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# China's foray into Africa: Ideational underpinnings and geoeconomic interests

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**China's new foreign policy stance in Africa is a marked departure from its previous emphasis on purely ideational principles designed to strengthen its standing as a supporter of the Third World. The ideational affinity with Africa has not changed in China's foreign policy discourse, but the new emphasis is on an aggressive pursuit of its geoeconomic and geopolitical interests on the continent, marked by an acquisitive impulse for Africa's natural resources and a concerted effort to offer political support to its allies in Africa to secure those resources in an uncertain post bipolar international system. This paper explores the transformation of China's African policy, ideationally, from the Bandung principles to the Beijing Consensus, while noting the geoeconomic and geopolitical motivations behind China's engagement with Africa as it cements its position as an emerging global power. The paper concludes that despite the presumed coincidence of interests and ideational affinity that formed the basis of pre-Deng China-Africa relations, China's new geoeconomic and geopolitical engagement represents a major pathway for the continent, but serious steps must be taken to harness the relationship to ensure that it fulfills Africa's desire to pursue a sustainable development agenda that moves it away from overdependence on commodity exports and marginality in the global economy. A version of this paper was presented in July 2008 at the Second Global Studies Conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia.**

**Key words:** Beijing consensus, geoeconomics, geopolitics, hard power, natural resources, soft power, South-South Cooperation

## INTRODUCTION

China's insatiable drive for resources to power its economic engine as it emerges as a new global economic powerhouse, has led the country to pursue an aggressive foreign policy engagement on the African continent. This geo-strategic reach into Africa is part of a concerted "Going Global Strategy" (Corkin, 2006, p.10). It is a far cry from the autarchic impulse of China's relationship with the international system during the pre-1978 period under Mao Zedong. The thrust of China's new foreign policy stance in Africa is a marked departure from its previous emphasis on building political influence on the continent, primarily bolstering its credentials as a supporter of the "Third World movement". While elements of the old political posturing to cultivate ties in Africa in its struggle against "hegemonism" (a euphemism for US dominance) remain, as well as diplomatic calculations to shore up relations against any enticements to African countries from Taiwan, the fundamental emphasis of the new approach is to provide China with reliable supply of

energy and other primary commodities. In a sense, the previous engagement by China on the African continent was part of a wider geopolitical strategy of developing of ideational affinity with the Third World, while building influence on a continent eager to escape the dangers of the traditional cold war rivalries and the impact of neo-colonialism.

The new phase of assertiveness by China to maintain strong economic ties in Africa, unlike the previous preoccupation with building a Third World coalition, is geoeconomic in scope, fuelled by China's desire for resources to power its economic growth and gain energy security. China sees the continent, not just as a potential ally in its bid for greater influence and power, but as a source of natural resources. This growing interest in Africa as a source of natural resources has generated concerns and questions about Africa succumbing to a new form of external control over its resources. Is China's new acquisitive foray into Africa in search of natural

resources leading to replication of the old patterns of foreign control over Africa's resources? Is this fear of a colonial-type control misplaced or is it an opportunity to foster a new dynamic relationship with a rising power based on a new ethos of co-operation and mutual benefit? China is brilliantly playing off concerns in African countries about undue interference in their internal affairs, including concerns about political and economic conditionality attached to lending by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) as part of the Washington Consensus. Critics of China's laxity on human rights issues have pointed to China's use of its seat on the Security Council to shield Sudan, one of its African oil suppliers, from strong international action on the crisis in Darfur. In addition to these general concerns about the Sino-African relationship, it must be noted that China's quest for raw materials in Africa comes at an important juncture in its development. It requires these resources to push ahead its unprecedented economic growth, even with the impact of the 2009 economic downturn. For China, Africa offers a vast opportunity to tap into the oil and gas reserves of the emerging "petro-states" on the continent. Africa is also a ready market and supplier of a wide range of natural resources required for China's economy.

In the past, and even in the current official party policy stance toward Africa, China viewed itself in the context of shared historical experience or common struggle with Africa against the economic domination of the Third World by the developed capitalist countries. Yet, as changing global geopolitical changes such as the end of the Cold War and globalization, have dictated, China and Africa have had to redefine their roles in this changing world order (Kim, 1994, p.128). The renewed interest by China in Africa comes at a time of diminishing western influence on the continent. A combination of benign neglect, condescension, official fatigue with Africa's development prospects and failed development models has compelled African countries to give another look at a long-time friend in the heady days of the Afro-Asian movement and nonalignment in the 1950s and 60s. But the question remains: Is Africa opening itself up to re-insertion into the old division of labour, that is, as a supplier of raw material, at a time that successive continental plans are trying to assert diversification away from this path? Using Samuel Kim's framework for assessing China's multifaceted global and Third World policy at the systemic levels (Kim, 1994, pp.120-160), China's African relationship will be assessed looking at the interrelated diplomatic/political, economic/functional and military/strategic issue-areas. This analysis views the relationship in an historical context, covering (not in a hard-and-fast way) two historical periods: the period at the height of the anti-colonial struggle to the immediate post-independence period for African countries and the post-Maoist period of economic dynamism and liberalization for China, while exploring how China's

current global prominence will shape how the two parties develop their relationship in the years to come. Unlike the prevailing views of the relationship which conceives of China as engaged in a long-term "development partnership," or as an "economic competitor" or "colonizer" (Alden, 2007), the argument of this paper is that the relationship is a complex one, built on initial ideational principles of working in concert with the Third World as part of its global policy, but increasingly motivated by the geoeconomic imperative of strategically tapping into resources and markets to support its growing economy. As will be discussed later, China uses its soft power or ideational principles (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and the Beijing Consensus) to bolster its standing in Africa in order to achieve desired outcomes. But as it engages in aggressive pursuit of energy security, it has not shied away from employing its hard power assets strategically. There is an obvious receptiveness of African states to China's blandishments and strategic inroads into the African continent, a situation that is derived from a perceived unwillingness or inability of the West to help the continent overcome its ongoing struggle against poverty and severe economic marginalization. This is exemplified by the G8's unwillingness to follow through on its successive commitments to ameliorate the continent's economic plight. While there is a coincidence of interest between Africa and China on the continent's unfavourable dealings with Western actors, ranging from the prescriptions of the Washington Consensus to the Lome/Cotonou agreements with the European Union, China's pursuit of its geoeconomic interests is likely to produce difficulties for both parties in the diplomatic, economic and strategic areas.

#### **STRENGTHENING CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC AND POLITICAL TIES IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA: FROM BANDUNG'S PANCHILA TO THE BEIJING CONSENSUS**

While China's recent economic focus on Africa for resources has generated interest and concerns about its strategic calculations, it should be noted that China's interest in Africa is not new. Indeed, Chinese commercial activity on Africa's east coast has been traced to the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) (Davies et al., 2007). Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China made a concerted effort to work to promote Third World solidarity and, in the African context, offer support to the anti-colonial movements on the continent. The emphasis was heavy on the building of ideational solidarity and inter-subjective understandings with African and other Third World countries. This was leverage that China could use in its dealings with the two superpowers. From the Chinese perspective, as enunciated by Mao, Africa and the Third World countries were a component of the theory of the three worlds

comprising the two superpowers in one category and the other industrial capitalist countries in another category, with the Third World as the third category. China's Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai attended the Afro-Asian meeting of 1955 in Bandung, which formed the basis for the establishment of the Non-aligned movement. At Bandung, China's preoccupation, as Mike Mason points out was on the building of solidarity on the basis of "anticolonialism, geographical location and the struggle against underdevelopment..." (Mason, 1997, p.31). This emphasis on anti-colonialism won the Chinese political plaudits on the African continent, as this was at the height of the anti-colonial struggle on the continent. China provided support for liberation movements in Africa, including in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe (Sutter, 2008, p.368). It is interesting that even in the post-colonial era contemporary Chinese leaders are quick to remind Africans of their shared colonial experience and struggle against foreign aggression. As well, the theme of Third World solidarity became a solid basis for developing China-African relations during the cold war period. China became a natural ally for African countries eager to escape the strictures of the power bloc system of the cold war conflict. The attractiveness of China to African leaders in the immediate post-Bandung period was the Chinese government focus on strong political principles that African leaders found compelling in their bid to establish a strong presence on the international scene. In the package of political principles was emphasis on shared understandings on anti-hegemony, South-South solidarity and the pressing need to reduce the vulnerability of African and other Third World countries in the international system.

The legacy of Bandung, which formulated a sense of common embrace of political principles for the Third World movement, has guided China's subsequent African policy. Emphasis on shared political ideals became a strategic approach for China to broaden its influence in Africa. Using the language of the Bandung Conference and the Non-aligned movement, Beijing stressed that its African policy was motivated by the desire to expand on the "spirit of Bandung" by emphasizing key principles of the Third World movement: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's affairs; equality and mutual benefit; peaceful coexistence. The five ideational principles (Panchila) are the formative basis of China-African relations, and have been a constant in Beijing's diplomatic practice on the continent. The principles are also captured in what is known by China as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence:

1. Each country should have the right to choose its own political, economic and social system in line with its own resources.
2. All nations of the world and especially the big powers, should strictly abide by the principle of not interfering in

other nations' affairs.

3. All nations should respect and treat others equally, cherish mutually beneficial cooperation, exist in harmony and seek common ground while resolving differences.
4. International conflicts should be fairly resolved through peaceful means, not through the use or threat of force.
5. Each country, no matter how big or small, strong or weak, should have the equal right to participate in consultations to settle world affairs. (Kornberg and Faust, 2005, p.211)

The ideational legacy of Bandung has formed the norms around which China has forged its ties with Africa, albeit the imperatives of economic interchange have often undermined adherence to the principles and norms. In terms of specific application to Africa, China emphasizes its respect for African countries' independent approach to development (China's African Policy, 2006), and ongoing efforts towards continental unity and collective self-reliance. Borrowing from the cooperative ethos afforded by Bandung, China's Africa policy seeks to work towards policy coordination in multilateral institutions, as well as the sharing of mutual ideas in the areas of sustainable development and governance. While China is often mentioned for its lack of non-interference and conditionality in its dealing with Africa, compared to strict conditions imposed by Western actors on African countries for assistance, it should not be forgotten that China-African relations has always operated within the context of one unavoidable conditionality: China's insistence that African countries adhere to the principle of the one China policy. In other words, Beijing would not countenance any effort by African states to have official relations and contacts with Taiwan, which it views as a rogue or renegade province. Nevertheless, while China's focus on the principle of non-interference has attracted African leaders, it has limits when it comes to not following the one of China policy. From China's perspective, African countries can have differing interpretations of governance and human rights, but for African countries to gain the benefits of engagement with China, they have to "support China's great cause of reunification" (China African Policy, 2006, p.4). Enhancing its African linkages bolsters Beijing's position in this competition with Taiwan's dollar diplomacy in an ongoing cross-strait "scramble for Africa." (Liu, 2001).

At the geopolitical level, China saw Africa in the immediate post-colonial period as a continent that offered it the geographical reach in developing its claim as the global champion of the Third World. China portrayed itself, especially in the pre-Deng Xiaoping period, as engaged in a protracted struggle against hegemonism, and sought to develop stronger political ties with newly independent countries, African countries to enhance its global reach and influence. China's Africa policy touched on enhancing ties between Africa and Asia (Afro-Asian relations), as well as China seeing itself as the world's

largest country reaching out to a continent with the largest number of developing countries. The political objectives of China's outreach was presented as South-South cooperation (this is also called "Economic Cooperation among Developing Countries", and as been a major focus of the Third World movement), and an exercise of countries trying to build trust and developing mutual ties after sharing a colonial experience that resonated on the African continent. China's also sought to get diplomatic support from African countries, given their numbers in the UN General Assembly, on issues of interest to the country as it developed global aspirations different from those of the US and the former USSR. Samuel Kim described China's use of the UN for its global aspirations clearly as follows: "At the global level, the UN General Assembly affords an indispensable forum for the projection of China's symbolic identification with the Third World. The UN's recognition of the People's Republic in late 1971 as the 'sole legitimate government of China' allowed Beijing access to the chief global arena for the politics of collective legitimation and delegitimation" (Kim, 1994, p.135). A major global concern that China shared with African states, within the UN and other global forums, is the need for reform of the international economic and political order. China counted on the support of African states as it managed its relationship with the US and the USSR, seeking a measure of equidistance to maintain its global aspirations as a unique growing power cultivating a strategic partnership with developing countries.

African countries were equally assuaged by China's emphasis in its foreign policy on the principles of sovereignty and opposition to hegemony and promotion of self-reliance as well as a call for new international economic order (Muekalia, 2004, p. 2004). Indeed China was a strong supporter of the demands of the Third World for a New International Economic Order, a support that was couched in terms of a broader pursuit of collective self reliance or South-South cooperation (Kim, 1994, p.151). For its part, China has supported Africa's efforts to increase its representation in the Security Council as part of UN Reform (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing Action Plan, 2007). In China's global strategic calculation, Africa represented an untapped well of diplomatic support for its global aspirations. With Mao's death in 1976, there was a marked decline in China's support for the anti-colonial movement in Africa, as attention shifted to internal economic reform. But as China embarked on its economic reform program under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping and beyond, the economic imperative of the relationship reached important heights. It is certainly not the case that the pre-Deng China-African relationship was devoid of mutual economic interchange. China famous involvement in the construction of the Tanzania-Zambia railway (then known as Tan-Zam, but now called TAZARA) in the 1970s is an example of the use of foreign economic aid to buttress its

diplomatic efforts on the continent. The Deng and post-Deng African engagement by China sought to build on the ideational connection with Africa but move the relationship to a new level dictated by China's growing need for natural resources, and also the need to deploy its massive currency reserves in foreign markets. There was a shift, as Samuel Kim describes it in the context of China and the Third World, of the relationship from aid to exchange (Kim, 1994, p.152) or what Wenran Jiang calls a relationship restructured from "anti-colonial brothers-in-arms to economic and trade partners, based on market principles" (Jiang, 2006, p.6). It is clear that the view of Africa, as a market and source of raw material, was part of China's global aspirations, albeit downplayed strategically by its leaders. As Chris Alden points out, the recommitment by Deng to transforming China's economy was coupled with an admonition on the best approach to foreign policy: "Observe calmly, secure our position, hide our capabilities and bide our time. Be good at maintaining a low profile, never claim leadership." (Alden, 2007, p.11)

### **Beijing consensus versus the Washington consensus**

If China's Africa relationship has been informed by the ideational principles from the Bandung Conference, especially at the height of the anti-colonial struggle, the new engagement with Africa for its economic resources is relevant when viewed through the lens of the so-called Beijing Consensus (BC), which is in sharp contrast to the Washington Consensus (WC), with its emphasis on political and economic conditionality for lending by international financial institutions. The term WC is attributed to John Williamson, whereas the BC was first used by academic Joshua Cooper Ramo. Eric Chu Teo Cheow traces the WC from the neo-liberal revolution that emerged around the world with the Reagan and Thatcher schools of thought and power. He contrasts the WC's "end-of-history arrogance" with BC's focus on developmental economics, social and economic changes (Cheow, 2006, pp. 1-3). The WC was viewed skeptically by African leaders, who saw it as a neo-liberal straightjacket that ignored the legitimate concerns about African sovereignty and genuine economic requirements. In addition, the WC failed to take into account the oft-stated African desire to extricate itself from the clutches of neo-colonial influences and eradicate the impact of poverty on the continent. Viewing the BC in opposition to the WC puts China's African presence as a geopolitical challenge to the US and Europe or an instance of US-China ideological rivalry (Cheow, 2006; Lammers, 2007). Unlike the WC's paternalist overtones and interference in economic and political decision-making on the continent, the BC is viewed as providing a more equitable paradigm of development (Ramo, 2004). It is important to stress that ideational principles and diplomatic approaches have

been useful for promoting China's soft power in Africa. Drew Thompson notes China's use of soft power nicely when he writes "African leaders' embrace of the Beijing Consensus reflects perhaps what is most attractive about Beijing's 'soft power:' a long-standing history of friendly ties, provision of appreciated, 'no-strings-attached' financial and technical aid to both elites and the most needy, and growing commerce between the world's largest developing nation and the continent with the most developing nations" (Thompson, 2005, p.1). China's attractiveness (soft power) to African leaders is also founded on the BC's principles potential to reshape and offer an alternative approach to development. Lammers (2007, p.3) notes that BC may have implications for Africa's development paradigm, that is, offer a pathway for Africa to see China as a model to pursue its own development path out of neo-colonial linkages. Interestingly, China is offering its model of Special Economic Zones to Africa, which was part of its domestic reform program. Martyn Davies reports examples of such zones in a number of strategic areas: metals hub (Zambia's copper belt region); trading hub (a manufacturing zone to house 40 Chinese businesses in Mauritius for market access to COMESA); Trans-shipment hub (Dar es Salaam in Tanzania as a port to commodities mined in the Copperbelt); Nigeria (a proposed SEZ for manufacturing and assembly operations for Chinese firms) (Davies, 2007, pp.4-6). The idea of creating high-growth economic hubs is part of the BC's model of innovation-led growth (Ramo, 2004, p.20). An example of this innovative thrust is China's use of the linguistic connection between Macao Special Administrative Region and Lusophone African states to foster opportunities for using Macao as a model or bridge to promote China-Lusophone Africa cooperation (Peng, 2008, pp.4-7). It is not entirely clear that Africa's continental plan, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), is necessarily consistent with what China offers for Africa. Some of the themes raised in NEPAD, including good governance, reducing corruption and strengthening of democracy, are not on the top of the list of China's priorities, albeit China has formally endorsed the NEPAD. Moreover, strong support for the ideational principle of 'non-interference' negates against China's concern for those themes.

Ramo suggests that BC is more than ideas about economics, but also encompasses geopolitical issues such as global balance of power. Among the other key principles of BC are: the necessity of innovation; the importance of sustainability and equality as first considerations in development; and strong emphasis on self-determination to exercise leverage against hegemonic powers (Ramo, 2004, p.12). The BC as a basis for China's Peaceful Rise and its influence in Africa is similar to the Bandung principles in one important respect: both ideational sources of China's relationship with the developing world focused on giving small states

an option to engage in the international system away from the control and tutelage of the hegemonic states. Unlike the WC emphasis on the prescriptions of Western-led international institutions, BC rejects the notion of hierarchy of nations that is embodied in the IFIs. For opponents of the neo-liberalism underlying the WC, there is a natural attraction to an alternative view of development. This is in part due to dissatisfaction with a series of Western initiatives aimed at Africa: the US African Growth and Opportunity Act, the Economic Partnership Agreements under the Cotonou Agreement, and failure of the G8 to follow through on their development assistance promises to Africa.

Bandung emphasized relationship among developing countries based on mutual benefit in a world dominated by the cold war and super-power rivalry, while the BC offers developing countries options for recoiling from the strictures of the WC towards an equitable relationship with a traditional friend of the Third World. The question that has to be posed is the extent to which China's African presence is furthering the principles of the Bandung-BC, or whether China is simply exploiting Africa or taking advantage of the ideational affinity in support of its long-term strategic interests. There are commonalities and shared self-understandings between China and Africa about their place in the international system, but the significant concern is whether, at a pragmatic level of economic interchange, China goes beyond its own strategic needs to help Africa move away from its marginal status in the global economy towards a path of sustainable economic development.

### **CHINA'S ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA – IDEATIONAL AFFINITY AND GEOECONOMIC INTERESTS**

During the struggle against colonialism and the immediate period of the age of African independence in the 1960s and 1970s, China sought to back up its ideological support of African states with a measure of economic aid, focused on the building of pertinent infrastructure for the newly independence states. It is estimated that China provided more than 900 infrastructure projects to African states, including the railway between Tanzania and Zambia (TAZARA Railway) as the centrepiece of such demonstration projects (Ministry of Foreign Affairs – China pursues..., 2006). The goal was largely ideological over pragmatic pursuit of self-interest. Nevertheless, even with projects such as TAZARA and the Benguela Railway, which links Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west coast of Africa, there is emphasis on building horizontal linkages between African countries, compared with the limited connections between African railway systems during the colonial era. Mooney (2005, p.1) points out that China's economic largesse in Africa was part of the cold war struggle for the "hearts and minds of

Third World citizens". China used its aid projects in Africa to convey the diplomatic message that it was on the side of the oppressed, and sought to strengthen alliances against the US and the USSR. Above all, spending on lavish infrastructure and prestige projects on the continent was meant to convey China's interest in the continent, both as a partner in combating the negative influences of the cold war rivalry and undermining Taiwan's quest for diplomatic recognition (Lyman, 2005, p.4). In addition to lavish infrastructure, China focused on strengthening its credentials as a supporter of South-South economic interchange. This took the form of small-scale technical cooperation, including provision of technical experts, training for African workers, cultural agreements and provision of scholarships for African students to study in Chinese universities. As Lammers (2007, p.2) points out, 15,000 Africans had graduated from Chinese institutions by 2004. In the other direction, there is a growing Chinese community in Africa, estimated to be over 750,000 (Mohan, 2008, pp.6-8; Eisenman and Kurlantzick, 2006, pp.219-224; Corkin, 2008, pp.4-5).

Development assistance (for instance, grants and low concessional loans) is a continuing aspect of China's economic engagement in Africa. It is estimated that China's EXIM bank had financed over 300 projects in Africa by mid-2007, with strong emphasis on infrastructure projects (Davies et al., 2008, p.3). Infrastructure projects are crucial to China's overall goal of getting access to Africa's natural resources to power its economic engine. This linkage of infrastructure development to the acquisition of energy and other natural resources has been called "coalition investment" strategy (Naidu and Davies, 2006, pp.69-83). Chinese aid to Africa won wide acceptance because, apart from its strict conditionality on the lack of dealings of the recipients with Taiwan, it was free of the typical tough conditions attached to aid from Western institutions and actors. South-South cooperation is certainly not expressed as a one-way China-to-Africa flow of aid and benefits. Indeed, as was demonstrated during the May 12, 2008 earthquake in China, African countries were quick to offer moral and material support. For instance, Mauritius contributed \$300,000 to aid China's quake victims, while Morocco provided \$1 million in aid support (People's Daily, 2008; Agence Maghreb Arabe Presse, 2008). Furthermore, unlike its previous emphasis on organizations such as the non-aligned movement to foster its relationship with Africa and other developing countries, China has formed its own consultative mechanism to foster dialogue and cooperation with Africa, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, which was established in 2000. At a geo-economic level, China economic activity in Africa is also aimed at getting a strategic advantage over its big regional economic competitors (Japan and India), who have shown strong interest in cultivating ties with Africa. For instance, at the

2008 meeting of the first Japan-Africa summit in Yokohama, the then Prime Minister of Japan Yasuo Fukuda promised \$4 billion in soft loans over the five years to assist with the improvement of African infrastructure. Similarly, India announced in May, 2008 \$500 million in grant for African development, and \$5 billion in credit to Africa, and 131 projects worth over \$10 billion.

As noted earlier, there was a noticeable retreat in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Sino-African relations, as China focused more on its internal transformation. However, this was short-lived as the imperatives of maintaining a counterbalance to the US and serving as a leader of the Third World coalition ensured a revival of relations with Africa. Moreover, China needed diplomatic support from Africa in the face of condemnation, particularly from Western countries, in the wake of the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. As Taylor (2007, p.11) points out "... post-Tiananmen Square China remembered that Africa was a very useful support constituency if and when Beijing was in dispute with other global actors..." In the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium, as China's incorporation into the global economic intensified, along with its spectacular economic performance vis-à-vis the major economic powers, Africa became an enticing arena for resources and markets for this new economic power. China's government seems to have made the strategic calculation of expanding its foreign direct investment into Africa to rely on its vast resource wealth. From a geo-economic perspective, the African continent presented opportunities for China's extractive industries to meet the country's resource needs. China has limited resources of oil and gas, accounting for only 2.3 and 0.9 per cent respectively (Nolan, 2004, p.246).

## **RESOURCE EXPANSIONISM AS A CENTRAL CHINESE GEOECONOMIC INTEREST**

China's trade relations with Africa have expanded, with the resource sector playing a prominent role in this exchange, albeit infrastructure development and rehabilitation remain important components of the relationship. The resource expansionism into Africa was particularly pronounced in the area of securing oil concessions as the country sought new sources to meet its growing petroleum needs, surpassing Japan in 2003 to become the world's second biggest consumer of petroleum products behind the US (BBC Report, 2006). While it is the resource sector, particularly oil-related business, that has gained prominence in China's dealing with Africa, it must be emphasised that the country has also continued its economic linkages in other areas, including science and technology, agriculture, development Assistance, debt relief, investment and finance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing Plan of Action,

2007, p. 2-8). China imports about 28 percent of its oil and gas supplies from Africa in comparison with 15 percent for the US (Alexander Gas and Oil Connections, 2006, p.1). The extent of China's oil acquisitions should not be exaggerated as Chinese oil companies face stiff competition on the continent (Downs, 2007, pp.42-68), but what is significant is the intensity and speed of China's demonstration of interest in the oil producing states as it begins to fill its new strategic petroleum reserve (Yergin, 2007) p.1). Moreover, China's activities and general African policy are less constrained and complicated by private domestic constituencies, which makes it possible for speedier and decisive action (Gill et.al., 2007, p.8).

The scale of what one might call this oil-focused intrusion by China is one of comprehensive outreach on the African continent, with the Chinese government spearheading a drive to use its diplomatic sway to win contracts and concessions for its firms. China's promotion of its private firms to do business in Africa is an important facet of its current investment strategy in Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007, Chinese private firms... p.1-2). The Chinese multinationals have been a key part of the "Going Global Strategy". China's expressed industrial policy is to construct globally powerful companies capable of competing on the global level playing field. As with diplomatic and strategic relations in the political sphere, the attraction is that African states in dealing with Chinese firms feel unencumbered by the restrictions normally associated with dealings with dominant firms from the West. Furthermore, the firms from China as well as the Chinese government focus on longer-term timeframe than other actors in terms of strategic considerations (Burke and Corkin, 2006). However, this raises potential contradictions between Chinese enterprises' interests and those of their African counterparts (Anshan, 2006). Moreover, China has not felt itself bound by the principles of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), a set of principles that seeks to ensure transparency, accountability and prudent use of natural resource wealth and stewardship of natural resource revenue streams. As indicated on the EITI website, the EITI process "sets a global standard for companies to publish what they pay and for governments to disclose what they receive" (EITI Summary, 2008). It remains to be seen whether China's operations will compound some of the problems that necessitated the establishment of the EITI. Wild and Mephram (2006, p.65) have highlighted the importance of having China onboard the EITI, suggesting that "China could be encouraged to make public declarations of support to EITI and Chinese companies could be urged (by African and other governments, civil society and the private sector) to engage with EITI in the African countries in which they operate". In spite of the espousal of the BC and the principles of the Bandung Conference, as well as emphasis in its economic dealings with Africa

on a "win-win" arrangement, the concern is that China has not shown that its commercial arrangements in the oil sector are benefiting the people instead of the regime in power. It also remains to be seen whether China can follow through its pledge to abide by the principles of transparency, equity and fairness, and also address concerns about environmental degradation associated with resource development. Mention has been made about adverse environmental impact of Chinese-run mining operations, such as copper mines in Zambia and titanium sands in Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania and Madagascar (Bond, 2006. p.74). Additionally, Corkin (2006, p.12) suggests that there is a challenge of "a lack of institutional regulatory frameworks and government capacity to monitor and encourage direct investment in terms of local skills development and technology transfer". She also notes that here is "the issue of whether enough is being done to cultivate and harness the development of local companies and/or small and medium enterprises (SMEs)". China's option for investment in the oil business could also be used by some African states to scuttle efforts to ensure beneficial efforts to reform the oil sector. For instance, Wild and Mephram (2006) and Sutter (2008) mention the case of the Angolan government failure to make significant reform of the oil sector to ensure transparency at the request of the IFIs, and later accepting a \$2billion soft loan from China. There is also concern about Chinese labour practices, such as paying low wages and reserving a disproportionate number of jobs in Chinese-funded projects to Chinese nationals, which in countries such as Zambia and Angola has led to anti-Chinese backlash. This is not a purely African phenomenon, as African students in China have faced occasional spasms of protest such as examples in Nanjing in 1988-89, albeit this is declining as China deepens its involvement in Africa. However, the Globe and Mail (2008) recently run this headline: "Africans in Beijing harassed as Olympics approach." Bond (2006, p.74) reports that thousands of Chinese labourers and engineers have been imported into Ethiopia to build the country's Takazee Dam.

China's geoeconomic expansion in the oil sector in Africa is in direct challenge to US interest in Africa as a source for diversifying its oil imports. It is also designed to address China's energy security and secure sources for its energy dependency. The expansion of China is best captured by mentioning a number of recent deals on the continent, especially a flurry of bilateral deals that often followed state visits by high level Chinese leaders, including President Hu Jintao. Sudan, which is facing ongoing conflict and international opprobrium for its conduct in Dafur, has found strong support from China to develop its oil sector. For instance, in 1998, Sudan and China signed an economic co-operation agreement (BBC Report, 1998), and the China National Petroleum (CNPC) has plans to invest \$1billion to increase the Khartoum refinery capacity, and the construction of a 750-kilometre-

long pipeline linking the Kordofan oilfields with the coast (BBC Report, 2003). As Western countries have retreated from Sudan over human rights and terrorism concerns, China has been the main beneficiary of expanded economic engagement with Khartoum in the oil sector. This has created a symbiotic relationship between the two countries, with Sudan getting protection from international criticism through China's veto power in the UN Security Council and China gaining leverage over the Sudanese government, such as China convincing Khartoum to permit the deployment of UN-African peacekeeping forces in Dafur. Whereas in the era of Bandung, Beijing was content to give broader ideological succour to newly developing countries as part of its quest to promote the development of the Third World movement, the current pursuit of its geoeconomic interests dictates aggressively protecting individual Third World governments to secure oil and other resources even at the expense of international condemnation for its lack of concern for human rights. It should be noted that China still conducts some of its economic outreach within the context of the ideational principles of mutual benefit ("win-win situation") and South-South cooperation. For instance, Beijing has sought to address the problem of foreign exchange shortfalls for African countries by engaging in Countertrade, including the exchange of oil for loans in Angola, and Gabon giving the China National Machinery Equipment Import and Export Company (CEMEC) the sole right to exploit iron deposits in the Belinga region of the country in return for CEMEC constructing a deep-water port at Santa Clara, a railway track from Belinga to the coast, and a hydro-electric power plant (Corkin, 2007, p.3). Other Chinese forays to secure resources have found expression in agreements for oil development with other African countries, including the following: Kenya and China have signed an agreement to allow a Chinese oil producer to search for oil in Kenya (Xinhua, 2006, Deal signed to search...); China's top offshore oil and gas producer – China National Offshore Oil Corp Ltd., completed a deal to purchase a stake in Nigerian oil-mining license (Xinhua, 2006, New Partnership...).. Chinese firms have also expanded their presence in Algeria, including CNPC's oil/natural gas contract with Sonatrach (Algeria's government-owned company), and China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (Sinopec)'s deal with Sinotrach to invest in the Zarzaitine oil field in the Sahara Desert (Hurst, 2006, p.12). China has become a major oil importer from Congo, and Sinopec is engaged in off-shore exploration. As well, Sinopec is engaged in joint ventures in oil exploration in Gabon. In 2006, after talks between President Hu and Moroccan King Mohammad VI, China and Morocco signed a package of accords to expand bilateral trade in the "fields of science and technology, telecommunications, agriculture, oil and gas development, labour, project engineering and human resources training, and encourage two-way investment"

(Xinhua, 2006, China and Morocco ink...).. Even in war-ravaged Somalia, China has not recoiled from getting an oil exploration deal with the Transitional Federal Government in Mudug region of Puntland, a semi-autonomous region of the country (Pham, 2007, p.2). Niger is reported to become an oil producer by 2006 as China is committed to investing \$5 billion to develop the country's oil resources, including the building of a 2,000-km pipeline and a refinery with a capacity of 20,000 barrels a day (BBC Report, 2008, Niger set to become...)

In focusing predominantly on natural resources, especially its hydrocarbon acquisition targets, China-Africa trade relations would seem to reinforce Africa's reliance on natural resources and commodity exports in an increasingly globalized economy.

Despite rhetorical commitment to the principles of Bandung and the Beijing Consensus, it is not clear that the China-Africa trade relationship has changed Africa's status in the pre-and post-colonial era as a primary commodity producer. Besada (2008, p.2) notes that "Beijing has acted and behaved no differently from the way European powers did decades and centuries ago. There is also a lingering concern that over dependence on oil and other natural resources could lead to what has been called the "resource curse". Leftwich (2008, p.223) indicates that this not only undermines democracy by reducing the state's need to be accountable to its citizens, but the resources could also spur conflict between groups eager to gain control over the resources. The extent to which China's oil concessions benefit ordinary Africans, particularly in the areas of local and national employment, integration of mining activities into the broader economy, and protecting community rights and relations, is also a cause for concern. If China's resource footprint only benefits the elites in African countries, and if Beijing ignores such concerns under the pretext of "non-interference" then it undermines opportunities for long-term development that addresses the needs of the owners of African resources, the African people. However, the picture of Afro-Chinese trade is far from static, as China explores, bilaterally and multilaterally opportunities to expand in a broad range of sectors. It is also expanding commercial activities in non-Petroleum-producing countries. China offers Africa zero-tariff treatment for about 454 types of African products, and overall trade is projected to reach \$100 billion by 2010 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007, Sino-African Trade... p.1), but African exports to China continue to face tariff escalation (Broadman, 2007, pp.134-135).. Even with a wide range of issue-areas in the relationship, it is not certain that China-Africa trade relations will elevate into an era of diversification of exports from its historical dependence on commodities. There is concern about the revisiting of unequal exchange of the colonial era, or whether Chinese expansion into Africa would re-establish an "era of 'white elephants' and 'prestige projects' with little benefit to local people (Bond, 2006,



p.74). China as a low-wage producer has also attracted investment that would otherwise go to other developing countries. Its textile producers have had a detrimental impact on local textile industries in Africa, especially following the end of the Multifibre Agreement, with the closures of textile mills in Swaziland, Lesotho, and South Africa blamed on cheap Chinese imports. The job losses have exacerbated poverty, particularly among women (Kaplinsky et. al., 2006). South Africa imposed quotas for Chinese textiles to protect the domestic garment industry from cheap Chinese imports. Broadman (2007, p.113) has noted emerging complementarities between Africa and China along the cotton-textile-apparel value chain; processing of natural resource exports; and increased intra-industry trade with emerging African industrial hubs such as South Africa and Nigeria. During a trip to South Africa, in 2006, Premier Wen Jiabao, offered to restrict textile exports to South Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006, China willing to restrict...). At another level, while China's global rise, and its strong demand, has boosted the prices of commodities to the benefit of African commodity exporters, it has also pushed up prices for food staples and industrial raw materials (Kharas, 2005, pp.54-55).

### **China's military and strategic interests in Africa – Shoring up global credentials in a post bipolar world**

China's geoeconomic interests in Africa are inextricably linked with its military and strategic analysis of a post bipolar worldview, which requires defending China's positions in international forums such as the UN, and positioning itself as a global power, while sometimes taking a firm stand against the US. China's Africa policy cannot be divorced from its overall grand strategy, which includes a great power diplomacy focused on establishing partnerships to increase its attractiveness. Africa's strategic importance, in China's foreign policy calculations vis-à-vis other great powers, has grown as countries deal with the problem of 'peak oil' and seek sources of reliable supply of natural resources. Existing and emerging economic powers, from the US, Japan and India, have shown deep interest in Africa's resource wealth. China's focus on multipolarity is very much welcome in Africa. While BC talks about expediting a "shift from power politics to moral politics," (Ramo, 2004, p.5-6). China has made every effort to use both all elements of its power-hard and soft to secure economic and political advantages in Africa against its global competitors. China has often railed against US hegemonism during the era of global competitiveness of the cold war era, albeit, it has been less concerned about Russia, whose influence has been declining on the continent in the post-Soviet era. As a resource-rich country, Russia does not have the same acquisitive drive that China has in Africa, but it is still interested in exploring

business opportunities and replacing business with the ideological space it has vacated in Africa. In Africa, China's strategic interests for diplomatic support and resource exploitation have often conflicted with those of the US, albeit in some instances they have been coincident. As Sutter (2008, p.46) points out "some of its strategic interest, use of sea lanes for oil supplies, market access and discouraging export of Islamic fundamentalism, for example, paralleled those of the United States". He also notes that "at other times, competition with the United States for markets, oil supplies, and influence led China to work against US policies." (Sutter, 2008, p.46).

The overall goal of China is to avoid the dangers of vulnerability and possible victimization by its rivals. Indeed as China has asserted itself globally in an increasingly multipolar world, it has lent its diplomatic support to anti-western regimes in Africa with challenging human rights records, including Zimbabwe and Sudan. As noted earlier, this support has meant blunting political criticisms or blocking UN action, the case of Dafur is an example. It has also meant a robust arms trade, exemplified in a negative sense by the publicized case of a Chinese vessel that was ordered back home after South African dock workers refused to unload weapons bound for Mugabe's government, military exchanges, and joint military training. The difference between the new China's military and strategic approach now compared to the days of the post-colonial period is clear: China has moved from working with the developing countries of the non-aligned movement to avoid the entanglements of the cold war, to a more concerted effort to protect its strategic interests as a growing global power. The diplomatic, economic and military engagement in Africa also served to enhance important national priorities of securing energy and mineral resources, expanding exports, and pushing for eventual China-Taiwan reunification. There is even an extension of Africa's strategic importance in the area of space development. As Drew Thompson points out, China maintains a space tracking station in Namibia and uses South African ports of call to support space-tracking ships (Thompson, 2005, p.23).

As China's geostrategic behaviour in Africa seems to reinforce its support for the tenets of the five principles of peaceful co-existence of the Bandung era, it is less constrained by ideational concerns of the outside world when its resource foothold in African countries is subject to any form of international challenge. China's strategic push in Africa is geared more to protecting its resource-rich friends and ensuring that natural resources flow unhindered, and also open up markets for Chinese products and investments. In a sense, the new China is more strategic in pursuing its core interests and less enamoured of the need to be viewed as a responsible great power. China's peaceful rise does not mean that it will pursue policies in Africa that abandon's some of its less-than-peaceful energy sources. For instance, China

has deployed about 4,000 troops to Southern Sudan to guard an oil pipeline in the region (Brookes and Shin, 2006, p.5). Additionally, Beijing's strategic behaviour is mounting a serious challenge to the view of Africa as a Western European backyard from the days of colonialism. Military cooperation with African countries is one way for Beijing to assert its growing influence on the continent. As with the situation in Sudan, China has been the main backer of the Western-sanctioned regime of Zimbabwe, supplying aircraft and other military hardware. While Mugabe is condemned for widespread human rights abuses, he has benefited from Chinese military support, and has been praised by China as "a man of great achievement, devoted to world peace and a good friend of the Chinese people" (Brookes and Shin, 2006, p.5). China's support for regimes with poor human records undermines NEPAD, and also threatens efforts by civil society to engender peaceful domestic political change. It is clear that China's military transfers to African states, as with other transfers elsewhere, are designed to fulfil both commercial and strategic reasons. Strategically, they expand Chinese influence in resource-rich countries, and also court support among regimes that are considered pariah states by the US and the West. For China, securing oil supplies from African sources helps the country lessen its dependence on Middle Eastern and Central Eurasian sources. Geopolitically, the Middle Kingdom is diversifying its sources of energy supplies as a strategic choice or advantage over its neighbouring great powers, India and Japan. On a purely commercial front, arms transfers help build China's arms industry and generate foreign exchange for the Chinese economy.

There is concern in China about US military interest in Africa, including the establishment of a new Africa Command (AFRICOM), and the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, ostensibly to combat the terror threat. This has given rise to speculation that the duelling military entanglements of China and the US in Africa could trigger the kind of competitiveness that marked the US-Soviet struggle for allies in Africa during the Cold War. The struggle, in this instance, is over natural resources, specifically the growing oil demands of the two major powers. AFRICOM is a belated US response to emerging threats and opportunities on the African continent, but the need to counter Chinese growing resource acquisitiveness cannot be underestimated as an underlying *raison d'être* for its establishment. As Volman and Tuckey (2008, p.1) point out "the creation of AFRICOM is one element of a broad effort to develop a 'grand strategy' on the part of the US to compete with, and eventually restrain China's activities". While the management of China's rising power is beyond the scope of this paper (Johnston and Ross, 2002), it should be noted that in Africa the US is particularly wary of losing out on the vast oil supplies in the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea region, which includes producers such as Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. For its part, China,

specifically analysts within the People's Liberation Army, is concerned about manifestations of US hegemony, as expressed in the domination of international trading and financial systems; the direct military intervention in regional conflicts; an increased willingness to use military coercion in pursuit of political and economic goals; and the strengthening of old and building of new military alliances and defence partnerships (Shambaugh, 2000, p.115).

Samuel Kim has noted that China's security behaviour has been fraught with ambiguity and contradiction as it attempts to balance geostrategic and normative concerns (Kim, 1994, p.141). He notes, for instance, that China's approach to UN peacekeeping missions has evolved through four distinct phases: opposition/exclusion (1949-1970); opposition/non-participation (1971-81); support/participation (1982-89); and retreat/participation (1990-present). As China's role in Africa has increased in pursuit of natural resources, it has also increased its participation in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, both to enhance its image as a responsible world power, and to protect its resource-driven interests on the continent. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Liberia (countries with vast natural resources), are among the countries with Chinese UN peacekeeping troops (China Daily, 2007, Peacekeeping – a rising role...), albeit China has contributed a total of over 3,000 personnel from participation in 12 UN peacekeeping operations in Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006, Chinese Blue Helmets...) China's African peacekeeping contribution is consistent with its ideational principles of peaceful coexistence, and offering assistance to deal with security threats in Africa. Its 558-member contingent of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has been hailed for contributing to the post-conflict development effort in Liberia. While helping to resolve a wide range of African conflicts, from Western Sahara to the Ivory Coast, China is helping to fulfil its commitment to help Africans resolve conflict that hamper development. At the same time, its overall geostrategic goals are enhanced in the process by having Chinese personnel on the ground in Africa to deal with any security threats. Aside from UN peacekeeping, Chinese also have engaged in military cooperation with African countries to deal with any threats to the growing Chinese personnel, Peace Corps, migrants and other humanitarian workers who live in African states.

## Conclusion

China has moved from pre-Deng preoccupation with building relations with Africa as part of a coalition-building exercise with the Third World to a more refined strategic partnership that is derived from long-term acquisition of natural resources for its emerging power in the global economy. The pre-Deng China was heavily focused on

the use of ideational principles underlying the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the normative Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence to build solidarity with the Third World. As a champion of the Third World in its struggle against colonial influences, hegemonism and Soviet control (during the Sino-Soviet split), China built its relationship with Africa by delivering prestige projects to cement the relationship. China has expressed its ideational affinity by supporting efforts by Africa and the Third World, to work towards a reformed international economic order and the promotion of South-South cooperation. By no means has the ideational component of China-African relations been extinguished, as the post-Deng relationship with Africa is informed by the existing ideational principles as well as the broader Beijing Consensus (BC), which seeks to project a new model of development in a global context. While continuity of the ideational principles, particularly BC, is evident in the China-Africa relationship, it should not obscure the fact that China advances its national interests disguised as abstract international principles. The new imperative of China's Africa policy may be couched in terms of the prior ideational principles, but they are also actuated by China's geoeconomic interests of ensuring a ready supply of natural resources from Africa (in particular, ensuring energy security). Through a hybrid of soft power (concerted charm offensive, diplomatic engagement, and proclamations of ideational principles) and hard power (military exchanges, arms sales, and military support for energy-rich regimes), China is seeking to enhance its broader global strategic interests as an emerging economic power and also ensure that its economic competitors do not threaten its interests in Africa. As Gill et al., 2007, p.8) point out "Africa is seen as integral to Beijing's strategic ambition to advance a 'new security concept' that can ensure China's peaceful rise as a global power and strengthen relations with key neighbours and regions". In a post bipolar world, China sees a geopolitical benefit of securing vital resources in a strategically important continent to make up for its own deficiency in resources, while stretching its global reach as an emerging global power. As well, as the Third World has experienced a measure of fragmentation and the emergence of the BRICSAM (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, ASEAN-4 – Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand, and Mexico) poses challenges for long-established notions of international order (Cooper et.al, 2007, pp.673-689), China sees Africa as a strategic partner to help strengthen its global power credentials and economic might. The relationship, however, is complex, multidimensional and ambitious and should not assume to endure in the future based solely on shared ideational principles, unless those principles are beneficial for helping ordinary Africans achieve material benefits that are sustainable.

While Africa and China shared commonality of ideational interests during the anti-colonial struggle and

continue to share broader support for norms of the Five Principles, their economic interests may not be necessarily coincident, especially in the area of moving Africa away from its dependence on commodity exports. African countries, through their continental NEPAD plan, have expressed a desire to work towards the path of sustainable economic development, which includes overcoming the lack of diversification of exports that has long characterized Africa's trade relationship with external actors. To be fair, China has engaged Africa on a broad range of economic endeavours, but the preponderance of efforts is focused on securing natural resources from the continent. It is not clear that the Chinese are responding adequately to concerns about labour practices, the displacement or stifling of domestic entrepreneurs by Chinese firms, issues related to corporate social responsibility (child labour, environmental sustainability and corruption), and integration of their resource expansionism into the broader national or regional economies of Africa. Of critical concern is the fact that the relationship, both pre-Deng and post-Deng, remains perched firmly, in the first instance, at the level of elites or leaders, as demonstrated by the summit diplomacy of African and Chinese leaders, both multilaterally and bilaterally. Judged by past incidence of mutual misunderstandings (racial incidents both in Africa and China) there is need for more concerted efforts to establish stronger trans-national civil society linkages between the Chinese and African peoples (Campbell, 2008). This process is starting to take shape as more Chinese migrant communities are established in Africa, and China continues to open doors for the training of African students in its institutions of higher learning.

As China attempts to establish its global reach, it is imperative for its Africa policy to demonstrate the same responsible behaviour that has characterized its peace-keeping operations. There is also the need to temper its traditional views on sovereignty, and embrace firmly emerging norms of the "responsibility to protect," and not let its geoeconomic interests for resources trump African continental goals for good governance, human rights and sustainable development. Subjective self-understanding of the past, while a useful reminder of the past relationship and perhaps a source for contemporary discussions, must give way to a sophisticated engagement with Africa that gives prominence to economic activities that benefit ordinary Africans, and respects their human security and development. Perhaps the basis for this new sophisticated and nuanced relationship has to come from the development of a new African Consensus on its dealings with China, from which a convergence could be attained with the worldview espoused in the Beijing Consensus. Otherwise Africa will simply be a convenient actor that helps China in its pursuit of a grand global strategy without reaping any sustainable benefit from the relationship.

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