politics of class and ‘race’ and economic change in Africa. We also explore a number of important debates about democratisation, rights discourses and the contemporary politics of aid in the context of these unfolding China-Africa relations. In each of these sections we raise some

outstanding issues for research whilst our conclusions draw out some of the broader and longer term implications of China in Africa.

## **II: Towards a postcolonial political economy of China in Africa**

In this section we move beyond the simplistic and racialised characterisations of Sino-African politics to suggest a framework for a more fruitful analysis based on what we term a post-colonial political economy. As Chan (2007: 1) writes “there is already a surfeit of poor and tentative scholarship on this issue” noting that “exotica is precisely the hallmark of so much published work on China and Africa – especially in the USA” (see also Broadman, 2007). Whilst China’s presence is frequently described as a ‘scramble’, a ‘mad dash’, a resource ‘grab’ even a ‘rape’ (Marks, 2007: 6) the image of a defenceless African populace passively submitting to the will of external powers is depressingly all too familiar.

Our analytical framework is made up of some familiar elements of critical political economy, namely a focus on state-capital dynamics and changing class forces. But it draws on aspects of postcolonial theory in being deconstructive and relational by decentring ‘the west’ in accounts of extraversion and discourses of modernity (Mercer, Mohan and Power 2003). It is also historical in analysing continuities as well as the ways in which the past is used ideologically. Here we sketch this out in a little more detail.

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. As we will see China’s foreign policy has closely shaped the Chinese state’s interactions with African states, but whereas in the past Chinese firms and the state were coincidental, now there is some relative autonomy of Chinese firms from state agendas, but still the ties between the CCP and the large Chinese multinationals is strong. However, smaller private Chinese firms, which have proliferated in Africa, are independent of Chinese state agendas to a degree even though they are encouraged (Brautigam 2003).

The outcomes of Chinese involvement are also conditioned by the histories, structures and capacities of African states. This concerns how capable African states are of governing their territories and generating conditions conducive to Chinese investment. It also concerns the levels of institutional regulation and the robustness of political society since for many African states, organised political debate and action, which might challenge development models (Chinese influenced or otherwise) are often lacking. 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, which for parts of Africa is debatable, or at least state forms that are radically different from a liberal ideal (Tull 2006). 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.

The final element of our political economy is class dynamics. China’s presence in Africa is bringing economic growth for some, but we know little of its distribution or the political ramifications of this. Again it is important to differentiate the types of business ventures that are being created (Alden, 2007), whether it be large SOEs, public-private ventures, or smaller private firms as these all affect the ownership patterns, decision making, and direction of profits (Broadman 2007). We can

speculate that enhanced resource extraction will strengthen rentier elites, but what of the smaller firms involved in trading? And, what is the racial dynamic of these economic activities in the sense of ownership and extraction of surplus since we know African leaders have had a mixed relationship with diasporic entrepreneurs. Hence, our analysis must tease out the changing class and racial dynamics of Chinese economic engagement.

Woven through a political economy perspective is a deconstructive analysis which decentres Western accounts of China and Africa and makes space for the voices and perspectives of actors not normally heard in accounts of international politics, aid and development. However, in valorising 'non-western' perspectives we are not advocating an uncritical relativism, which treats, for example, the proclamations of the Chinese government as any more legitimate than claims by rival governments vying for African resources. This necessarily has to be historicised and to analyse continuities and identify traces of the past that influence (or are manipulated by) contemporary actors. This avoids *de novo* accounts that suggest what China is doing is, first, out of the blue in terms of Chinese foreign policy and, second, a significant departure from past practices of other external interests on the continent

A starting point here are the binaristic media accounts of China's engagement with Africa (e.g. Carroll, 2006) that accentuate the differences between western perceptions of the continent (with Africa depicted as a moral cause) and Chinese visions and perspectives (which see Africa as a business opportunity). The media discourses on China's engagement with Africa draw on a range of Orientalist discourses and present China as a monolithic 'beast' with an insatiable appetite for African resources. Politically they depict a totalitarian state that has been let 'loose' in the 'dark continent' and is impervious to and somehow beyond the logics of western rationality, humanitarianism and the agendas of international 'development'. The way the UK and US media have sought to position Sino-African relations is often located within a deeply uncritical narrative of western interactions with Africa (Mawdsley, 2007). What we need to be aware of then are the constructed imaginaries of 'China' and 'Africa', and the geopolitical images and representations of Chinese and African ideologies, foreign policies and cultures that circulate and sediment in popular culture.

For China, Africa has historically been the focus of various moral and philanthropic crusades (Snow, 1988: 144-185) and neither is neoliberalism specific to the 'West' nor external to China (Kwong, 2006). There are thus multiple commonalities between the agendas and policies of 'developed' western states and those of China (Sautman, 2006). China has a popular representation for exceptionalism, but China is quickly becoming a normalised part of everyday African life as links and connections begin to deepen (Mohan and Kale, 2007). There is an urgent need to listen to what Africans themselves are saying about China's influence in Africa (Manji and Marks, 2007) so that we do not always automatically assume that African engagements with the 'external' must invariably be malevolent or misguided. It is also necessary to begin to understand those exchanges that are less visible at present – the commodity flows, the creation of new political and economic elites, the education partnerships and the emergence of African businesses in China. Crucially we must further engage with Chinese academics, policy-makers and think-tanks in opening up dialogues and conversations around China-Africa relations.

To elaborate on our postcolonial political economy we divide the substantive analysis into three main issues: (1) *The changing contexts and patterns of Chinese involvement in Africa* - how has China's foreign policy with respect to Africa evolved since the birth of the PRC in 1949 and what are the current and country-specific

patterns of Chinese trade, aid and investment? (2) *Trade relations, African producers, and political responses* - how are the impacts of Chinese aid, trade and investment altering class dynamics and how are they being debated and contested by civil society and political parties in Africa? (3) *Democratic discourses, entrenching authoritarianism, and geopolitical rivalry* - how is Chinese aid targeted and what tensions exist between Chinese aid practices and those of key donors and multilateral organisations at the multilateral and national level?

### **III: Geopolitical histories and development cooperation**

In addressing the first of these issues this section provides an historical analysis of China's engagement with Africa in order to address some key challenges identified in our analytical framework. We want to stress that China has always engaged strategically with Africa and used the continent to bolster its geopolitical interests, which marks it out as similar to other superpowers. That said, it also highlights that whilst Chinese 'aid' is used to further geopolitical claims it has been different from western approaches, by being based on bilateral 'co-operation' rather than a moralising political discourse of 'catch up' development, and seeking to minimise the social differences between giver and receiver, though not always successfully. Finally, it also helps us situate and question contemporary Chinese discourses, with which we started, about China's historic and on-going role as champion of 'anti-imperialism'.

Broadly speaking these changes in Chinese policy have seen a shift from Cold War ideology to a more classical pursuit of economic self-interest in the form of access to raw materials and the construction of spheres of influence through investment, trade and military assistance". Muekalia (2004: 7) describes the transformation in Sino-African relations since 1949 as China having "gradually changed its tactics from confrontation to co-operation, from revolution to economic development, and from isolation to international engagement". Recently, China's breathtaking economic advance has seen its need to access resources to fuel growth, within which China's role in Africa is typically presented as a straightforward resource scramble (Pan 2006, Klare and Volman 2006).

#### *Third World 'co-operation'*

Although China has long had a role in Africa (Yu 1965; Ismael 1971; Larkin 1971, Eadie and Grizzell 1979; Gao 1984) the shape of current China-Africa relations can be traced back to the 1950s and the connections forged during the anti-colonial struggles for independence and the revolutionary period of Chinese foreign policy from 1950 to the early 1970s. Running through this engagement is China's emphasis on South-South co-operation based on a number of perceived 'similarities' between China and African states. Zhou Enlai foreshadowed the concept of 'South-South' co-operation in his African tour of 1963-4 in advocating mutual economic assistance between 'poor friends' and in attacking the bullying of small and weak countries by the 'big and strong' (Snow, 1995). Beijing has also argued that China and Africa are both cradles of civilisation, that both 'belong to the developing world' and face common enemies and as a result they have common strategic interests and a shared perspective on major international issues. Beijing has also suggested that as a result China and Africa should support each other in close co-operation on key global issues and has sought to mobilise and maintain African support on those issues.

Although China continues to give aid to selected African countries the emphasis today has, as we will see, shifted toward providing official loans with government

subsidised interest rates and to developing partnership or joint ventures between companies from China and Africa. Some authors (Melville and Owen, 2005; Alden, 2005b; Carroll, 2006; Marks, 2006) are sceptical about China's interest in Africa as a form of 'south-south cooperation', which is more progressive and less selfish, suggesting it might be the more familiar and hegemonic 'north-south relationship' with China attempting to oppose unilateral global dominance in part by building relationships that bolster Beijing's diplomatic offensive against 'hegemonism'. Similarly, Snow (1995: 321) questions the way in which China has used 'camouflage tactics' to disguise its private interests and campaigns or has articulated a "rhetorical unity which has sometimes disguised the pursuit of profoundly different goals". We turn now to explore in a little more detail the nature of this co-operation.

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

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 (Tjonneland *et al*, 2006: 75). 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. It does not appear that Africa was important to China at Bandung, however, and although it marked the beginning of significant Chinese initiatives in Africa there is little evidence that China foresaw this with clarity (Larkin, 1971). The AAPSO was the chief institution embodying this Bandung spirit and it established a permanent secretariat in Cairo although the organisation was largely unable to translate words into action (Wei, 1982). At the start of the 1960s however, the bitter ideological dispute between the USSR and China involved competition for dominance over various organisations of Afro-Asian solidarity and the non-aligned countries (Ismael, 1971). Further, Chinese wishes were often stubbornly and effectively resisted within these organisations and by no means did China fully control them (Neuhauser, 1968).

Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai's tour of Africa in 1964 confirmed Beijing's support for African struggles against imperialism (which he called 'the poor helping the poor') and set the stage for Africa as an ideological battleground with both Washington and Moscow (Adie, 1964; Ismael, 1971; Snow, 1988). The era of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai had a strong emphasis on political ideology and set out principles for co-operation and for guiding the giving of aid. However, while Mao informed a guerrilla leader from Southern Rhodesia that China and Africa were 'one and the same' many African leaders of the 1950s and 1960s knew little about China (Snow, 1995). The principles for aid and co-operation reflected China's own experience as an aid recipient over the preceding sixty years where the Chinese had not appreciated their 'client' status (Snow, 1988) and were partly calculated to "show up the North" (Snow, 1995: 287) by contrasting with the assistance then provided by 'first world' countries. By spreading the gospels of nationalism and independence and in its good works, China set out to knit the African countries together into a Third World alliance with

China at its head as a counterbalance to the Cold War superpowers and wealthy advanced economies of the North. In distancing itself from Western approaches, China also drew on 'missionary' like convictions of its righteousness in assisting Africa.

China's method of giving aid, it can be argued, has displayed certain distinctive historical features. It was usually given as a grant, was strictly bilateral in nature, and only given where the relationship was mutually beneficial to donor and recipient alike. Moreover, Chinese aid workers were urged not to "loll in hotel suites and run up expenses as other expatriates did" (Snow, 1988: 146). Chinese aid went to various sectors of African 'development' such as light industry, transport, agriculture, water control and irrigation, public health, power and communications, sports and cultural complexes and heavy industry (Eadie and Grizzell, 1979). China seemed happy to work on projects that were effectively inessential monuments to the glory of the African regimes they worked with, reflecting the political or psychological needs of African leaders, and they also made a point of 'doing something' for districts which the Europeans had been content to leave as backwaters (Snow, 1988). Aid was also an important geopolitical tool for the Chinese in the contest with Taiwan (also an aid giver) and the USSR (where the Chinese aimed to shame the Kremlin by stepping up their charity and economic aid and by providing fewer arms). Aid thus became an important way of exposing the limitations of China's opponents, both Western and Soviet. There was often a reluctance however to coordinate efforts with other foreign powers and a deep-seated tendency to 'go it alone', sometimes resulting in active hostility to other aid personnel.

However, the upheavals of China's Cultural Revolution undermined the PRC's efforts to implement ambitious foreign policy objectives. Peking's failure in Africa during the late 1960s may also be attributed to the ignorance of PRC leaders and their failure to grasp the significance of regional antagonisms and cultural and historical differences within and between the various countries while trying to apply a general model of revolution to diverse African 'liberation movements' (Neuhauser 1968). In Angola, for example, although it strongly opposed Portuguese imperialism in Africa, China did not provide clear support to any one liberation movement (Wei, 1982) and when relations with the MPLA soured in the late 1960s and early 1970s (as the MPLA moved closer to the Soviets) China increased its support to UNITA and even sided with the US in an attempt to weaken the USSR's grip on Angola (Jackson, 1995). Chinese support switched back to the MPLA in the late 1970s and early 1980s however (Taylor, 1997; Grijón, 2007) suggesting that Angola was more a 'testing ground' for the PRC's position towards the superpowers (Jackson, 1995; Taylor, 1997) than a setting where China demonstrated and adapted its committed support for national liberation. Hence, China's support to African liberation movements was shaped largely by its own geopolitical interests and oscillated between different nationalist groups, lacking consistency and continuity.

Despite waning interest in Africa in the late 1960s the massive Tanzania-Zambia railway (1967-1975) which cost over US\$600 million and was built with the help of 15,000 Chinese workers stands out as a symbol of Sino-African solidarity. However, according to Brautigam (1998), its success was limited by factors that are very familiar to other donors and in other eras. The Chinese not only failed to understand local political and institutional factors, but there were limited evaluations in the early period and a persistent over-centralisation in decision-making. There was also a lack of transparency and more project linkages were held with Chinese agencies than with local institutions (Snow, 1998; King, 2006).

As the Cultural Revolution wound down in the 1970s China's foreign policy began to lose its strong ideological inflection (Harding, 1995). Between 1976 and 1982 total Chinese aid pledges to Africa fell from US\$100.9 million to just US\$13.8 million (Snow, 1995: 306). Within years of the completion of the flagship Tazara project major shifts were underway within China's domestic and foreign policy (particularly following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976) which saw a gradual dilution of the ideological focus in policy-making in favour of a greater emphasis on economic co-operation.

### *The post-reform era and resource diplomacy*

In the post-Mao era Chinese leaders have sought to assign priority to economic modernisation and to maximising access to foreign markets, technology and capital (Harding, 1995). In a major policy speech delivered in June 1985, Deng Xiaoping laid the foundation for China's post-Maoist foreign policy, by suggesting that the PRC would become a "modern, powerful socialist economy" and stressing that a revival of China's own economic development and modernisation was *the* primary objective. Africa policy shifted from support for Maoist-inspired revolution to the search for new commercial engagements that would strengthen the PRC's economy. Combining the promotion of Chinese exports with the giving of aid, from 1983 onwards China's aid to Africa stood at an average of US\$200 million a year (Snow, 1995: 311). Deng re-affirmed a policy of non-interference, encouraging African countries to find political and economic models of development to suit their own particular circumstances (Wang Qinmei 1998, Zhong Fei 1995). Just as China had 'readjusted' its economy there was an assumption that African partners could learn lessons from Chinese history and so they too would have to 'adjust' in ways not too dissimilar from the SAPs advocated by other donors.

During Africa's 'lost decade' of the 1980s Chinese economic attention was firmly directed towards Japan and US whilst Sino-African trade was increasingly marginalized (see Taylor, 1998) although it continued to grow from about US\$300 million to US\$2.2 billion between 1976 and 1988 (Snow, 1995: 318) suggesting that Deng's refocusing of China's Africa policy had begun to reap rewards. After June 1989, China underwent a major re-evaluation of its foreign policies as it ended its 'honeymoon' relationship with the West. The self-interest of African elites under threat from democratisation projects and the longer history of Third World solidarity and resentment at Western 'neo-imperialist' interference meant that African leaders were muted in their criticism (if not openly supportive) of China following Tiananmen square and were fearful that Beijing could easily end Chinese development aid. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc China began to conceptualise the world as being threatened by a new and potentially unchallenged hegemon; the United States. Africa thus played an important role for China in its struggle to be free of the overt influence of any one power and in regaining its eminence in the international system (Taylor, 1998).

By the mid-1990s securing energy resources became a key driver of China's foreign policy (Zhao 2007). In terms of resource security, oil is clearly a crucial concern, with China's energy consumption predicted to rise by 153% between 2002 and 2025 (Klare and Volman, 2006). As energy competition intensifies between the US and China, producing regions that have hitherto been quite marginal to global concerns become of critical strategic importance (Lyman 2005). The Washington consensus of the 1980s was made possible in part through a lack of ideological counterweights following the ending of the cold war. The neo-liberalism which accompanied this has been based upon what Harvey (2003) terms 'accumulation by dispossession', which is a brutal appropriation of the resources of the developing world and repeats a



model laid down under colonialism. Indeed, the whole discussion of the 'new' scramble for Africa's resources by China and others needs to be set in this longer-standing and wider analysis of the global division of labour in which Africa's position has been one of 'extraversion'. Africa has since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century been externally oriented, so it is overblown to suggest that China represents a radical departure from this long standing structural relationship.

Whereas the 1980s was the pinnacle of the Washington consensus, the late 1990s witnessed what Ramo (2004) terms, somewhat prematurely, the Beijing Consensus. While this posits a more co-operative stance by China viz-a-viz the developing world based on 'peaceful coexistence', there is much to suggest that China's renewed interests in Africa is not much different from those of the neo-liberal 'Western' powers, namely to advance the class power of its elites (Harvey 2005). Hence, while China's rhetoric of non-aligned, socialist 'brotherhood' remains its geo-strategic interests have changed dramatically. Therefore, the question remains whether China's engagement with Africa will radically alter the 'extraverted' relationship to the global economy (Sautman 2006).

Whereas in the 1960s-1980s China's engagement was largely 'ideological', today China's foreign policy is characterised as 'flexible, differentiated and proactive' (Zhao 2007). Alongside this resource diplomacy are various forms of 'soft power' (Alden 2005a), which not only garner support in exporting countries but are tied to China's regional and international geopolitical aims. Some have termed this 'rogue aid' (Naim 2007) whose effect is "typically to stifle real progress while hurting average citizens". But from an African perspective for the first time since the end of the cold war African countries have more choices about who to turn to for aid and investment and can play donors off against one another. But, arguably, the leverage that China gives is 'safer' than the cold war trade off between the US and USSR, when military destabilization was often the reward for non-compliance.

And with a growth in wealth and influence of China, the US's faltering deficits, the relative buoyancy of the EU and Japan, and India's rise the international scene is characterised much more by multipolarity than the bipolarity of the cold war or the apparent unipolarity of the immediate post cold war period. That said, US hegemony is not on the wane and China is sorely aware of this, even as it attempts to both challenge and contain this hegemony. This multipolarity sees China engaging tentatively with various multilateral organisations. With its recent ascension to the WTO, China recognises that it needs to court votes to protect and promote its interests even as it tries to address some of the trade asymmetries between North and South.

This resource diplomacy has seen various high level visits and policy fora. During President Jiang Zemin's 1996 Africa visit he signed 23 economic and technical co-operative agreements with six African countries. He also outlined a five point proposal for long-term Sino-Africa co-operation, which included fostering 'sincere friendship', interaction based on equality, respect for sovereignty and non-interference, common development on the basis of mutual benefit, enhanced consultation and co-operation in global affairs, and the pursuit of a just and fair international economic and political order (Shi Weisan, 1996). This was followed up in the Beijing Sino-African ministerial conference in October 2000 which led to the establishment of a permanent Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC). The forum has since become the principal instrument for fostering dialogue and co-operation with African countries, all of whom have been invited to attend the subsequent FOCAC gatherings in Addis Ababa (2003) and Beijing (2006), even those that still maintain an official contact with Taiwan.

In some ways the 2006 Beijing FOCAC meeting marked the end of the beginning of China's latest engagement with Africa, a process qualitatively different from the past (Alden, 2006). In January of that year China published the equivalent of a white paper, *China's Africa Strategy* (PRC, 2006). Whilst re-affirming older principles of non-interference and the 'one China' policy, it emphasises trade, investment and economic co-operation as the basis for engagement and also outlines China's intention to deepen political relations. There is also a clear emphasis on access to African commodities, on co-operation in the multilateral system and on Chinese support for the AU/NEPAD and other regional initiatives and organisations. Hu Jintao embarked on an eight-nation tour of Africa in February 2007 (his third visit in as many years) dispensing billions of dollars of debt relief and announcing discounted loans and new investments. A US\$5 billion China-Africa Development Fund was also recently launched that aims to encourage Chinese firms to invest in Africa whilst the 2006 Beijing FOCAC meeting pledged to open three to five trade and economic cooperation zones in Africa by 2009 (King, 2007).

#### **IV: The politics of class and race**

While oil dominates China's recent African interests there is much more to her economic strategy. Other minerals and metals are important (Broadman 2007) as are agro-forestry products and trade of manufactured goods and capital equipment. In terms of the patterns of ownership, Chinese firms operating in Africa tend to be either large, multinational state 'influenced' enterprises or small, private trading or manufacturing enterprises. The prospects of Africa's developmental gains from these interests are not clear cut and will vary by sector and country (Kaplinsky, McCormick and Morris 2006).

In order to assess the impacts of China it is important to disaggregate the potential costs and benefits of Chinese trade and investment and, crucially, how these are manifested at the national level, and in terms of wealth accumulation and class composition. While there is a growing body of work on the national patterns of trade and FDI (e.g. Broadman, 2006; Goldstein et al 2006; UNCTAD 2007), there is little on the changing class dynamics. The little high-quality empirical work that does exist on Chinese business strategies tends to focus on ethnic networks and the social relations through which transnational enterprises operate (Haugen and Carling 2005; Brautigam 2003). It is also important to analyse the racial aspects of accumulation strategies because politically, as we will see, a changing class-race dynamic has important implications for African politics at both local and national levels.

##### *Disaggregating China-Africa economic relations*

It is difficult to generalise about the likely impact of China's trade and investment with African countries. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide much detail on this or to analyse specific countries. The combined effects of the potential costs and benefits are context specific although some case study material is emerging (UNCTAD 2007, le Pere 2007). However, in terms of understanding the changing class composition of African societies it is too early to assess the impact of China and would also require a different form of analysis from the types of aggregate studies done so far. We need to know much more about whether Chinese 'aid' and investment has transformed the ownership of businesses in African countries and how this affects the well being and security of different class groups in Africa. We also need to understand the racial composition of these changing class groupings and the extent to which African middle classes are gaining from or losing out to a Chinese petit-bourgeoisie. Here we suggest some contours of these new class/race

configurations. In this sub-section we also expand upon the racial politics of China-Africa relations and the ways in which organised civil society-based politics are beginning to be felt in various ways.

First, there is some evidence that a Chinese merchant class has emerged in some countries. Politically, there may be parallels with other 'ethnic' merchant classes such as the Indians in East Africa and the Lebanese in West Africa. On the face of it these merchants may be less interested in domestic political issues so long as they can accumulate wealth. This could be attractive to authoritarian African regimes (Lee 2007), because their sojourner status means they are less likely to press for openly democratic changes. However, studies such as Reno's (1995) of Sierra Leone suggest politics will be organised via a 'shadow state' which ties ethnic entrepreneurs into circuits of state power. One more formal way in which the Chinese businesses are beginning to organise is through organisations like chambers of commerce, some of which have been proactive in encouraging further Chinese investment, as in Mauritius (Brautigam 2003), but which are likely to be lobbying for other privileges.

Second, if competition from Chinese imports closes factories and increases unemployment in the formal and informal sectors this may erode the support base of organised labour and diminish its political clout. Indeed, some of the most organised critiques of Chinese engagement have come from trade unions (e.g. Zambia, South Africa, Ghana). Yet as African companies are being squeezed by Chinese competition they are also using the more 'liberal' civil society organisations such as chambers of commerce to lobby against the Chinese. For example, Lee (2007) details the objections of the Kampala City Traders' Association to Chinese traders as dumping sub-standard goods, profit repatriation, exacerbating unemployment, and tax evasion. However, these objections seem relatively few and far between although this may simply reflect the lack of grounded analysis to date as well as the extent to which Chinese trade and investment undermines local economies. Clearly where impacts are most negative we would expect greatest opposition.

Related to all of these 'economic' issues are more cultural questions. The increasing numbers of Chinese on the continent is producing social change and begs a whole set of further questions around the relations between the 'hosts' and Chinese (Mohan and Kale 2007). Chinese migration to Africa started in the colonial period as forms of indentured labour and carried on into the cold war period through aid missions (Hsu 2006). Small overseas Chinese trading communities of Southern and Eastern Africa lived harmoniously with their African neighbours and even married African people or took office in African governments (Snow, 1995). But more recently the Chinese construction methodology is to keep Chinese workers in their own labour and social groups, within their own accommodation, and working to Chinese practices of speed and health and safety, but it is not true that all go home afterwards (Chan, 2007). Fujian and Zhejiang provinces have been actively encouraging emigration to Africa as a source of remittances and of new jobs (Alden, 2007).

Hence, there is a peculiar diaspora that requires some sociological investigation here and it differs from country to country and so more nuance is required in understanding 'Chinese' relations with Africa and the interactions that Chinese people have with local communities. Angola, for example, is expected to soon house the largest single expatriate Chinese community in Africa and one estimate has it that so far 10,000 Chinese businessmen have visited Angola (CCS, 2007). In Cabinda (which has the largest natural resource endowment in Angola) the Chinese are the largest single immigrant group. It is estimated that between 20,000 and 30,000 Chinese nationals now live in Angola, a figure almost as large as the community of expatriate Portuguese (47,000) (CCS, 2007).

Anecdotal relations between Chinese and African populations are quite good, but some political figures are playing a 'China card', most notably in elections in Zambia in 2006 where an opposition politician whipped up resentment against the Chinese, although he fared badly in the elections themselves. It remains to be seen whether this form of scapegoating gathers momentum in the coming years (Trofimav, 2007). Beyond this manipulated politics there are complex racial and cultural discourses of whether the Chinese are treated as different and 'other' by Africans or are somehow the same insofar as they are 'not white' (Snow 1988). Whether and how this shared 'non-whiteness' and its linkages to the anti-imperialist agenda of the political leaders plays out is another issue for ongoing analysis.

## **V: Democratisation, rights discourses and the contemporary politics of aid**

Earlier we mentioned the underlying logic of China's foreign policy around anti-hegemony and stability. But the current disjuncture is such that China now pursues resources and takes pragmatic policy decisions, but cloaks it all in an older rhetoric of Third World solidarity. China's 2006 *Africa Policy* is premised on respect for sovereignty and 'non-interference' in national political processes. In terms of government revenue those countries with significant commodity exports are experiencing growth in rents. In order to bolster claims to resources and to further its international geopolitical aims, as we have seen, 'aid' is also used strategically. The political implications of this activity, alongside the potential changes in class forces outlined in the previous section, are already making an impact on Africa's politics. This sub-section examines the likely impacts on leadership and the processes of governance, and the politics of aid.

### *Leadership and governance*

Again, we need to avoid generalizations about the impact of China on Africa's politics. Too many accounts simply see China as entrenching despotic rulers (French 2004, Naim 2007). Following our postcolonial political economy framework the precise effects will be conditioned by the nature of China's interests, the modes of engagement with particular polities, and the political systems operating in the African country concerned. As a start we have Tull's (2006) 3-fold categorisation. First, states undergoing transitions to democracy. As we know China does not get actively involved in governance reforms so in such states China's role will be minimal given that any criticism of authoritarianism and moves towards liberal democracy will simultaneously reflect badly on China's domestic record. These countries, which lack strategic resources, but which serve as useful markets and allies in geopolitical struggles have received significant aid. These include Kenya, Ghana, and Tanzania. In the majority of these cases there is technical and infrastructural support, grants, and some joint ventures. Secondly there are states with significant resource endowments where investment and aid have been at high levels which include Angola, Sudan and Nigeria. Here, China's role is likely to exacerbate a resource curse and benefits will accrue to elites thereby undermining development and democracy. Here we have seen major infrastructural investment, large aid packages, and high level diplomatic engagement. The Sudan has proved the most controversial of these with China supplying arms to the government and its militias in order to suppress opposition in Darfur as well as allowing the Sudanese government to mount attacks from Chinese run oil facilities (Abdalla Ali 2007, Askouri 2007, Large, this issue). Third, are states emerging from conflict. China's peace-keeping interventions are generally welcomed, but only if other economic activities do not enhance inequality. For example, in Liberia the Chinese contributed to peace-

keeping efforts, but Chinese logging companies were also aggressively stripping forests.

Despite these differences most African leaders share an uncritical openness to China for the 'good' that it will bring. In all cases there is very little internal debate, either in China or African countries, about the efficacy and impacts of China's Africa policy. For example, apart from South Africa there is very sparse civil society debate about the pros and cons of China's involvement (Burke pers comm, Obiorah 2007). We also know little about how African political parties engage with this issue. It is not clear whether this is because most Africans are happy with what China brings and therefore making a political issue of it would backfire, or whether people are simply unaware of what China is doing and how the politics surrounding it works. However, it does raise questions about whether extended Chinese penetration of African markets and elevated immigration levels will become political issues in much the same way as Indian Diasporic enterprises became the targets for regimes in East Africa in the 1970s.

### *The politics of aid*

We have already seen the close linkages between aid and politics in Chinese policy, particularly its tied character and project basis. What is interesting politically is the bilateral nature of China's aid and the ways in which it conflicts with other donors' moves towards coordination as well as with pan-African attempts to direct Africa's development. This sub-section will not look at the mechanisms of aid *per se* (see King 2007, Tjonneland *et al* 2006), but rather at the political implications of them.

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness concerns donor coordination, which the Chinese signed up to, but China's Africa Policy is focused on bilateral aid. Likewise the Chinese support the pan-African African Union and NEPAD, yet still do most of their diplomacy bilaterally. These tensions between bilateralism and multilateralism are important issues for both Africa and the other donor countries besides China who are feeling their way through in how to deal with China. Some of this tension between donor modalities is played out in debates around 'rights'. The US and Western European donors have for some time been pushing a 'rights-based' development agenda (Mohan and Holland 2001), which is a liberal package of aid designed to engender freedoms through various legal reforms, democratisation and good governance initiatives. Although stressing the whole gamut of rights, from civil and political through to economic, social and cultural, these approaches tend to favour the liberal freedoms of market-based mechanisms with a minimum role for the central state. By contrast China emphasises only the social and economic group based rights and see these as underpinning not only China's own development model, but also its aid programme.

Some western commentators, and especially American ones, use these different takes on rights to emphasise the inherently dangerous and self-serving nature of China's foreign policy as well as criticising China's domestic democratic credentials. All of this is designed to enhance the legitimacy of western approaches to democracy and development aid. On the other hand western donor countries are wary of upsetting the Chinese who hold the key to longer-term global prosperity. The result, in terms of development aid policy, is to tread carefully around China, pushing a rights-based agenda and to look for productive ways to engage with China on aid delivery, drawing it gently into coordinated schemes (Benn 2004; Tjonneland *et al*, 2007, Wild and Mephram 2006). However, the Darfur Crisis may prove to be a turning point at which China realises its need to be more careful about the governance side of its aid and investment. International condemnation was so fierce

that there are signs that China will not repeat such approaches elsewhere (Alden, 2007).

A not dissimilar issue around the politics of aid is China's relations with the AU and NEPAD, both of which China actively supports and are test-beds for its changing stance on multilateral politics. What ever the efficacy of NEPAD, it posits a multilateralist approach to solving Africa's development problems. While the Chinese state-backed investors are relatively lax about transparency, accountability and sustainability of investments, NEPAD has been developing the African Peer Review Mechanism. This is an effort to encourage African countries to set standards and put in place procedures for vetting and monitoring investments. Again, there are potential tensions and it seems likely that in the rush to attract and maintain Chinese investments, African countries will be tempted into a race for the bottom in terms of labour and environmental standards. Another fracture line is China's 'non-interference' ethos, which ostensibly demonstrates respect for African statehood. However, the DRC, Darfur and Zimbabwe crises, amongst other things, have moved the AU to push for 'non-indifference' in international relations so that African and other countries cannot stand by when abuses are taking place. Again, these may prove to be a fault line in China-Africa political relations over the coming years.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude we want to open up a series of broader issues around the longer term implications of whether China's involvement will enhance development prospects and political accountability in Africa or undermine them. We do this through a series of research questions for the future and a skeletal methodology. All agree that China is in Africa to stay and so monitoring the unfolding of these relationships is an obvious conclusion from this review. One medium to long term issue which conditions any foreign policy initiatives by China is its domestic inequality. Given huge and growing urban-rural inequality, debate is emerging around whether China can continue to fund aid and investment at current levels, when pressures are coming for domestic redistribution rather than international aid (Naidu 2007).

We suggested that China's involvement will not fundamentally alter Africa's place in the global division of labour. It simply adds a new and significant market without challenging the continent's extraversion. History suggests that in some states this will entrench rentier states, concentrate ownership in a few hands, and deliver limited multipliers to marginalised Africans. The more upbeat take amongst policy-makers (Wild and Mephram 2006, Tjonneland et al 2006) is that if Africans can 'control' the benefits of Chinese involvement then Africa will benefit. This requires strengthening civil society (Obiorah 2007) and opening up development to democratic debate to see how redistribution might work. International donors, then, do not do much differently and encourage the types of governance reforms already in place while ensuring 'dialogues' with the Chinese. However, civil society strengthening has been limited thus far and so it remains to be seen whether mote of the same actually works.

A related debate, with historical parallels, is whether China will be forced to get more involved in multilateral governance as well as building governance capacity at the national level. So far China has, as we have seen, taken the view publicly that internal political matters are not its concern. This echoes earlier merchants and imperialists, who insisted their interests were largely commercial, but who ended up becoming more and more mired in internal institutional building and policing. 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 which are ever harder to manage, because these agencies do not enjoy direct lines of authority over Chinese corporations overseas:

“As it deepens, the Chinese government will more likely find itself hamstrung by...an increasing set of tensions and contradictions between the interests and aims of government principals—the bureaucracies based in Beijing tasked with advancing China’s overall national interests—and the aims and interests of ostensible agents—the companies and businesspersons operating on the ground in Africa” (Gill and Reilly, 2007: 38).

And as these relationships grow and the institutional tendrils become more enmeshed we see possible problems of African people, in western fears, being locked into China for many years to come but equally the Chinese are ‘locked’ into Africa, which brings its own risks.

Leading on from this is that China seeks, as do all investors, a stable and secure investment environment. In line with other superpowers China supplies arms and military training in an attempt to secure resource access. So a possible scenario involves greater superpower conflict in which as a result of arms sales, rent seeking, and growing inequality African states are destabilised even more and pull farther apart. The result in terms of securing access to resources may be that China, and others, end up dealing with a myriad of ‘non-state’ institutional players such as warlords, guerrillas, and secessionist movements, not unlike the situation in the contemporary Niger Delta.

In all these areas, though, there is a need for rigorous research and we finish with some key research questions and a methodology. On issues of economic change and class composition we feel there are questions around ownership, wealth distribution, race and organised politics:

- In what ways do the patterns of Chinese trade, aid and investment reinforce existing macro-economic reforms or does it work against them?
- How has Chinese ‘aid’ and investment transformed the ownership of businesses in African countries?
- How does Chinese involvement affect the well being and security of different class groups in Africa? How do different classes of Africans perceive China’s growing role in trade and investment?
- What is the racial composition of these changing class groupings?
- Does the changing class and gender composition have implications for organised civil society based politics (e.g. Trade unions, business lobbies)?

Leading from the last question is formal political society and the ways in which political parties and incumbent regimes use China’s presence:

- How do African politicians and political parties play ‘the China card’?
- To what extent does China’s involvement strengthen the hold of regimes in power? How do African regimes use Chinese aid and China’s development path as a means to push through different kinds of political change?

Finally Chinese aid, in all its complexity, and the relations between donors is likely to have long-term repercussions across Africa:

- In what ways does China deliver aid and how it is different and distanced from ‘western’ aid? How are different discourses of sovereignty, cooperation and development mobilised in these practices?
- How are Chinese aid and investment projects decided upon and allocated?

- What forms of conditionality exist in Chinese aid? What effects does this have on policy autonomy in Africa?
- What tensions exist on the ground over donor coordination? Are western donors at the country level seeking to include China more and in other ways?

These questions urge a detailed empirical response. There are already too many generalised analyses of China and 'Africa' "as if there were relationships between two countries instead of between one and fifty-three" (Chan, 2007: 2). Instead what are needed are detailed case studies of China-Africa relations, which establish baseline conditions and that are capable of differentiating generic impacts from country specific ones. In the past year we have seen more case studies emerging including Angola, Sudan, Namibia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Benin (in le Pere, 2007 and Manji and Marks, 2007), but these are mostly descriptive and use poor quality public data and newspaper accounts. It is vital for critically engaged scholars, activists and policy-makers to properly analyse these unfolding relationships in order to guide action rather than continually rely on half truths and impressions.

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<sup>i</sup> Similar points have been made by others. See also Marks (2006). In China, shortly before the Beijing FOCAC summit of 2006 the Chinese newspaper *People's Daily* ran an article denouncing "the fallacy that China is exercising neo-colonialism in Africa...apparently aimed at sowing discord between China and Africa" (People's Daily Online, 2006).

<sup>ii</sup> China's trade with Africa reached US\$55 billion in 2006 (up 40% year on year) making China the second largest bilateral trading partner in Africa behind the US (US\$91 billion) and now ahead of France (US\$47 billion) and this may reach or go beyond US\$100 billion by 2010 (oil and raw materials are crucial to this) (Tjønneland et al, 2006; Harman, 2007). At the end of 2006 China's investment in Africa reached US\$11.7 billion (Guijin, 2007: 3).