

Jump Aboard: Assessing China's Development Thinking for Africa

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Abstract

The article examines China's increasing presence in Africa, with a focus on Chinese foreign policy discourse. It is demonstrated that China-Africa relations is constructed upon specific representations of not only China's role in Africa, but also China's image of itself and an essentialised image of Africa. The article further considers the practical and normative impact of China's development discourses. It is argued that rather than challenging liberal internationalism, China's development thinking appropriates it, in a manner that is consistent with the leadership image and in favour of the pursuit of bilateral deals and business interests.

Keywords: China, Africa, Discourse Analysis, International Economic Relations, Internationalism.

Introduction

At the 2018 Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing, China's President Xi Jinping pledged \$60 billion dollars to the African continent. This new round of investment has become a new marker for this Beijing-led initiative.¹ The size of China's economy has seen the country become ever more present on the international front and its foreign policy increasingly assertive, especially since Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012-13. The China-Africa relationship can

¹'Xi Jinping's Speech at 2018 FOCAC Beijing Summit', on *Xinhua Net* (3 Sept 2018) http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2018-09/03/c_129946128.htm (Accessed 29 October 2019).

be seen as a case in point of China's 'new internationalism'.² It is also a renewal of historical engagements between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the African continent since the late 1950s. This article looks at the Chinese official narrative of this relationship, by examining Chinese foreign policy documents, diplomatic speeches, and quasi-authoritative media outlets.³ The article brings in China's modernisation thinking which is intimately linked to its own development theory and considers the relations between representations and foreign policy.

The primary subject of the analysis is the 'African continent' or 'African countries'. This seems contradictory to the largely bilateral nature of China's current engagement with African countries. However, it is reflective of the tendency in official Chinese discourses to refer to Africa as a geographic entity and speak of the respective bilateral relations as signifiers of the broader relations between China and Africa. Here, one can ask several important questions. How is Africa imagined in these discourses? In relation to such imagination, where is China situated? How do such imagination and representation inform policy and practice?

The first section of the article looks briefly at the official historiography of the relationship, asking how innovative this presumably new engagement of the continent is. A brief historical overview is given on the transformation of the discourse of similitude that connects China and the African continent. Section two moves on to examine China's post-reform development discourses on Africa and more specifically, the 'Chinese Solution' under Xi Jinping. The implications of a 'Chinese Solution' for African development and more broadly international normative structures is evaluated.

Informed by its own modernisation trajectory, China presents itself as a more advanced modernising force and at the same time, an alternative to the West. On the other hand, the representation of China's economic success as a developing country and its economic

² C. Lin, 'China's New Internationalism', in L. Panitch & G. Albo ed., *The World Turned Upside Down? Socialist Register* (Merlin Press 2019), p.230.

³ M.D. Swaine, 'Chinese Leadership and Elite Responses to the US Pacific Pivot', in *China Leadership Monitor*, Vol.38 (2012), p.1.

capabilities rationalises China's leadership position in advancing African development. It is argued that rather than challenging liberal internationalism, China's development thinking appropriates it, in a manner that is consistent with the leadership image and in favour of the pursuit of bilateral deals and business interests.

China in Africa: A Historical Overview

Chinese presence in Africa has attracted research interest since the 1960s.⁴ More recent works, demonstrate how China's Africa policy has been intertwined with a history of its shifting "(informal) national ideology" and broadly identify various periods of Chinese engagement with Africa.⁵ The most significant policy shift was marked by the end of the Cold War and China's reform and opening period that started in 1978. The 1989 Tiananmen Square incident is highlighted as another important moment that marked China's 'return' to Africa. Qing Cao argues that policy priorities during Maoist period were primary ideology, moving toward pragmatism during Deng Xiaoping's time, while the current policy largely follows a business logic.⁶ Similarly, Chris Alden and Zheng Yixiao observe that since Premier Zhao Ziyang's 1982 African tour, China's African policy took a shift towards an explicitly commercial approach.⁷

In 1998, a 'going out' policy was announced which used state resources to promote the expansion of state-owned enterprises in key sectors in the African continent.⁸ Due to this push, the twenty-first century marked the beginning of a rapid expansion of China-Africa trade. Bilateral trade increased from around \$10 billion in 2000 to \$215

⁴J. Cooley, *East Wind Over Africa* (Walker, 1965); George Yu, 'Dragon in the Bush', in *Asian Survey*, Vol.8, No.12 (1968), p.1018-1026.

⁵ I. Taylor, *China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise* (Routledge, 2006), p.8.

⁶ Qing Cao, 'China's Changing Discourse in Africa', in S. Chan ed. *The Morality of China in Africa* (Zed Books, 2013)

⁷ C. Alden and Y.X. Zhao, 'China's Changing Role in Peace and Security in Africa', in Alden et.al ed., *China and Africa: Building Peace and Security Cooperation on the Continent* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018), p.41.

⁸ *Ibid.*

billion in 2015.⁹ China is now Africa's biggest trading partner, surpassing the US. In 2015, China's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock in Africa reached \$32 billion, though it still fell behind the US, the UK, and France.¹⁰ The engagement expanded to the sectors of finance, health, infrastructure and education. Most recent studies have been focusing on the way that China's trade and resource interests underlie its current foreign policy in Africa.¹¹

Closely intertwined with the ideological shift is the discursive shift. Several scholars have examined the discursive aspect of China-Africa relations. Rather than understanding history as pre-given, this approach considers historical narratives and policy as mutually constitutive. What historical connections are made relevant? How are these historical connections represented? Chris Alden and Daniel Large argue for the need of examining China's rhetorical construction of this relation to avoid a kind of economic reductionism.¹² From a similar perspective, Marcus Mohan and Giles Power highlighted the role of Chinese historical narrative and how it 'functions as a discursive field through which current foreign policy is legitimised'.¹³

The representation of similitude has been key to Chinese discourses on Africa since the early years of the PRC. This representation has its root in the wider climate of Third World Internationalism and Non-Alignment Movement since the 1950s.¹⁴ The 1955 Bandung Conference and the establishment of diplomatic ties with Egypt just one year later marked the beginning of the PRC's presence on the African continent. Here, the rhetorical effort to unite

⁹ Data from *China Africa Research Initiative* <http://www.sais-cari.org/data-china-africa-trade/> (Last Accessed 28 August 2019).

¹⁰ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *World Investment Report 2016*.

¹¹ L. Jakobson & Zha Daojiong, 'China and the Worldwide Search for Oil Security', in *Asia Review*, Vol.13, No.2 (2006), p.60-73; R. Kaplinsky et al. 'The Impact of China on Sub-Saharan Africa', in *IDS Working Paper 291* (Nov 2007).

¹² C. Alden & D. Large, 'China's Exceptionalism and the Challenges of Delivering Difference in Africa' in *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol.20, No.68 (2011) p.25.

¹³ M. Power & G. Mohan, 'China and the Geo-Political Imagination of African 'Development'', in Dent ed. *China and Africa Development Relations* (Routledge, 2011), p.48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

China and 'people of Asia, Africa and Latin America' began.¹⁵ This geographic reference is simultaneously a political term, with connotations of Mao's anti-imperialist ideology. China is connected to and similar to this part of the world for two reasons: the shared experience of deprivation and the common imperialist Other.

The 'Third World Theory' brought up by Mao and further developed by Deng Xiaoping highlights the idea of a common struggle.¹⁶ It is implied that there is a natural juxtaposition between the world of imperialism and colonialism, and those that have been exploited. It was also an attempt to put forth a vision for the necessary dismantlement of the bipolar hegemony between Western democratic-liberalism and the Soviet Union's communist ideals. During the 1960s, the idea of the common struggle was materialised into revolutionary comradeship in several African countries, e.g. Angola, Mozambique, and Rhodesia. Premier Zhou Enlai's 1963-64 tour to ten African countries symbolised China's interests in the continent as well as its sincerity to support the cause of the African countries. The symbolic significance of this trip is iterated to this day as a marker of China-Africa relations.¹⁷ During this period, geopolitical considerations also had strong effects, especially after the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s. For example, in Angola the Soviet backed the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) while China chose to support its rivals, the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

The ideological appeals nevertheless softened as China moved toward its reform and opening period. The radical othering of the superpowers and developed states no longer resonates to its policy that well, as China resumed its relations and trade with the West. The

¹⁵ Mao Zedong, Speech at the opening of Eighth National People's Congress Meeting 1956.

¹⁶ First brought up at Mao's meeting with Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda (22 Feb 1974); Deng Xiaoping, Speech at the United Nations, (10 Apr 1974).

¹⁷ 'China-Africa Friendship Is More Iron Solid Than You Can Imagine', on *Xinhua Net* (4 Dec 2015) http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-12/04/c_128497265.htm.

struggle *against* the West seemed to be ending. The discourses of similitude, however, remain intact but have undergone a transformation. In the post-reform period, China's engagement in the African continent shifted to mainly economic cooperation and partnerships, often labelled as 'win-win' and mutual beneficial in Chinese official discourses.¹⁸ The representation of the paternalistic West remains relevant. A People's Daily commentary addressed Western media's criticism of the Mombasa-Nairobi railway – a 470-km railway project connecting Kenya's key harbour and its capital city, funded by China as part of the Belt and Road Initiative:

"According to these views in the West, African states are often portrayed as unable to make their own judgements, while China...is as if to suck the soul of Africa... no wonder analyst has pointed out that "the parental thinking from colonial time that is still embedded in the West..."¹⁹

Both China and Africa are subjected to the same false imagination of the West, rendered through a condescending or even neo-colonial lens. In contrast, China-Africa relations are supposedly dialogic and mutually understanding. This commentary explicitly speaks in response to rising accusations of China's ulterior interests and neo-colonialism in Africa.²⁰ Chinese Premier Li Keqiang also remarked on such critique:

"Like many African countries, China once suffered foreign invasion and fell under colonial and semi-colonial rule... The so-called "China's neo-colonialism in Africa" is a false accusation inconsistent with Chinese tradition and culture..."²¹

¹⁸ Hu Jintao, Speech at Asian-African Summit in Jakarta (22 April 2015).

¹⁹ 'Understand the Righteousness of China-Africa Relations', in *People's Daily* (2 Jun 2017) http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2017-06/02/nw.D110000renmrb_20170602_6-02.htm.

²⁰ D. Grammaticas, 'Chinese Colonialism?', in *BBC News* (19 July 2012) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18901656>.

²¹ Li Keqiang, A Joint Interview Given to African Press (1 May 2014)

The history of colonialism is still made relevant as the connected past. The current and future of China and Africa is connected by the common path towards modernisation and similar development challenges. The connections at different temporalities make up Xi Jinping's idea of the 'Community of a Common Destiny' (*Minyun Gongtongti*). The term was first brought up on the 19th National Congress of the CCP in 2017 as China's own vision for global governance, alternative to the hegemonic one.²² What does this current rendition of similitude mean to China's Africa policy? This will be further explored in the next section.

The Chinese Solution: Construction of a Leadership Identity

Identity and foreign policy are often closely intertwined. Lene Hansen observes that foreign policies rely upon representations of identity, while through the formulation of foreign policy, identities are (re)produced.²³ This article focuses on the aspect of representations specifically. Roxanne Doty highlights that the representations of developing world by the developed world have constructed a temporal difference between the two, which is to be bridged through the adoption of western policies and advice.²⁴ China's second African Policy Paper, published in 2015, demonstrates well how the link between China and Africa is also articulated on a temporal span.²⁵ The two were closely connected in their past – having always been 'good friends that have gone through difficulties together' and 'brothers that are sincere to each other'. The current exchanges are ever greater. Furthermore, their future is inevitably tied together, as China pursues its 'Chinese Dream' and Africa, an 'African Dream'. The idea of an 'African Dream' was first mentioned in Xi Jinping's 2013 speech in Tanzania. The Policy Paper reused the term

²² Xi Jinping, Speech at the 19th National Congress of the CCP (18 October 2017)

²³ L. Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnia War* (Routledge 2006), p.2

²⁴ R. Doty, *Imperial Encounters* (University of Minnesota Press 1996)

²⁵ China's Second African Policy Paper (2015)

http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-12/05/c_1117363276.htm (Last retrieved 18 June 2018)

and described Africa's path as one toward 'industrialisation and modernisation' – a prescription that has been central to China's own development path.

The concept of modernisation has its root in China since the late imperial time, with competed renditions. Under the PRC, the concept assumed a key place in national policy when Zhou Enlai announced the goals of Four Modernisation in 1965: in agriculture, industry, national defence and science technology.²⁶ The Four Modernisation goals were replaced by a 'socialist modernisation with Chinese characteristics' by Deng Xiaoping. Socialist modernisation is a key programme to be pursued by the party and the nation.²⁷ Modernisation is 'a pre-given metanarrative that informs the explanations and predictions of China's development trajectory'.²⁸ Modernisation thinking is constitutive to China's development thinking not in the manner of determining specific goals but ideationally, laying down a linear temporality and a stageist perspective.

In his examination of Chinese modernisation discourses, Tong Shijun highlights that not only the official Chinese modernisation programme should be considered. The aspect of modernisation as a universal historical process in general should be taken into account.²⁹ Tong argues that according to this specific understanding, modernity only obtains its empirical relevance in the West, while the rest of the world is still in the process of modernisation. Likewise, Elena Barabantseva observes that, although the CCP has developed its own vision of the socialist modernisation, the opposition between China/West and tradition/modernity remains at the heart of dominant Chinese development perspective.³⁰ This creates a

²⁶ Tong Shijun, *The Dialectics of Modernisation: Habermas and Chinese Discourse of Modernisation* (University of Hawaii Press, 2000), p.2

²⁷ Deng Xiaoping, Opening Speech at the twelfth National Congress of the CCP (1 September 1982)

²⁸ E. Barabantseva, The Modernisation Trap in China's Official Development Discourse in *East Asia Quarterly*, Vol.29, No.1 (2002), p.64

²⁹ Tong (2000), p.4

³⁰ Barabantseva (2002), p.67

conundrum when China's progress is constantly being observed through a duality of China/West, while aspiring for unique presence.

In the quest of constructing China's own rightful place, China's place in the developing world becomes increasingly relevant to dismantle this binary. Although denying hegemonic ambition, China increasingly subscribes itself to a potential leadership role in the developing world and global economy. Through making parallels between a Chinese and an African dream, the two geographically demarcated bodies are situated on the same linear modernisation path but differentiated by the levels of achievement. This idea of the temporal difference is embedded in China's self-image as a leader in the developing world as well as the practices in accordance to such image.

China's Africa policy also relies on an essentialisation of what 'Africa' is. At the first FOCAC summit in 2000, Jiang Zemin's stated that 'Africa is the continent with the largest number of developing countries... China is the largest developing country in the world.'³¹ Jiang's opening words reflects how the identities of China and Africa are constructed in relations to each other, at least discursively. Although bilateralism is the primary way that China engages with African countries, official publications tend to highlight specific bilateral partnership, for example, China-Zimbabwean, as 'China-Africa' friendship.³² The image of African wilderness, troubled by poverty, diseases, and conflicts, is present in many quasi-authoritative news articles, which target more at domestic audience.³³

On 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping brought up the idea of 'Chinese solution' which is 'a new choice for developing nations that wish to speed up their development while preserving their autonomy'.³⁴ Symbolically, the 'Chinese solution' is formulated in consistence with China's unique leadership position as a developing

³¹ Jiang Zemin, Speech at 2000 Forum of China-African Cooperation (FOCAC) summits

³² 'The Messages Behind African Leaders' Visits to China', on *Xinhua Net* (7 Apr 2018) http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-04/07/c_1122645614.htm

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Xi Jinping, Speech at the 19th CPC National Congress (18 Oct 2017)

country. Practically, according to China's African Policy Paper, China with its capital, technology, equipment and experience would enable Africa to better utilise its productive labour, resources and to explore Africa's market potential.³⁵ The possibility of technological transfer further backs up the mutually beneficial arguments for Chinese investment and loans. In this sense, China's economic success and its current economic and technological capacities provide credibility for its own trade and investment agenda in Africa.

What might a 'Chinese solution' look like on the ground? According to Mohan and Power, Chinese presence in Africa is largely shaped by complex state-market dynamics.³⁶ Chinese capital is often intertwined with Chinese state power, which often stands at the forefront of the exploration of preferential deals, markets, and sectors for investment and labour to enter Africa. China's strong presence in resource industries, especially oil, is reflective of Chinese state interests in the sector. The Chinese government swiftly stepped up cooperation with Angola after its civil war ended in 2002, and, South Sudan after its independence in 2011. China was quick to send friendly signals and donations to Juba, securing deals despite of its closed relationship with the Sudanese government.³⁷

Infrastructure is another sector where Chinese investment pours in. The China Export-Import Bank, established in 1994, is a key institution to promote Chinese exports and investment in Africa. From 2000 to 2015, China Export-Import Bank has issued \$63 billion loans to Africa, mainly sponsoring roads, railway and airport construction.³⁸ Infrastructure is crucial to Africa's industrialisation, as high costs or the lack of power and transport limits the growth of production.³⁹ China's approach to development loan resonates with this, but scepticism remains around the design and implementation of

³⁵ China's Second Africa Policy Paper (2015)

³⁶ Mohan & Power, in Dent ed. (Routledge, 2006)

³⁷ D. Large, 'China's Sudan Engagement', in *The China Quarterly*, No.199 (Sept 2009), p.610-626

³⁸ J. Eom, et al. 'The US and China in Africa: What Does Data Say?', in *China Africa Research Initiative Policy Brief*, No.18 (2017)

³⁹ J. Page, *Three Myths about African Industry* (Africa Growth Initiative, 2014)

its infrastructure projects. Do they really target the needs of African industries? Are they worth the cost? For example, Bloomberg reports on a railway project in Kenya that became a 'road to nowhere'.⁴⁰ An investigation into the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway and Addis Ababa light railway reflects some problems of practicality and operation.⁴¹ Low profitability also further burdens the Ethiopian governments as it starts to repay the debt, thus labelled as 'white elephant' and vanity project by the *Financial Times*.⁴² In contrast, Xinhua News portrays the railway projects in Ethiopia as a nationalist moment for China, who for the first time, is exporting its first-class railway technology in full scale.⁴³

These projects are largely conducted by Chinese construction companies, using mainly Chinese workers and materials, thus serves the purpose of exporting overcapacity and excess labour. Project profitability is mostly higher in African market than home market due to the intense competition in the latter.⁴⁴ The business logic that serves the end of exporting Chinese construction services might not fit well enough into the local conditions of industrialisation and urbanisation. On the other hand, there is little gain for local countries, in terms of creating employment or using local produces. The import of cheap Chinese goods sometimes undermines local producers, as exemplified with the textile industry in northern Nigeria. Faced with the incurrence of Chinese goods and capital, how much room is there for Africans to manoeuvre? It is not faced without backlash and resistance.⁴⁵ In the cases of good reception and active cooperation, the

⁴⁰ 'China's Built a Railroad to Nowhere in Kenya', in *Bloomberg* (19 July 2019) <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2019-07-19/china-s-belt-and-road-leaves-kenya-with-a-railroad-to-nowhere>

⁴¹ Tarrosy & Vörös, 'China and Ethiopia', Part 1&2 in *The Diplomat* (Feb 2018)

⁴² 'Chinese Investments in Africa Go Off the Rails', in *Financial Times* (5 Dec 2018) <https://www.ft.com/content/82e77d8a-e716-11e8-8a85-04b8afea6ea3>

⁴³ 'The First Time Chinese Railway Industry "Going Out"', on *Xinhua Net* (4 Oct 2016) http://www.xinhuanet.com/2016-10/04/c_1119664511.htm

⁴⁴ L. Corkin, C. Burke & M. Davies, 'China's Role in the Development of Africa's Infrastructure' in *SAIS Working Papers in African Studies* 04-08 (2018)

⁴⁵ S. Hess & R. Aidoo, 'Charting the Roots of Anti-Chinese Populism in Africa: A Comparison of Zambia and Ghana', in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol.49, No.2 (2014), p.129-147

relationship is also greatly shaped by local politics, elite interests, and labour regime.⁴⁶ Thus, the reality of China in Africa has to be concerned with African politics.

A test for liberal internationalism?

China observers are increasingly interested in the idea of a China Model, asking if China's example would offer a concrete alternative for developing states.⁴⁷ Some argue that China creates an example of 'authoritative developmental state'.⁴⁸ Rhetorically, China denies any intention to export its development model or political system. Nevertheless, its growing capacities and assertiveness in international relations raise question about whether China poses a challenge to the existing international order. Denis Tull, for example, sees an inseparable link between China's pragmatic interests and normative challenge, because China is prepared to 'defend autocratic regimes... for narrow ends of regime survival.'⁴⁹ In contrast, liberal IR scholars such as John Ikenberry remarks that China is likely to integrate itself into the current system as it benefits greatly from the rule-based order.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, China would inevitably increase its influence from within the system.⁵¹ The article hopes to avoid juxtaposing China's presence in global politics and the set of liberal values that are often regarded as intrinsically 'Western'. How much is the Chinese Solution novel? At the same time, it remains relevant to question to what extent this framework does present illiberal tendencies.

⁴⁶ G. Mohan & B.Lampert, 'Negotiating China: Reinserting African Agency into China-Africa Relations' in *African Affairs*, Vol.112, No.446 (2012), p.92-110

⁴⁷ J. Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive* (Yale University Press, 2007)

⁴⁸ M. Condon, China in Africa: Policy of Non-Intervention, in *The Fletcher Journal of Human Security*, in Vol.27 (2012), p.13

⁴⁹ D. Tull, China's Engagement in Africa: Scope, Significance and Consequences, in *Modern African Studies*, Vol.44, No.3 (2006), p.459-479

⁵⁰ J. Ikenberry, 'The Future of Liberal World Order', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.90, No.3 (2011), pp.56-62

⁵¹ J.S. Nye, 'Will the Liberal Order Survive', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.96, No.10 (2017), p.10-16

China's cooperation, economic but also in a range of other areas, with developing countries is linked to its call for the global South 'to unite, to develop together, in face of the economic imbalance between the North and South'.⁵² Symbolically, the idea of imbalance highlights a sense of righteousness for developing countries to explore their own path and a natural affinity that links developing countries. In this sense, South-South solidarity functions to rationalise alternative modes of exchange outside the US-/Western-dominated traditions. In practice, Chris Alden and Christina Alves observe that the current economic content of 'South-South solidarity' hardly differs from that of the traditional North-South ties.⁵³ China's superior capital, technology and indeed, the story of success, create rationales for African leaders to engage with China. However, by no means is the South-South solidarity a radical challenge to current international trade system.

The exploration of alternatives is also reflected in China's own experiment in multilateralism. China has incorporated certain neoliberal prescriptions, globalist and multilateralist arguments into its own framework. Indeed, China has expanded its relationships with multilateral bodies such as the African Union (AU) and New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). China is also very vocal to support Africa Union's (AU) 2063 agenda.⁵⁴ However, most diplomacy and deal-making is still carried out bilaterally. Structures such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in which several African countries are part of, and the Forum on China-African Cooperation (FOCAC) largely evolve around multiple countries' development relations with China⁵⁵. These mechanisms are

⁵² 'What You Should Know about South-South Cooperation', on *Xinhua Net* (11 Sept 2015) http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-09/11/c_128220980.htm

⁵³ C. Alden & C. Alves, 'History Identity in Constructing China's Africa Policy', in *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol.35, No.115 (2008), p.46

⁵⁴ FMPRC, Joint Announcement of the Fourth Political Consultations between Chinese and African Foreign Ministers (22 Sept 2017)

<https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjbzhd/t1495663.shtml>

⁵⁵ R. ZiroMwatela & Zhao Changfeng, 'Africa in China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative: A Critical Analysis', in *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol.21, No.12 (2016), p.10-21

represented as more inclusive and representative, serving the purpose of creating a more equal international order. The Belt and Road Initiative marked the ambition to create and lead a set of multilateral development relations that transcend the North/South framework. Its progress would be the fruit of China's own internationalism as well as Xi Jinping's personal political achievement. The FOCAC since 2000 is China's own take on leading a multilateral platform that tries to shape African development. Both can be seen as present iterations of China vying for a leadership position.

A key contradiction that China's state-centrism poses toward liberal internationalism, including the AU's right-based approaches, is its silence over many tenets of human rights and governance issues. Civil societies are largely excluded, thus limiting the space for African agency, in contrast to the Western aid approach where NGOs are largely involved from aid distribution to policy-making. An economic development-centred thinking underlies China's languages on rights:

"China's investment in African countries continue to grow, from commercial trading in the beginning to now assisting African countries to build relatively developed industries. This is helping African countries to get out of poverty and focus on development. This is the best human rights."⁵⁶

China is increasingly projecting its voice in the area of human rights, an area usually seen as its weak spot. In 2017, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke of human rights with Chinese characteristics as an illustration that 'human rights can be protected in more than one way' and that each country should have their own model of human rights.⁵⁷ Rhetoric like this symbolises Chinese attempts to appropriate of universal rights doctrines into a 'country-specific' framework, which not only speaks for China itself but might also be an option for those countries that are faced with similar criticism. Under this

⁵⁶ 'International Commenters Speak Highly about China's Human Rights', in *People's Daily* (30 October 2016)

<http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2016/1030/c1002-28818496.html>

⁵⁷ Wang Yi, Speech at the First South-South Human Rights Forum (Dec 7 2017)

<http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/zgyw/t1518240.htm>

development thinking, a myriad of problems faced by African societies, such as corruption, social inequalities and failing democracy, are more symptoms of the African continent's underdevelopment, rather than perpetuating factors that call for specific political solutions.

Chinese past support for authoritarian states like Sudan under Omar al-Bashir and Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe has been cited as the evidence for its dubious presence in Africa.⁵⁸ In contrast to this conventional understanding, China's business and strategic interests are also reaching countries like Senegal, which is not particularly resource-rich and has a working democracy. The Senegalese government, on the other hand, is eager to attract Chinese companies and investments, for example a \$138 billion industrial park project.⁵⁹ Does China have its preference of regimes, or simply a preference for deal-makers? Nonetheless, for all regimes that face criticism on issues such as human rights, China's neutrality indeed presents opportunities, without the finger-pointing and the strings attached often associated with external involvement in Africa.

Conclusion

This article examines Chinese foreign policy discourses on China-Africa relations and the representations of self and other inscribed in such discourses. The article further evaluates the policy and practice informed by these discourses, within the broader question of China's role in African development and China's position in liberal international order. The language of common struggle and comradeship since Mao's time might have demised. Certain historical connections between China and Africa are continuously made relevant. Shared experience as post-colonial societies and similar conditions as developing countries put China and Africa on the same page, pursuing interests that are not dissimilar to each other's. The

⁵⁸ See note 48

⁵⁹ 'Made in Senegal? New Industrial Park Woos Chinese Firms', in *Reuters* (3 Apr 2017) <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-senegal-china-manufacturing/made-in-senegal-new-industrial-park-woos-chinese-firms-idUKKBN175145>

representation of similitude stays intact but has transformed in accordance to China's rising business interests in the continent and the self-image as a leader in the developing world.

On the other hand, the representation of temporal differences within the framework of modernisation thinking is productive of China's leader identity in China-Africa development relations. Although refusing to define a China model and speaking of 'Chinese Solution' instead, the Chinese authority has been exercising the practice of making meaning of China's economic growth. China comes to signify a civilisational and modernising force alternative to the West. China model is unique, carving out a new possibility for developing countries. It was exactly under this framework of thought, Xi Jinping called on all African countries to jump aboard on the 'fast-track train' of Chinese development.⁶⁰

It is argued that China does not actively pursue an alternative framework of liberal internationalism but an appropriation of it. The FOCAC, as a multi-lateral body, and China's engagement with African organisations such as the AU and NEPAD mainly serve the purpose of bilateral deal-making. Nonetheless, China's new experiments in multilateralism stay largely consistent with the increasing tendency to inscribe itself as a leader in the developing world. Effective or not, China is also experimenting in the languages of rights, with economic rights prioritised over other tenets. How much these languages would be reproduced by African states is yet to be assessed. However, it represents an attempt to create a set of alternative language to the liberal perspective of development and rights.

This article focused on the discursive construction of China-Africa relations. Question remains on the coherence between discourse and practice. How much do discourses really determine what happens on the ground? Chinese business drive in search for resources and markets in Africa is important to understanding this. Furthermore, this business drive cannot be simply associated with the

⁶⁰ Xi Jinping, Speech on the 7th FOCAC Summits (3 Sept 2018)
http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-09/03/content_5318979.htm

Chinese state and homogenised as a monolithic 'Chinese investment'. Chinese capital in Africa varies in resourcefulness, the connection to the Chinese government, and the level of profit-driven.⁶¹ The reception in Africa is a multi-faceted topic to look into, which might differ across countries, shaped by the local conditions of capital, labour and power. The ways that power, politics and societies in African states engage with their presence is fundamental to understanding the impact of these interactions.

⁶¹ C.K. Lee, *The Spectre of Global China: Politics, Labour and Foreign Investment in Africa* (University of Chicago Press 2017), p.4