



CODESRIA



CODESRIA

13

èmç

Assemblée générale
General Assembly
Assembleia Geral
الجمع العام الثالث عشر

L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
A África e os desafios do Século XXI

إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

DRAFT VERSION
NOT TO BE CITED

**Emerging Powers and Africa's Future: Unpacking
China's Rise on the Continent**

Ian Taylor

University of St Andrews/University of Stellenbosch, South Africa

5 - 9 / 12 / 2011

Rabat Maroc / Morocco

Beijing's expansion into Africa is increasing at an exponential speed and has become a major topic of interest to observers of both Africa's and China's international relations.¹ According to the China-Africa Business Council, China is now Africa's third most important trading partner, behind the United States and France but ahead of the United Kingdom. Published trade figures are indicative of this massive surge in Chinese economic interest in Africa. In 1996, the value of China's trade with Africa was US\$4 billion; by 2004, this had grown to US\$29.6 billion, in 2005 reached US\$39.7 billion, and in 2006 hit US\$55.5 billion.² It is predicted that trade volume between China and Africa will top the US\$100 billion mark in the next five years.³ Much of this expansion is driven by a desire to obtain sources of raw materials and energy for China's ongoing economic growth and for new export markets.⁴

At the same time, China's growth in interest in Africa has provoked a flurry of concern over whether China poses a strategic threat to Western interests in Africa. However, there are indications that China is not having things all their own way, undermining the argument that Beijing poses an unstoppable juggernaut in Africa that will wily-nilly threaten Western security. Recently, Angola's state oil company Sonangol stopped talks with Sinopec on plans to invest in a \$3 billion oil refinery at Lobito that was expected to produce 240,000 barrels per day, due to, 'The refinery [being] engineered in such a way that it was basically going to be China's fuelling station. Angola wanted more flexibility. They wanted to be able to sell to South Africa and others in the region'.⁵ In other words, China's attempt to sew-up a major aspect of Angola's oil industry for Beijing's own benefit was not allowed to go ahead once Luanda's elites realised that they might lose from the deal. And in Nigeria, it was announced in March 2007 that the Nigerian Government was considering reviewing its plans to hand over management of Kaduna oil refinery to a Chinese oil company as Chinese promises to invest in the refinery had not materialised. Previously, China had been awarded four oil drilling licences in exchange for China buying a controlling stake in the 110,000 barrel a day Kaduna oil refinery. Nigeria offered first right of refusal to the Chinese company for four exploration blocks during a licensing round in mid-

¹ For broader discussions of Sino-African ties, see Ian Taylor *China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise* London Routledge, 2006; Ian Taylor 'The "All-weather Friend? Sino-African Interaction in the Twenty-first Century' in Ian Taylor and Paul Williams (eds.) *Africa in International Politics: External Involvement on the Continent* London: Routledge 2004, pp. 83-101; and Denis Tull 'China's Engagement in Africa: Scope, Significance and Consequences', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2006.

² *Peoples' Daily* (Beijing), May 16, 2006 and *Peoples' Daily* (Beijing), January 30, 2007.

³ Senior economist at the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, quoted in *China Daily* (Beijing), January 13, 2006.

⁴ See Ian Taylor 'China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa', *International Affairs*, vol. 82, no. 5, September 2006.

⁵ *Reuters* (Luanda) March 8, 2007.

2006. Yet in March 2007, Director General of the Bureau of Public Enterprises, Irene Chigbue, stated that the plan to get the Chinese to manage the refinery ‘had run into hitches as the [Chinese] have not been forthcoming with the takeover plans’.⁶ Indeed, the Chinese had agreed to manage Kaduna as a *pre-condition* to winning oil blocks. However, ‘no appreciable progress had been made since the allocation took place’ and the Chinese have not fulfilled their part of the deal, said the Director-General.⁷ Such a situation is particularly important for Nigeria – and threatens to sour Sino-Nigerian relations – as Abuja is desperate to offload its former public enterprises to competent management.

Furthermore, as was highlighted during President Hu Jintao’s recent (January-February 2007) tour of Africa, plans to make an official visit yesterday to Chambishi copper mine in Zambia, re-opened under Chinese state ownership, were cancelled when miners threatened to protest about poor pay and conditions.⁸ This came on top of anti-Chinese rioting in Lusaka in 2006 after the Chinese embassy became involved in a spat with an opposition politician in the run up to Zambian elections, with protestors claiming that Zambians were ‘being robbed of our birthright by the Chinese’.⁹ In short, it appears that Sino-African relations may be “normalising” and the honeymoon may be over.

However, it is in the human security dimension that this paper is mostly concerned with, as I believe this to be more interesting – and possibly more worrisome – than any talk of China’s “strategic threat” to Western interests in Africa. In short, there is a genuine cause for concern that China’s expansion into Africa is threatening to undermine attempts to advance new norms relating to constitutional rights and privileges, as well as more broader governance issues promoted by the West – *and by selected African leaders*. This is already seen as a potential problem for British foreign policy, given that a key pillar to current policy is ‘Promoting sustainable development and poverty reduction underpinned by human rights, democracy, good governance and protection of the environment’.¹⁰ One British newspaper in 2006 has gone so far as to state that ‘A year on from Live 8, China has trounced all hope of change in Africa by doing deals with its kleptocrats’, adding cynically that ‘China will deal with anyone, and pariah states are a gap in the market’.¹¹ This is deemed to have important implications for British foreign policy towards Africa as ‘the Department for International Development is now trying to encourage good governance, by cutting back aid to countries

⁶ *This Day* (Lagos) March 6, 2007

⁷ *Vanguard* (Lagos) March 6, 2007

⁸ *Daily Telegraph* (London) February 5, 2007.

⁹ *Daily Telegraph* (London) October 3, 2006.

¹⁰ FCO ‘International Priorities’, www.fco.gov.uk

¹¹ *The Times* (London) July 4, 2006.

that persecute opposition leaders and supporters. The latest approach makes sense. But, sadly, the game is up: China makes it irrelevant'.¹²

Current thinking about security intimately links good governance and development with wider security concerns. As Sir Emyr Jones Parry, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations states, 'Human security derives from the nexus between conflict, development and human rights. It recognises that the security of an individual is affected as much by poverty or political repression as it is by small arms, landmines or civil war. It recognises that frequently these threats combine in a lethal cocktail which undermines the ability of people to lead their lives and puts the security of whole communities at risk'.¹³ Jones Parry goes on to assert that 'human security depends on development, security and human rights'.

Currently, China's expansion into Africa is provoking real concerns about the impact on Africa's human security situation. Human Rights Watch have alleged that 'China's policies [in Africa] have not only propped up some of the continent's worst human rights abusers, but also weakened the leverage of others trying to promote greater respect for human rights'.¹⁴ Similarly, Amnesty International have argued that 'China is having an adverse effect on human rights in other countries because by dealing with repressive regimes, such as in Sudan, and putting its economic and trading interests ahead of concern for human rights it's allowing these regimes to be provided with resources that they would not otherwise get so easily'.¹⁵ Yet, at the same time it appears that many African leaders are falling over themselves to court China's presence and attention. Exploring why this is so and why China is seen as such an attractive partner by many African leaders, with the concomitant implications for Africa's human security circumstances, is the aim of this article.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Speech made by Sir Emyr Jones Parry, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations to the Human Rights Centre, University of Essex, 22 November 2006.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch 'China-Africa Summit: Focus on Human Rights, Not Just Trade: *Chinese Leadership Should Pressure Sudan, Zimbabwe on Human Rights*', New York, November 2, 2006.

¹⁵ Sariah Rees-Roberts, a press officer for London-based Amnesty International, quoted in *UN Integrated Regional Information Networks* (Dakar) June 27, 2006.

Chinese conceptions of human rights

According to one analyst, 'Few issues in the relations between China and the West invoke as much passion as human rights'¹⁶. Indeed, this topic is often placed centrally in any criticisms aimed at Sino-African relations. Yet the very notion of human rights is an essentially contested concept between Beijing and the West. Focus is usually on Chinese transgressions of the universal norms adopted by the United Nations, but it would be erroneous to regard the Chinese discourse on human rights, grounded in Chinese traditions as they are, as being one-dimensional (and by inference, inimically counter to the current international human rights regime).

Traditionally, the dominant Chinese discourse of rights has focussed on the obligations and responsibilities of citizens as part of a society to build a rich and strong nation. This has certainly generally underpinned Chinese positions post-1949 and dominates Beijing's thinking on the subject today. Very briefly summarized, China's current discourse on human rights is underpinned by a communitarian emphasis on social solidarity and duties toward others within society, merged with a desire to promote harmony i.e. a focus on collective rights. In short, it is a discourse informed by pragmatic nationalism. In contrast, Western ideas that states must guarantee freedom and liberty at an individual level at virtually all costs is seen as an abstraction, if not dangerous. As a Chinese commentary on human rights puts it, 'human rights [are] enjoyed by the collective in addition to individuals' human rights. The individuals' interests are upheld via the realization of collective interests. So, China attaches importance to collective human rights as well as to individuals' human rights. This is in contrast to Western countries where much emphasis is put on individuals' human rights while collective human rights are neglected'.¹⁷

It is only really in the last decade or so that there has been any real interest in China's human rights record.¹⁸ Before 1989 the West appeared quite happy that Beijing's contribution to any human rights regime was more rhetorical than being anything else. Chinese praise for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as 'the first international instrument that systematically sets forth the specific contents regarding respect for and protection of fundamental human rights', in spite of its blatant, many would argue, transgressions underscores this point.¹⁹ In fact, it was after Tiananmen Square that human

¹⁶ Ming Wan *Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Relations: Defining and Defending National Interests* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p. 1.

¹⁷ 'Human Rights Can be Manifested Differently', *Xinhua* (Beijing), December 12, 2005.

¹⁸ See Andrew Nathan 'Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Policy', *China Quarterly*, September 1994.

¹⁹ Quoted in Yongjin Zhang *China in International Society Since 1949*, Oxford: St Antony's Series, 1998,

rights came to the fore in China's international relations and concomitantly, where Africa's place in Beijing's foreign policy was resurrected after a decade of neglect.²⁰ Beijing was shocked by the level of Western criticism vis-à-vis Tiananmen and sought to counter this by an attentive courting of the developing world, at the same time as undertaking diplomacy towards its peripheral Asian neighbours. Anti-imperialist rhetoric was dusted off and an emphasis on state sovereignty and different definitions of human rights and democracy were advanced. Beijing profoundly resented critiques of its human rights record and what was perceived as attempts at interfering in China's affairs. This was linked to not only a surreptitious attempt to halt China's modernization programme but also resonated with deep-seated memories of colonial meddling in China in the nineteenth century, resurrecting what might be seen as a neo-Bandung approach.

Consequently, China began to woo countries that were not overtly critical of China's record (and did not support Taipei)—and found a willing support constituency in Africa at the time. Li Peng framed this in a way that would appeal to a good number of African leaders feeling the heat from pro-democracy movements and conditionalities from the international financial institutions (IFIs), tapping into a backlash against the Washington Consensus. Speaking at the Asian-African Law Consultative Committee meeting in Beijing in March 1990, Li asserted that 'no country is allowed to impose its will on other countries...They are not allowed to interfere in the internal affairs of the developing countries, or pursue power politics in the name of "human rights, freedom and democracy"'.²¹ This has remained a consistent policy stance—one that has attracted a fair degree of controversy and criticism over China's rapid expansion into Africa.

In sum, there remain two key elements to China's stance regarding human rights in its foreign policy. The first is the importance placed on material rights to subsistence and development through economic prosperity. The Zambian Foreign Minister on a visit to China in April 1993 concurred with Beijing's assessment that, 'with respect to developing countries, the most basic human rights are the rights to subsistence and to development'.²² He Wenping, director of the African Studies Section at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, has equally claimed that 'We [China] don't believe that human rights should stand above sovereignty...We have a different view on this, and African countries

p. 188.

²⁰ John Cooper 'Peking's Post-Tiananmen Foreign Policy: The Human Rights Factor', *Issues and Studies*, October 1994.

²¹ *Xinhua*, (Beijing), March 12, 1990.

²² *Xinhua* (Beijing) April 10, 1993.

share our view'.²³ The second element, often linked to the former, as He Wenping makes clear, is an underscoring of the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs and the norm of state sovereignty. Importantly, non-interference in state sovereignty and freedom from "hegemony" has been a theme of Chinese foreign policy since the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, formulated in the 1950s as the basis of Beijing's foreign relations.²⁴ The Five Principles are re-echoed implicitly throughout China's current stated Africa policy, released in January 2006.²⁵ In Chinese diplomacy, sovereignty trumps other norms, including that of democracy – unless this in reference to Taiwan and self-determination.

Liberal democracy has in fact been held up by the Chinese as a source of much of Africa's woes (going directly against the Western mainstream view that it is a *lack* of democracy that helps account for Africa's maldevelopment). During the high-water mark of the democratic swell in Africa in the late 1980s/early 1990s, when a number of African autocrats were being peacefully removed through the ballot box, Beijing dismissed the process as an 'obsession' and a 'temptation'.²⁶ Later however, as Africa's democratization began to fade, China excitedly dubbed the whole experience a 'disaster'²⁷ arguing that 'multi-party politics fuelled social turmoil, ethnic conflicts and civil wars'.²⁸ This view was welcomed by various African leaders for quite specific reasons, something that I now turn to.

Nature of politics in Africa

It is a fact that China's discourse on human rights and its emphasis on state sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs finds very fertile ground in Africa, even if it undermines the long-term human security situation on the continent. This is because of the nature of the state in many, if not most, African nations. Since African elites lack any real form of consensual aspects to their rule, their domination and modalities of governance are expressed through both the threat and actual use of violence *and* the immediate disbursal of material benefits to supporters in neo-patrimonial regimes. Without these twin strategies –

²³ Quoted in Paul Mooney 'China's African Safari', *YaleGlobal*, January 3, 2005.

²⁴ Interview by author with Acting Head, Political Affairs Section, Chinese Embassy, Windhoek, Namibia, August 13, 2006. These Five Principles are namely, mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity; non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence.

²⁵ See *China's African Policy* Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006. I am indebted to Dai Yumin of the Chinese Embassy in Freetown, Sierra Leone, for a copy of this document.

²⁶ *Xinhua* (Beijing), July 1, 1992)

²⁷ *Xinhua* (Beijing), December 22, 1994),

²⁸ *Beijing Review* (Beijing), July 29-August 4, 1996.

both inimical to long-term development and human security—the African ruling elites cannot rule.

Central to this milieu is the fact that power in Africa is fundamentally dependent upon “capturing” the state—or at least being linked favourably to those within the state. This is an essential precondition for acquisition and self-enrichment. Instead of a stable project that binds different levels of society together, what we have in Africa is an intrinsically *unstable* personalized system of domination. Absolutism reigns and power is maintained through patrimonial power via the illegal commandeering of state resources. Corruption is the cement that binds the system together and links the patron and his predatory ruling class together.²⁹

Resources extracted from the state or the economy are deployed as the means to maintain support and legitimacy in this system, with the concomitant effect that the control of the state is equivalent to the control of resources. Under neo-patrimonial systems the separation of the public from the private is recognized (even if in practice only on paper) and is certainly publicly displayed through outward manifestations of the rational-bureaucratic state—a flag, borders, a government and bureaucracy etc. This is what China’s leaders encounter when they invite delegations to Beijing or visit Africa. However, in practical terms the private and public spheres are habitually not detached and the outward manifestations of statehood are facades hiding the real workings of the system. In many African countries, the official state bureaucracies inherited from the colonial period, however weak and ineffective, have become dysfunctional and severely constrained in their official, stated, duties. Post-colonial African leaders have rather relied on effected control and patronage rather than functioning administrations. Whilst of course clientelism and patronage are *not* unique to Africa, the type of intensive neo-patrimonialism, if not “pathological patrimonialism”³⁰ and predation³¹ that we can observe across large swathes of the continent is indeed noteworthy. The implications for human security of such a milieu is well-known.

How does this affect China-Africa relations? Firstly, it seems apparent that Chinese policymakers either do not know about the neo-patrimonial nature of African states—in which case the rhetoric regarding state sovereignty is rather naïve—or they do know about

²⁹ Robert Fatton ‘Bringing the Ruling Class Back In: Class, State, and Hegemony in Africa’, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1988, p. 36.

³⁰ Zaki Ergas ‘Introduction’ in Zaki Ergas (ed.) *The African State in Transition* London: Macmillan, 1987.

³¹ Peter Lewis ‘From Prebendalism to Predation: The Political Economy of Decline in Nigeria’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1996.

such modalities of governance – in which case China’s Africa policy (like most other external actors) is rather cynical. Given that China is playing catch-up in its transregional relations, the former is actually a possibility. Whichever, it is precisely because China does not ask any questions about the neo-patrimonial regimes in Africa, does not criticise the rampant corruption that goes with this and, crucially, does not seek to advance meddlesome initiatives related to democracy and – more importantly – good governance, that means that Beijing is a preferred partner of choice for many African autocrats at the apex of clientelistic regimes. The type of governance strictures that underpin the liberal democratic project and which are promoted in the West cannot be hurriedly implemented without undermining the basis upon which most African presidents and their followers base their rule. Indeed, African leaders are more than aware that introducing basic liberal democratic rights in Africa would mean reviewing and replacing many governments in Africa. In contrast, China is a partner that does not seek to interfere, asks few questions and in fact provides a discourse around state sovereignty that patrimonial leaders can embrace as a means to legitimize their own rule and ward off Western interference. This is why within many African states there is a convergence between China’s foreign policy in Africa and the continent’s leaders.

Contradictions and collusion?

Two countries in Africa stand out as examples where China has warm relations but where the human security situation is derisory: Angola and Sudan. Angola has been described as a country that has moved from “Afro-Stalinism” to “petro-diamond capitalism”, where patronage and corruption reigns supreme.³² Currently, Angola is China’s second largest trading partner in Africa.³³ The elites in Luanda (an oppressive, dictatorial regime by any standards) are deeply appreciative of China’s “non-interference” stance. Over the last couple of years, Angola’s government, in need of reconstruction funds after the civil war, has been in the midst of negotiating a new loan with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Due to Luanda’s malgovernance, the IMF was determined to include transparency measures to curb corruption and improve economic management. However, as the IMF pressed for agreement, the Angolan government suddenly stopped negotiations. The reason for this was that Luanda had received a counter-offer of a US\$2 billion loan from China’s export-credit agency, Exim Bank. The deal came with an interest rate repayment of 1.5%

³² Tony Hodges *Angola: From Afro-Stalinism to Petro-Diamond Capitalism* Oxford: James Currey, 2001.

³³ *China Daily* (Beijing), March 7, 2005.

over 17 years and was tied to an agreement to at first supply 10,000 barrels per day of crude oil, to increase later to 40,000 barrels per day, as well as the award of substantial construction contracts. Critically, none of the IMF's conditionalities regarding corruption or graft were included in the loan's details, enabling Luanda to overcome the refusal by Western donors to bankroll a Donor's Conference until Angola had reached agreement with the IMF and concluded a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

Angolan sources stated that the deal 'cannot be matched on the current international financial market, which imposes conditions on developing countries that are nearly always unbearable and sometimes even politically unacceptable'. Further, 'In the case of the agreement recently signed with the Chinese bank, no humiliating conditions were imposed on Angola. The agreement therefore greatly surpasses the contractual framework imposed on the Angolan government by European and traditional markets and opens up a practical means of sustained and mutually advantageous cooperation with one of the world economies with the highest growth rate'.³⁴ The Angolan Ambassador in China later called Beijing 'a true friend of Africa' and crowed that 'Africa can [now] develop by its own effort with China's help...without any political conditions'.³⁵

Another example of China's involvement in an oil-rich nation which has attracted controversy, due to its pariah status, is Sudan. China is now Sudan's largest investor, with an investment estimated at US\$4 billion. Apart from the governance and human rights issues in Khartoum, Beijing's weapons exporting policy and its involvement in Sudan's long-running civil war has been particularly criticized, with Amnesty International stating in June 2006 that 'China has transferred military, security and police equipment to armed forces and law enforcement agencies in countries where these arms are used for persistent and systematic violations of human rights'.³⁶ China, for its part, deployed its "alternative" reading of human rights to block United Nations action in the country. For instance, the Chinese ambassador to Sudan, Deng Shao Zin, openly stated that Beijing was 'opposed to any intervention by the United Nations in the internal affairs of Sudan under the pretext of human rights violations'.³⁷ The fact that sanctions would affect Chinese business interests in Sudan is key here.

³⁴ Embassy of Angola, 'Angola-China: An Example of South-South Cooperation', March 26, 2004.

³⁵ *Xinhua* (Beijing), January 24, 2006.

³⁶ Amnesty International *People's Republic of China: Sustaining Conflict and Human Rights Abuses: The Flow of Arms Accelerates* New York: Amnesty International, 2006.

³⁷ 'Chinese Investment Spurs Civil War in Sudan', *CNSNews.com*, September 3, 1999.

It should be noted that United Nations investigators have found most of the small arms in the conflict in Darfur are Chinese manufactured, despite an arms ban within the region. Amnesty International has reported that China provided hundreds of military trucks to Sudan in 2004 at the height of the three-year-old Darfur conflict and that the Sudanese army and the Janjaweed militia had used these vehicles for travel and for transporting people for execution. China in turn rejects such charges on the grounds that other countries similarly export arms and equipment.³⁸ As Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Zhou Wenzhong was quoted as saying, 'Business is business. We try to separate politics from business...I think the internal situation in the Sudan is an internal affair'.³⁹

Beijing's current attitude regarding its supply of weapons to regimes such as Sudan is that it is an internal matter for that sovereign state and that weaponry strengthens the state, thereby stabilising the political environment in which to do business. But most observers view such transfers as profoundly destabilising, particularly as African governments and armies are rarely in full control of the weapons they receive, as well as the more general point that providing arms to oppressive regimes is inherently anti-developmental and actually promotes insecurity.

Remarks on the contradictions

China's economic and political expansion into Africa is complex and fraught with paradoxes. On the one hand, China's policies may be seen to be undermining emergent attempts to promote human rights and good governance in Africa, as crystallized in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). NEPAD has been enthusiastically pushed by a select number of countries in Africa as a means to stimulate what has been termed the "African Renaissance" and improve the human security situation on the continent.⁴⁰ But as one analysis has framed it, 'While in some countries China's involvement appears benign, in others its approach undercuts efforts by the African Union (AU) and Western partners to make government and business more transparent and accountable'.⁴¹ Indeed, a fundamental concern regarding China's African ventures is that Beijing's no-questions-asked practices and the stress on non-interference threatens to re-introduce

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Quoted in *New York Times* (New York), August 22, 2005.

⁴⁰ See Ian Taylor *NEPAD: Towards Africa's Development or Another False Start?* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2005.

⁴¹ *Africa Research Bulletin*, February 16-March 15, 2006, p. 16855.

practices that NEPAD is supposedly looking to move away from as well as undermine the human security condition in Africa.⁴² As one South African newspaper put it:

Chinese aid is likely to subsidize profligate and/or dictatorial governments as it is to advance the welfare of ordinary Africans. These developments threaten a project of particular importance to President Thabo Mbeki, and through him, to South Africa. One of the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) of which Mbeki is a co-architect is to promote corruption-free, good governance in Africa, for its own sake as well as a means of securing sustained developmental assistance.⁴³

This is probably why President Mbeki of South Africa recently warned against a new possible form of colonization resulting from China's expansion into Africa. Mbeki was quoted as saying that if Africa just exported raw materials to China while importing Chinese manufactured goods, the African continent could be 'condemned to underdevelopment', resulting in a 'replication' of Africa's relationship with its former colonial powers. As a report on Mbeki's remarks put it, 'critics have said China is too happy to support repressive African regimes. Mr Mbeki's latest comments appear to be a hardening of his position on the subject'.⁴⁴ Furthermore, China's no-strings-attached policies arguably introduce a moral hazard for African regimes vis-à-vis fiscal responsibility, something which NEPAD is also trying to address.

From the other perspective, a Chinese embassy press statement claims that '[China and Africa] support each other in international affairs, especially on major issues such as human rights [to] safeguard the legitimate rights of developing countries'.⁴⁵ The Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, reiterated in late 2006, stated that, 'Countries that vary from one another in social system, stages of development, historical and cultural background and values, have the right to choose their own approaches and models in promoting and protecting human rights in their own countries.' "Moreover, the politicization of human rights and the imposition of human rights conditionalities on economic assistance should be vigorously opposed as they constitute a violation of human

⁴² See for instance Liu Guijin 'China-Africa Relations: Equality, Cooperation and Mutual Development', speech to the Institute of Security Studies, Pretoria, South Africa, November 9, 2004.

⁴³ *The Star* (Johannesburg), July 4, 2006.

⁴⁴ *Daily Trust* (Abuja) December 18, 2006.

⁴⁵ 'Sino-African Relations', Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2003.

rights'.⁴⁶ Hence China (and forty-eight of fifty-three African state leaders) assert that seeking to encourage universal human rights in Africa is itself an abuse of human rights.⁴⁷

Yet, the current position of Beijing's critically undermines China's objectives to be implicitly seen as the leader of a developing world coalition or one that is qualitatively different from the "traditional exploiters" of Africa, i.e. the West.⁴⁸ This contradiction was most graphically illustrated in April 2006 when on the very same day as the Dutch government were suspending nearly \$150 million in aid to Kenya because of longstanding concerns over corruption,⁴⁹ China was busy securing an important oil exploration agreement with that same country.⁵⁰ A telling illustration of the difference in approaches between the West and China vis-à-vis malgovernance on the continent.

Currently, Beijing's relations with Africa suggest that in the short-term, Chinese policymakers do not seem to realise that corruption and political instability sabotages the long-term possibilities of sustained Sino-African economic links and also helps maintain the situation where Africa remains at the bottom of the global hierarchy, plagued by dictators and insecurity. Whilst a certain type of African leader is deeply appreciative of such a friend, it is doubtful that the average African shares the same sentiments.⁵¹ Problematically, as a Kenyan report put it, 'China has an Africa policy. Africa doesn't have a China policy, only a Beijing-controlled forum in which Mandarins figure out which country to take a sweet shot at. China talks of mutual trust...The danger is that China will politely rip off Africa, just as the West did'.⁵²

However, in spite of NEPAD's attempts, ultimately there is actually a great deal of convergence between Chinese norms on governance related to human rights and democracy and African practice and this threatens to continue to undermine long-term stability and security on the continent. Many, if not most, African leaders do not share the West's concern

⁴⁶ 'Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation', quoted in *Xinhua* October 19, 2006.

⁴⁷ It should be pointed out that the Declaration had been drawn up before the conference, with minimal/non-existent input from African ministries. And of course, African leaders (like, arguably, leaders elsewhere) have a history of signing up to a variety of declarations and statements of intent with no real commitment to follow through.

⁴⁸ China likes to play this card if and when criticised for its no-questions-asked policy. For instance, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang, in denying that China ignores human rights considerations, lashed out at Western journalists, asserting that 'We [China] will not repeat the record of the then Western colonists who bloodily plundered and violated human rights. China is a responsible country', quoted by *Agence France Presse* (Beijing), April 26, 2006.

⁴⁹ 'Dutch Halt Kenya Aid Over Graft', *BBC News Online*, April 29, 2006.

⁵⁰ 'China's Hu Boosts Kenyan Business', *BBC News Online*, April 28, 2006.

⁵¹ Interview by author with Henning Melber, Namibian political economist, Windhoek, Namibia, August 14, 2006.

⁵² *The Nation* (Nairobi) June 12, 2006.

over human rights and democracy, certainly not in the same way. These leaders thus weigh up China's expansion into Africa and relations with Beijing with a very different approach from what appears to be some Western understandings. One report asserts that 'In fact, China and Africa to a large extent share the same attitude towards human rights. By and large, they put economic rights over political rights and assign the highest priority to the right to development.'⁵³ I would differ on this somewhat. It is certainly true that China and African presidents to a large degree share the same attitude towards human rights and good governance. Yet this is not because African leaders put economic rights over political rights nor because they allocate the maximum precedence to national development. National development and a broad-based productive economy is far less a concern to elites within most African political systems than the continuation of the gainful utilization of resources for the individual advantage of the ruler and his clientelistic networks. In fact, development might stimulate opposition. As Bertrand Badie explains:

On the one hand, economic development is a goal that every head of state must pursue...On the other hand, an overly active policy of development risks producing several negative results: it would valorize the competence of the technocratic elite relative to that of the fragile political elite, break up social spaces and favour the constitution of a civil society capable of counterbalancing the political system, and indeed, neutralize neo-patrimonial strategies.⁵⁴

In short, the idea that resources should rather be channelled towards the nebulous concept of "national development" is, in the main, not on the agenda of many elites in Africa. Unfortunately, elite survival (i.e. access to rents to distribute to patronage networks and thus retain key support) can be based on the capture of relatively limited geographic areas, particularly in oil-rich nations—where China is particularly active. That is all (to varying degrees) that is required to lubricate the machinery of patronage. Consequently, 'China's economic and political support could offer African politicians increasing leeway in misusing public funds or manipulating institutions to preserve their own power'.⁵⁵ Whilst Chinese engagement with a variety of regimes in Africa promotes regime security, it at the same time undermines human security.

Yet it is important to note that China's policy of non-interference in domestic affairs is long standing and is not specific to Africa. It is historically rooted in China's years of

⁵³ 'An Old Rule Serves China Well in Africa', *New Straits Times* (Singapore), January 5, 2007.

⁵⁴ Bertrand Badie *The Imported State: The Westernization of the Political Order* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 19.

⁵⁵ Peter Lewis 'China in Africa', *Saisphere*, Winter 2006.

humiliation in the nineteenth century and non-interference was early on established as a mainstay of Beijing's foreign policy. Article 54 of China's first plenary session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference indeed asserted that 'the principle of the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China is protection of the independence, freedom, integrity of territory and sovereignty of the country'. This, combined with particular understandings and interpretations of what constitutes human rights and democracy explains China's current stance towards such issues, whether in Africa or elsewhere. China's emphasis on collective development as the key human right, rather than individual civil and political liberties, has to be understood. As David Shinn points out, 'If the West fails to take these different perceptions into account, it will never deal effectively with the challenges posed by China in Africa'.⁵⁶

Criticism heaped on China for its Africa policy is thus arguably misplaced at one level—the policies are not particular to Africa. Why there is a problem is because such positions converge with those of African leaders themselves, who are more than happy to have such an ally that does not demand conditions and answers to where the money is going or the number of political prisoners or the lack of elections. The nub of the security problem is found within Africa itself, within the neo-patrimonial regimes that have so damaged the continent. China is simply acting in a pragmatic and self-interested manner and following its own understandings of particular concepts. Thus in this sense, condemning China's policies in Africa misses the point. The problem is not necessarily Beijing, but is rather found in the nature and edifice of most African nations – what has been termed in the past “quasi-states”.⁵⁷ Obviously, there is justifiable disquiet that Beijing's Africa policies may undermine political and economic reform on the continent, as well as nascent attempts to advance such movement, and it certainly does not add to human security in places as diverse as Angola, Sudan or Zimbabwe, to name but three. However, the reasons for Africa's current predicament are complex and erecting a potential scapegoat to blame for Africa's woes makes little sense—even if it does mask Western anxieties over other issues regarding China's African sojourn—energy access being the prime example. Thus before critiquing China's role in Africa vis-à-vis human security, analysts need to understand both China's particular human rights discourse *and* the nature of most African states, for it is here where the real problem lies.

⁵⁶ David Shinn 'The China Factor in African Ethics', *Policy Innovations*, December 21, 2006.

⁵⁷ Robert Jackson *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Concluding remarks

Having said all of the above, there is a certain illogicality in China's position on human rights in its Sino-African diplomacy and its implications for security in Africa. It is acceptable to recognize that different conceptions of human rights as well as different interpretation of the Universal Declaration exist. As mentioned, the Chinese discourse on human rights places the right to food, clothing, shelter and economic development to the fore and Beijing has been quite active in asserting that its primary mission is to develop the productive forces. In this formula, giving priority to concentrating on development is central. As cited earlier, the slogan that Development is the absolute principle is key. Thus, from this perspective, the liberal conceptions of human rights as advocated by the West potentially threaten the much-desired stability that Chinese policymakers view as essential to advancing development. This is certainly the message communicated in China's Africa policies. So good so far. But what if Chinese diplomacy and activities in engaging with certain African regimes not only clashes with the advancement of universal (i.e. Western) norms of human rights, but actually helps to further undermine development and human security, ostensibly essential to Beijing's own definition of what rights mean? What if, even if we accept China's alternative readings, Beijing's diplomacy in Africa helps to consolidate governments that, as explained above, actively obstruct development as it is seen as a threat to elites positions? Obviously, China's non-interference policy is that sovereignty trumps everything and so it is up to each country to decide what to do with Beijing's assistance. But if sovereignty is the guarantor of human rights as per the Chinese position and that sovereignty is being used to effectively undermine developmentalism, then there is a profound contradiction at the heart of China's discourse on human rights. Surely in such cases China is complicit in not only siding with autocrats and undermining a nascent human rights regime (one now supported by a number of African states), but China is also participating in undermining its own conception of human rights viz. one based on development, as well as its own interpretation of the linkage between human rights and sovereignty. Chinese support for abusive regimes holds within it a real danger that Beijing helps to further destabilize developmental options in Africa and the human security environment and in doing so directly contradicts China's own pronouncements on what human rights should mean.

It is clear, for instance, that Mugabe's government not only tramples on civil and political rights (as per Western ideas of human rights), but also subverts Zimbabweans'

economic and social rights (as per China's discourse on human rights). In such cases then, China resorts to a fundamentalist bottom line that sovereignty itself is the basis of human rights; it is up to each sovereign state to establish its own conception of the rights of its people – what they are in each specific context and how they should be achieved – without interference from outside forces. This reification of states and the amalgamation of sovereignty and rights into a single principle of non-interference makes little real sense in a milieu dominated by quasi-states and neopatrimonial regimes. Furthermore, if whilst adhering to the principle of non-interference, Chinese economic activities actually make things worse for some in Africa, then the other great shibboleth of Chinese human rights rhetoric – that basic socioeconomic rights are more important for the poor than abstract political rights – might actually become harder for the people of Africa to attain. Of course, the Chinese government can return to the importance of sovereignty, and note that sovereign African states are free to deal with China or not as they so desire. But if China's leaders are genuine in their belief that China's engagement of Africa will not repeat the crimes and misdemeanors of European colonizers, then engaging without damaging remains one of China's greatest challenges and vulnerabilities in its current African diplomacy.

However, it must be emphasized that China's policies towards Africa are evolving and maturing and Beijing is going through a steep learning curve. It is true that at the moment there appears to be divergence between Western and Chinese policy aims regarding governance and that this then suggests a convergence between Beijing and certain types of African leaders. But this can only ever be temporary in nature if China wishes to have a long-running and stable relationship with Africa. China is like all other actors in Africa – it needs stability and security in order for its investments to flourish and for its connections with the continent to be coherent. Western nations have had to learn the hard way that propping up dictators willy-nilly is not sustainable nor desirable, and China will likewise learn this as its relations unfold. Thus, whilst in the current period there appears to be divergence, there can ultimately only be convergence with Western policy aims – maybe not with regard to democracy (though China is itself evolving in interesting directions), but certainly with regard to governance and security. The task for the West is thus to engage with Beijing in identified areas where mutual interests converge and work with serious African governments to advance the interests of the continent. Portraying China as a “threat” to the West in Africa only plays into the hands of unscrupulous autocrats on the continent who relish such rhetoric – and who then seek to exploit it – and,

more crucially, has the danger of being self-fulfilling in its prophecy. It is urgent that realistic, mature and reasoned debate on the nature of Sino-African relations becomes the norm, rather than the somewhat hysterical tone we have witnessed in the media thus far.