

CHINA IN AFRICA: THE RISE OF HEGEMONY?

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"China is both a tantalising opportunity and a terrifying threat"
— Moeletsi Mbeki¹⁾

ABSTRACT

This article explores China's international role with reference to Africa in order to answer the question whether China can, in fact, be considered an emerging hegemon that is using, as Western states have done in the past, Africa in order to promote its own position. The concept hegemon/hegemony is discussed briefly in order to provide a framework for analysis. China's relations with Africa are considered, focusing on economic, political and security issues (though the distinction between political and security issues is sometimes vague). These relations are then evaluated with reference to the nature and role of a hegemon. It is concluded that there is not sufficient evidence for perceiving China's role in Africa as that of an emerging hegemon.

1. INTRODUCTION

The spectacular rise of China as (what is often claimed to be) a superpower in the contemporary international system is regularly the subject of much debate and attention, especially in the press and popular journals. The International Relations community, though, seems to find it rather difficult to characterise the role of China in international affairs. International Relations theories about the international power structure have traditionally dealt with Western powers, including Japan as a kind of 'honorary' Western economic power, but

with apparently little provision for the emergence of a superpower from the Global South.²⁾ Scholarly contributions on China's rise as an 'incipient superpower'³⁾ tend to focus on its economic 'giantism', its modernising security establishment, its energy policies and needs and, to some extent, its impact on the global natural environment in an age of climate change and environmental degradation.⁴⁾ When it comes to China's relations with Africa, international views, especially in the United States (US), whether scholarly or journalistic, seem to regard China as a 'bad influence', potentially undermining "years of international efforts to link aid to better governance"⁵⁾ and as proping up "dangerous regimes, producing a new cycle of unsustainable debt, and damaging anti-poverty efforts across the region".⁶⁾

Mearsheimer recently analysed China's rise, and its concomitant impact on the international system, on the basis of hegemony. He defined the country's rise as 'unpeaceful', due to the potential for "intense security competition" with the US that might result in "considerable potential for war".⁷⁾ Alden also uses the concept 'hegemony' when dealing with China (in this case China's engagement with Africa), pointing out that China has an "overriding concern with American hegemony" and presents its own emergence as (at the very least) a great power as a 'peaceful rise'.⁸⁾ Both scholars use the term 'hegemony', yet the one views China's rise as 'unpeaceful' (Mearsheimer) and the other (Alden) as peaceful. Apart from Mearsheimer and Alden's work, though, and despite the bulk of publications over the past decade charting China's rise and more specifically its role in and policy towards Africa, little effort has been expended in the International Relations scholarly community to explain China's role in the international system. Although some scholars use the concept 'hegemon' when referring to China's rise, hegemonic stability theory, as Evans and Newnham point out, is exclusively concerned with "relations within the advanced industrial countries" and not with the North-South divide.⁹⁾ Nor does it make provision for the rise of a Global South power to hegemonic status, despite China's greater power status which it has enjoyed at least since the early 1970s when it became a permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council.

This article explores China's international role with reference to Africa in order to answer the question whether China can, in fact, be considered an emerging hegemon that is using, as Western states

have done in the past, Africa in order to promote its own position. An exploration of China's role in Africa could provide an indication of how China will develop as an international great or even superpower and should provide an indication of how China views its role in the international system.¹⁰⁾ A sub-question that is dealt with, is whether China's role in Africa is beneficial to Africa and contributing to peace, security and development on the continent.

In the first section the concept hegemon/hegemony is discussed briefly in order to provide a framework for analysis. In section two, China's relations with Africa are considered, focusing on economic, political and security issues. Section three provides an evaluation of these relations with reference to the nature and role of a hegemon in order to draw a conclusion on the type of relationship that China is developing with Africa. It is not possible to provide an in-depth overview and discussion of the topic within the scope of this article, but the purpose is to contribute to the international debate about the nature of China's engagement with various regions of the world.

2. HEGEMONS AND HEGEMONY

For many the term 'hegemon' has a pejorative connotation.¹¹⁾ It should be noted that the Chinese themselves are deeply suspicious of the concept 'hegemony', "always [connecting] it with oppression and selfishness".¹²⁾ The word 'hegemony' derives from the Greek word for 'political leader' and is mostly used in terms of hegemonic stability theory that developed within the realm of International Political Economy during the 1970s.¹³⁾ Its use is not confined to International Political Economy and international economic leadership, though, and as Lake points out, it is also an established concept within studies of war and security.¹⁴⁾ Hegemony refers to leadership or primacy in an international system and a hegemon is a state that possesses sufficient capability to fulfil such a leadership role. Evans and Newnham argue that other states in the system then have to define their relationships with the hegemon in terms of consenting, opposing or by remaining indifferent to the hegemon's leadership position.¹⁵⁾ In other words, they posit that states have choices as to how they will define their own positions *vis-à-vis* the hegemon. It is doubtful, though, whether states have all that much choice in terms

of accepting the hegemon or not — it would seem that such a choice will depend largely on the state's position in the global political and economic system, especially regarding its level of dependency on the hegemon and also its strategic value for the hegemon.

For Mearsheimer the core purpose of a hegemon is to "establish hegemony in their region of the world while making sure that no rival great power dominates another region". In addition, he views the international arena as a field of contest for power in order to be "the only great power in the system".¹⁶⁾ The hegemon's ability to govern the international system is a product of its economic, military and technological capabilities and the extent to which it is willing to induce or force other states to play according to its rules. Yet, although hegemony is frequently almost crudely associated only with economic and military terms as 'capability analysis',¹⁷⁾ it should be kept in mind that the concept's association with power needs to take into consideration not only its materialistic content, but also its ideational content — in the words of Bates: "Man [sic] is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas".¹⁸⁾ In the case of hegemony in international relations, Evans and Newnham put it succinctly: "(A) hegemon's ability to lead is derived as much from what it stands for as from how it seeks to achieve its goals".¹⁹⁾

The ideational component of hegemony refers to the hegemon's worldview and the extent to which, in Gramscian terms, its structure of values and understandings is acceptable and unquestioned and forms a consensual order that determines behaviour in its sphere of influence. The essence of hegemony is the hegemon's power to persuade, although this definition implies that hegemony is benign, which is not necessarily true.²⁰⁾ Hegemony can also be coercive and in such a situation the hegemon's powerful position will have little to do with 'what it stands for'. It could be argued, though, that hegemons exhibit elements of both 'benignancy' and of coercion, depending on the importance that they attach to the achievement of specific and multiple goals on the basis of their national interests. A further characteristic of hegemony is that hegemonic powers provide some benefits to others in the international system, such as protection (militarily and/or politically), and, in economic terms, a number of public goods, including international political and economic stability — "the persistence of the main characteristics of the system" as Holsti defines it.²¹⁾ These public goods and the provision of international

stability are necessary conditions for stability, progress and international trade because stability provides predictability, a crucial requirement for a very wide range of international co-operation.

So, how can a hegemon be recognised? A number of characteristics in terms of a state's conduct in the international arena can be listed on the basis of hegemony theory:

- A hegemon strives for domination in and of the international system, or, at the very least, domination or control in its own region, whilst attempting to prevent another great power/s to dominate other regions.
- In materialistic terms, such a state would have superlative economic, military and political power.
- Its political power would have some institutionalised international recognition, indicated by its role in international institutions.
- It would provide certain benefits (for example, public goods) to other members in the system.
- It would provide a leadership role which would be directly related to its values and accepted by other states in its sphere of influence.
- It would act to maintain and expand its role and position in what it determines to be its sphere of influence.

On the basis of this brief discussion of the concepts 'hegemony' and 'hegemon', attention turns to a discussion of China's role in Africa.

3. CHINA IN AFRICA

3.1 Economic interaction

When it comes to China's economic involvement in Africa, issues of trade and investment are primary. There seems to be general agreement in the literature and amongst analysts and political commentators that Chinese growth is dependent both on export markets and on access to natural resources and primary commodities re-

quired for fuelling the Chinese economy. With 2006 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in China at 10,7 per cent, investment would therefore concentrate largely on securing such resources, though China, as many emerging industrial states before it, also has surplus labour that it needs to export, as well as surplus capital, in order to promote and increase capital returns, to maximise profitability and to lessen the burden of dependency on its domestic economy.²²⁾

Since the early 1990s tens of thousands of Chinese labourers were brought to Africa, mostly to work in the construction industry, but also in manufacturing.²³⁾ Chinese labour is involved in projects in countries such as Namibia, Botswana, Angola, Uganda, Sudan, Nigeria, Zambia and Kenya, to name but a few, and often there are allegations that Chinese investors either prefer Chinese labour or treat local (African) labour poorly. Chinese contractors are heavily involved in infrastructure building projects in the aforementioned countries and unconfirmed reports claim that "Chinese have taken over the construction industry in Botswana".²⁴⁾

As to investment, it is difficult to put a figure to the total of Chinese investments on the continent as China does not officially declare such activities. So, for instance, South Africa is still considered to be the biggest investor on the continent, though it is quite possible that this position will eventually (and in the not too distant future) be overtaken by China, as South Africa does not have the resources to 'compete' with China. One estimate places the amount of investment in Africa during the first ten months of 2005 at US\$175 million.²⁵⁾ During President Hu Jintao's visit to eight African countries in February 2007, he announced that China would encourage Chinese investment in Africa by setting up a China-Africa development fund amounting to US\$5 billion, and that a number of special economic zones would be set up on the continent.²⁶⁾

Chinese investment concentrates heavily on (African) state-run companies and projects, such as infrastructure building — activities seldom pursued by Western investors.²⁷⁾ But there is also another side to investment: South Africa is increasingly investing in China, the country's mighty Anglo American corporation has entered into a major partnership with China's Shaanxi Coalfield Geological Bureau in a coal-chemicals project and has invested US\$150 million in its Shenhua Energy Company. It is currently negotiating a US\$6 billion deal with SASOL for the development of a coal-to-liquid fuels project

and Beijing's largest newspaper, the *Beijing Youth Daily*, is part-owned by South Africa's Naspers which also has a major stake in Tencent, a Chinese internet company with more than 260 million clients. Another South African company, SABMiller, the world's second largest brewer, has cornered 15 per cent of the Chinese market and AngloGold, the biggest gold mining company is investing US\$7 million in gold exploration in China in 2007, whilst Gold Fields bought a US\$25 million share in Sino Gold.²⁸⁾

China's trade with Africa has been booming over the past years, with commercial transactions in 2005 amounting to US\$40 billion, three times higher than in 2000 and up from US\$12 million in the late 1980s.²⁹⁾ However, the trade balance is increasingly in favour of China, and in many countries, most notably South Africa and Zambia, organised labour complains of job losses due to cheap Chinese imports. This is especially true of the textile industries in these countries. Trade between South Africa and China has been growing at 26 per cent per year, with a 480 per cent increase in clothing imports from China between 2003 and 2006, with 62 000 jobs allegedly lost in the textile industry during the same period.³⁰⁾ At the same time, though, it would also seem as if China is beginning to realise the dangers in carrying a trade balance that is hugely skewed to the detriment of Africa and it has recently started attempts at changing this situation. South Africa's trade to China seems to be growing, indicating that the trade deficit with China is shrinking. During the first six months of 2007 China exported goods to South Africa to the value of US\$3,2 billion while imports from South Africa rose by 65 per cent to US\$3 billion.³¹⁾ China also recently announced cutting tariffs for all goods imported from 25 of the 49 African countries with which China does business.³²⁾

The oil industry in Africa is another economic sector which has seen a huge increase in Chinese trade and investment over the past years. Sudan, Chad, Nigeria, Angola, Algeria, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) export oil to China, or have Chinese-backed oil exploration activities. By 2005 China was buying 50-60 per cent of Sudan's oil production (approximately seven per cent of its consumption needs) and in early 2006 it announced that it had taken a 45 per cent stake (US\$2,27 billion) in an offshore oil and gas field in Nigeria.³³⁾ What is especially noticeable about China's relations with African oil-exporting countries, is

the extent to which China shores up such relations with investments in other sectors of these oil exporters. Angola is a good example — apart from oil exports to China and Chinese investment in oil exploration activities off the Angolan coast, China has also invested heavily in infrastructure projects in Angola, such as low cost housing, roads, bridges and schools, and in the Angolan railways and telecommunication sector.³⁴⁾ What is clear is that Chinese economic engagement with Africa is growing rapidly and that it involves the whole spectrum of activities in domestic economies. Furthermore, such economic activities are not confined to countries that could provide markets or natural resources or investment or labour opportunities to China, though such countries obviously attract the bulk of Chinese attention. Economic activities are also extended to less attractive states, often for political reasons. This is possible because of China's large number of state-owned companies and parastatals.

3.2 Political engagement

Measuring political engagement is more difficult than assessing the scope of economic involvement, but it is possible to identify at least three areas of such engagement, namely aid relations, diplomatic relations and governance issues — that is the extent to which political engagement has an impact on issues of governance in the host state and/or the support provided to states in their dealings with the international system.

Starting with diplomatic relations, it is well-known that one of China's foreign policy objectives, though not necessarily spelled out as such, has been to counter formal recognition of Taiwan, that is, the promotion of the 'one China' principle. Since the end of the Cold War a number of African countries have switched recognition of Taiwan (Republic of China — ROC) to the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), amongst them Chad, the Central African Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa. Only Burkina Faso, Gambia, Malawi, Swaziland and Sao Tomé and Príncipe have retained their recognition of Taiwan. China also established the China-Africa Forum in 2000, based on "equal negotiation, enhancing understanding, increasing consensus, strengthening friendship and promoting cooperation".³⁵⁾ Since the creation of this Forum, Africa has become a major focus point of Chinese diplomacy, receiving

several high level visits from Chinese leaders, the most recent being President Hu Jintao's visit to eight African countries in February 2007 and Premier Wen Jiabao also being a regular visitor to the continent. Hu's visits to Africa (17 countries in the period April 2006 to February 2007) surpass those of any other foreign state or government leaders to the continent and is widely seen to be an indication of the importance that China attaches to Africa.

Aid has long been considered an instrument of foreign policy, allowing donors to "manipulate the quantities and types of foreign aid for political purposes".³⁶⁾ Because of the already mentioned close relationship between the state and parastatals (according to Rios 90 per cent of Chinese companies doing business in Africa are state-owned³⁷⁾) and because China does not draw a sharp distinction between investment and development aid, it is difficult to disentangle the nature and scope of China's aid relations with Africa. Nevertheless, during the China-Africa summit of November 2006, President Hu pledged to double aid to Africa by 2009. This would include US\$5 billion worth of preferential loans and credits.³⁸⁾ Hu also announced the creation of a US\$5 billion development fund to encourage Chinese companies to invest in Africa, promised the cancellation of the debt of the poorest countries and pledged to give Africa preferential customs treatment,³⁹⁾ including free market access to a range of African products.

China's aid to Africa increasingly mirrors that of Africa's traditional aid partners, with significant assistance provided in the medical sector, sending 16 000 Chinese doctors, as well as other health workers to Africa and providing medical supplies, particularly vaccines and medicines, technology and skills transfer and other social welfare programmes. In addition, it has been contributing to food aid to the continent. In fact, in mid-2006 the World Food Programme (WFP) announced that China had become the world's third largest food donor. Although such aid is provided largely to East Asian countries in need, Liberia and Guinea Bissau are regular recipients.⁴⁰⁾

China's respect for sovereignty and its concomitant support for the rule of non-intervention has long been a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Just as it resists any intervention in Chinese domestic affairs (especially issues of human rights and democracy), it desists from intervening in the internal affairs of countries it does business with. It is often accused of protecting countries in international

forums, most specifically in the UN Security Council when they are subject to international criticism or attempts by the international community to intervene in their domestic affairs — the allegations regarding China's protection of Sudan in the Security Council provide a good example. As will be pointed out in the next section, it is this aspect of China's role in Africa that draws particular criticism from Western countries.

Some examples of China's 'protection' of rogue countries (as defined by the West) are its support to Morocco's for its Western Sahara autonomy plan (in the face of the UN's preferred plan of deciding the region's fate through a referendum) and its support to President Gbagbo in 2004 when the French left Cote d'Ivoire.⁴¹⁾ China has also maintained and increased its co-operation with Zimbabwe over the past several years. In Angola, China provided the country with a much needed loan at a time when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was loath to grant a loan, due to the fact that Angola did not comply with the conditionalities set to qualify for such a loan. But the relationship that has drawn the strongest criticism from the West, is China's role in Sudan.⁴²⁾ China has consistently used its veto power in the Security Council to protect Sudan against international sanctions and to provide support for Al-Bashir's government, thereby obstructing UN attempts to end the carnage in Darfur.⁴³⁾ Yet China's position on Sudan seems to be changing and it has recently urged the Sudanese government to allow a UN peace-keeping force to be deployed in Darfur, thereby acting as an interlocutor between Sudan and the Security Council, a point to which will be returned in section three.

3.3 Military support

China has extended military support operations in Africa, ranging from offering military training courses to African military officers to arms sales to a number of countries.⁴⁴⁾ Such arms sales are viewed by some to be a reflection of China's energy needs of which 30 per cent is provided by African oil producers, or of its needs for other raw materials and natural resources. Yet, there is no conclusive evidence that China's military support is confined to or proportionate to its need for these resources.

Mozambique does not provide China with any natural re-

sources, yet has received arms from Beijing; Angola, though China's biggest African provider of crude oil has not bought or received any arms from China. Zimbabwe, though, a country with the second richest platinum deposits in the world and subjected to severe international criticism and pressure due to its repressive and destructive domestic politics, has increasingly turned to China for its military needs, finding an apparent willing supplier in Beijing.⁴⁵⁾ In Sudan, China built three munitions factories and it is also a provider of other military equipment to the country. Other countries with which China has close military co-operation are Nigeria, Congo, Senegal, the Central African Republic, Chad and Liberia, with several of them currently experiencing high levels of internal instability and serious governance deficits.

In China such countries find a willing ally who will not intervene in their domestic affairs, thereby often frustrating Western powers and non-governmental organisations who subject their relations with these countries to governance conditionalities. US companies, for instance, are prohibited from investing in Sudan⁴⁶⁾ and Zimbabwe is the subject of international sanctions. Many commentators therefore point out that China invests and does business when and where Westerners cannot do the same due to public opinion pressure.

4. IS CHINA A (RISING) HEGEMON?

Bearing in mind this cursory overview of China's economic, political and military relations with Africa, the question can be asked whether these relations indicate the conduct of a rising hegemon that contests the existing hegemonic status of especially the US, bringing, in particular, a new ideational structure to bear on international relations. The analysis in this section is necessarily brief and rather superficial, due to constraints of time and space. The discussion in this section is structured in terms of the six characteristics of a hegemon previously identified, though it should be pointed out that there is some overlap between these characteristics. Nevertheless, they do allow for a structured discussion.

The first characteristic is that a hegemon attempts to dominate and control its own region, simultaneously preventing another great power/s to become preponderant in other regions. This assessment does not focus on China's relations with its immediate geographical

region, but on Africa as 'another' region. Despite China's wide-ranging and increasing economic, political and military relations with African countries, it is difficult to attribute hegemony to China. China is not Africa's biggest trade partner or the biggest investor in Africa, nor does it have the kind of military relations or presence of the US on the continent. The US has a strong military base in Djibouti, has recently announced plans to step up its intention to establish an African Force — the Africa Command (AFRICOM) — on the continent, made two air strikes against Southern Somalia in January 2007 and generally plays a much more forceful role on the continent than does China. Together with other Western countries, the US has also been much involved in dictating the nature and pace of political and economic transformation towards good governance on the continent.

Does China's Africa policy exhibit a distinct attempt to counter American influence on the continent? This is not an easy question to answer and is actually a separate topic.⁴⁷⁾ Nevertheless, two brief comments are of relevance: China has often declared its 'offensive against hegemonism' and its aim of "building a more just and equitable international order" that would advance the South's agenda.⁴⁸⁾ These expressions of intent do not necessarily point to hegemonic ambitions, but they do emphasise a conviction on the part of China (one that is shared by many, if not most, developing countries), that South-South co-operation might actually create an international order more beneficial to the developing world. China is not the only 'strong' country in the South (though obviously it is *primus inter pares*) committed to this ideal: India, Brazil and South Africa share these sentiments wholeheartedly. This leads to the second point — support for and co-operation with China, especially from countries such as South Africa, Angola, Nigeria and other major players on the continent also has much to do with a realisation on the part of these countries that ties with China might assist them in balancing their relations with international political and economic giants.

Hegemonic power is of course centred first and foremost on the interests and needs of the hegemon and involves creating an environment conducive to the achievement of these goals. These interests have both a materialistic and ideational component and the latter will be addressed forthwith. As to China's materialist needs and interests, there is no doubt that Africa is of huge importance to Beijing. Sustaining its meteoric economic rise means that China has to

ensure a continuing and sustainable supply of a wide range of natural resources, chief amongst them being oil, with minerals a close second. Africa already provides 30 per cent of China's oil and in many ways it offers more political stability than does the volatile Middle East. Yet such stability, or even the ability of China to navigate in unstable regions such as the Horn of Africa, is not guaranteed. The attack on an oilfield in Ethiopia on 25 April 2007 in which a number of Chinese workers were killed, is but one example of the dangers that China might face in its relations with at least some regions on the continent.

Furthermore, China's supremacy in Africa cannot be taken for granted. A number of African states have their own ambitions for leadership roles and autonomous positions internationally. Chinese investment provides competition for South African business interests on the continent and in late 2006 South Africa's President Mbeki warned against the dangers of a type of 'colonial partnership' between Africa and China.⁴⁹⁾ Angola has used its relations with China to strengthen its own position and projection of power, rather than becoming dependent on China for its reconstruction and development.⁵⁰⁾ Angola became a member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in early 2007, giving it a certain level of power and power projection that further removes it from a possible dependent position *vis-à-vis* China.

In Sudan the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference are also important players and China's influence in and support for Sudan is not necessarily the 'biggest' factor influencing and encouraging the recalcitrant Sudan regime. Nor is China's involvement in terms of aid and other forms of investment comparable to that of the US in the aftermath of World War II when it expanded and solidified its hegemonic position globally through such programmes as the Marshall Plan. In short, when China's relations with Africa are taken into consideration, there is not (yet) sufficient evidence of attempts at becoming a hegemon. Rather, it would seem that the West, and more particularly the US, are *interpreting* China's rise as that of a hegemon, based, at least in part, on a lack of understanding of China's policy goals as determined by its own economic and domestic needs and on a definite inability to appreciate the reasons why China is welcomed with open arms by Africa's political élites.

The second characteristic of a hegemon is its own power cap-

abilities in the domains of politics, economics and military clout. In this sense China is not a hegemon, as it is not yet in the economically dominant position of the US or the European Union (EU), nor does it have the political impact in its own region or internationally that would compare with these players. Its military might is impressive, though, and being a recognised nuclear power it does command at the very least the status of a major power. The question, though, is not so much related to China's current international status and position, but to its future position and it is in this rise of China that the West sees the possible emergence of a superpower, if not a hegemon. This emergence of China raises concerns about the future structure and order of the international system and the type of international security regime that China would promote and support.

This aspect (the kind of international structure and order and the type of international security regime that China would support and promote) relates to the third characteristic of a hegemon — the level of international institutionalised recognition that it enjoys, as evidenced especially by its role in international institutions. Hegemons design, build and then maintain international orders, often in the form of international institutions, be these regimes or organisations. The US' design of the post-World War II international political and economic order is a prime example. Two aspects of this characteristic is important. Firstly, a rising hegemon does not therefore necessarily have to play according to the 'rules of the game' as designed and implemented by another hegemon/s. Rather, and secondly, it would seem that a hegemon would prefer to build its own institutions that would reflect its own preferences with regard to the rules of the international system.⁵¹⁾

At the global level, China's most obvious institutional recognition is its status as a permanent member of the Security Council, though the power configuration within the group of five permanent members has always made it difficult for China and Russia to genuinely exercise power through this status in the same way that the US has been able to do this. The US is the hegemon that designed the UN system, a characteristic of hegemons.⁵²⁾ At most China and Russia could prevent certain decisions from being made, or could insist on modifying decisions and resolutions, acting as 'spoilers'. Security Council membership therefore does not spell hegemony, neither is China's membership of the Bretton Woods institutions (the World

Bank, IMF and the World Trade Organisation —WTO) indicative of hegemony — rather, by joining the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) China indicated acquiescence to the existing international liberal hegemony of the US. In short, China does not set the international agenda. At most it influences the international political-security agenda through its membership of the UN Security Council. The post-World War II architecture of the international order remains in place and meaningful changes in the rules of the game would only be possible through a transformation of these institutions. However, there is little indication that China favours such radical changes, perhaps relishing its role as the 'only' Global South country to be a permanent Security Council member, though this aspect needs further investigation as China did support Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa's aspirations for permanent membership during the drive for Security Council reform in the run-up to the 60th anniversary of the UN in 2005.

Yet China is also building its own institutions internationally, or at least in the case of Africa. The establishment of the China-Africa Forum in 2000 is such an example and constitutes an institution in which China can largely set the agenda and determine the rules amongst a membership that, on the whole, accepts such leadership. In this institution one of the most basic and important rules is that of respect for sovereignty and non-intervention, principles wholly accepted by African leaders and principles that offer protection to them in the face of other international norms that require that a range of civil and political rights be respected. China's insistence that other human rights, such as the right to food, shelter and development (second generation human rights) are actually more important than so-called first generation human rights, finds a ready and supportive audience amongst African leaders whose countries battle with underdevelopment and poverty. It is difficult though to see the establishment of the China-Africa Forum as a Chinese attempt at a form of counter-hegemony. At most it represents an attempt to provide an institutional setting for co-operation among largely like-minded actors and given China's ambitions to also play by the rules of the current liberal hegemony (as will be discussed shortly), the China-Africa forum is an institution that serves China's foreign policy needs in Africa, but not an effort to compete with other great powers or with the US for a sphere of influence.

The fourth characteristic of a hegemon, at least of a benign

hegemon, is that it provides certain public goods and other benefits to its allies or other members of the system. In international political economy terms such public goods are, for instance, the creation and openness of the international trade system as largely sustained by the US and other Western powers, or the provision of international military security as is the case with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). China's provision of benefits to Africa is on a much smaller scale than is usually associated with a 'genuine' hegemon.

Firstly, although Chinese aid to the continent is increasing, it is not yet the biggest donor to the continent. Secondly, despite Chinese investment in Africa and the lucrative income that especially oil-producing countries receive from their exports to China, there is as yet little evidence of China opening its markets to African producers and ample evidence that in certain sectors, such as the textile industries of many African countries, Chinese competition brings little benefit. In fact, in some quarters China is viewed as an exploiter of Africa with some of its business deals in Africa verging on aggression, if not coercion. Yet coercive hegemony is an encompassing status and cannot be truncated to focus only on one dimension or sector of an economy.

China has, however, contributed some public goods to Africa, if only in the sense that it tends to invest in economic sectors long neglected by the West,⁵³⁾ such as infrastructure building, and it does accord Africa a status and level of recognition, support and approval seldom, if ever, granted by Western countries. As Mbeki put it in November 2006, Africa has "dire need of close friends, reliable partners and good brothers"⁵⁴⁾ These are public goods that are highly appreciated in Africa and it is little wonder that at least at the level of political leadership in African countries and among African élites there is a high level of appreciation and admiration of China. Again, though, these are not public goods in the traditional sense of the meaning as it is related to hegemony.

The fifth characteristic of a hegemon deals with the ideational component inherent in power and relates to the leadership role played by the hegemon. Of importance here is the value structure of the hegemon. It has been mentioned previously that African countries find China's values admirable and much in agreement with and similar to their own values. This is particularly true of China's insistence on sovereignty and non-intervention and its refusal, on the basis

of these values and principles, to intervene in the domestic affairs of African countries that might be violating international norms regarding human rights and good governance.⁵⁵⁾

At the same time, though, there seems to be an element of contradiction in China's principles and values in the sense that though it espouses sovereignty and non-intervention, and though it insists that it is a 'Third World' country and therefore close to and understanding of Africa's dilemmas and problem across a range of dimensions, it does, also, attempt to project an image of being an international player on the basis of the rules and standards set by the West. One example of this is China's insistence that, in the case of Sudan, they are encouraging the Al-Bashir regime to conform to international requirements of respect for the rule of law and for democracy — clearly an indication that it wants to be considered a respected and respectable international 'citizen'.⁵⁶⁾ Nevertheless, at the same time, China insists that Sudan's "territorial integrity and sovereignty should be respected" and that the Darfur crisis should be solved through "equal dialogue and discussions".⁵⁷⁾

China has also more recently begun to participate in UN peacekeeping missions on the continent, being the biggest troop contributor amongst the permanent five members of the Security Council. There are also other indications of China attempting to play a more traditional leadership role in Africa in the sense of projecting itself on the basis of existing international customs and norms. There is little evidence that China would seek a global security framework that is radically different from the current one, except that it would obviously want to promote its ideas about non-intervention. 'Peaceful coexistence' has a powerful ring for Chinese politicians who realise all too well that radical changes in the international order cause unpredictability, instability and even chaos — not the kind of environment that China needs in order to develop. Its debt cancellation (mentioned previously) and increasing prominence as a donor in the African context are reminiscent of the traditional role of great (Western) powers.⁵⁸⁾

Finally, the sixth characteristic of a hegemon is the fact that it would act to maintain and expand its role and position in what it considers to be its sphere of influence. Again, in this article Africa is dealt with exclusively, and not with other regions in which China might have a powerful presence. At this point in time there is not much, if

any evidence that China acts in Africa to keep other actors out of the region. China started showing a renewed interest⁵⁹⁾ in Africa in the early to mid-1990s, an era during which the West had, for all intents and purposes, neglected the continent.⁶⁰⁾ Africa became attractive for China for two reasons. Firstly, this was the era during which China's economic growth took on ever bigger proportions and it was looking for new energy and other natural resources. Secondly, Africa had continuously shown support for China politically, most notably during and after the Tiananmen Square uprising and riots in 1989, thereby indicating to China that the continent could provide sizeable support, if not protection, of China in international forums — after all, Africa counts for more than a quarter of UN membership. China recognised the benefits and advantages attached to relations with Africa; other powerful countries did not. China moved to secure and cement these good relations; other countries did not.

Of course the situation is more complicated than this: since the 1990s in particular, public opinion in Western societies has become increasingly stronger, making it difficult for these countries to maintain relations with despotic, undemocratic and abusive regimes in Africa.⁶¹⁾ In Sudan, for instance, Canada was forced by public opinion to sell its oil interests in Southern Sudan — China bought these interests. China is not constrained or limited in its policies towards Africa by public opinion, as its political system is a closed and largely undemocratic one that leaves China free from the checks and balances so pervasive in Western societies. At the time of China's latest phase of engagement with Africa it was not competing with other powerful countries. This is not to say that other countries, most notably France, the United Kingdom (UK) and the US did not have interests, both economic and political, in Africa.

China, however, was willing to provide a range of other goods to Africa, both tangible and intangible and these goods provided China with a type of 'preferred partner' status on the continent, as opposed to these other countries which had always been viewed as colonial masters and exploiters of the continent. Currently, there does not seem to be a view on the part of China that it has to keep other powers out of Africa — perhaps on the one hand, because many African countries prefer China to their traditional Western trading and investment partners and, on the other hand, because China, free of constraints from domestic groups, knows that it can venture into a

range of lucrative markets in Africa that are closed to Western powers due to political pressure from their home constituencies. It is therefore not possible to refer to Chinese behaviour in Africa as being hegemonic with respect to other major players.

5. CONCLUSION

This article was not aimed at chronicling incidents and aspects of the negative impact that China might have on Africa, especially in the economic and governance spheres. There are many accounts of such negative behaviour, but the problem is that these accounts and allegations mostly come from the North and given the history of its involvement in and exploitation of Africa, such allegations do not carry much weight. It is also striking that international perceptions of China's impact on Africa seems to be changing slowly from pure criticism to a much more nuanced evaluation. A World Bank advisor remarked recently that "(t)hey (the Chinese) want to give China a fair deal. I believe that". In May 2007 the Chinese Export-Import Banks signed a memorandum of understanding with the Bank to "improve cooperation on aid and development".⁶²⁾ What might be witnessed is the emergence of a more realistic appraisal of China's role in Africa, together with attempts on the part of China to bring its engagement with Africa more in line with international (read: Western) norms on governance, economic and political issues.

There is no doubt that China has a huge impact on the African continent and that its influence spans the economic, political and military spheres. Yet, in terms of the characteristics of a hegemon, there does not seem to be sufficient evidence for describing China as a hegemon, whether actually or emerging, in Africa. That China is a giant *vis-à-vis* Africa, and that it can exercise economic and political power on the continent, cannot be denied. It is in a far better position to do this than are other industrialised countries, as it comes with much less historical baggage and because it is seen as a Global South power which implies goodwill to Africa, as opposed to the perception of many Western countries as exploiters. Furthermore, China has so far resisted attempts to get it to involve itself in the domestic affairs of African countries, though its recent interactions with Sudan would seem to indicate that it might not be completely opposed to such intervention. Yet, on the whole, China cannot be said

to be acting as a hegemon in Africa or towards Africa from a global perspective. Nevertheless, the Sudan crisis and the apparent increasing involvement of China behind the scenes to influence the government of Al-Bashir, as well as the cooling of its relations with Zimbabwe, should be flagged. What might be apparent is a new trend in China's external relations towards 'responsible international citizenship'. Archer points out that one of the functions of international organisations is that of socialisation of its members — members become "socialized to act in a certain way that is acceptable to the rest of the international community, or to adopt a certain common value system".⁶³⁾ What might be witnessed is China's socialisation into the norms and rules of its Western partners in the Security Council, an adoption of which might indicate that China is slowly taking on the mantle of a global leader based on the ideas and principles of good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law and other core ideals currently espoused by and within the UN system, though this is only in relation to its external environment.

Yet it would seem that China's rise globally, and its increasing economic involvement in Africa, are prompting others, especially the US, to view it as a potential hegemon.⁶⁴⁾ In Africa there is, so far, a clear preference for China as a superpower, though this does not mean that should China harbour hegemonic ambitions, African countries would acquiesce. Major African countries such as Nigeria, Angola, Egypt and South Africa would look to China as a partner, and even a 'senior' partner, but it is doubtful whether they would unquestionably accept Chinese hegemony. For now, at least, China is providing them with a friendship that helps these and other African countries to broaden their prospects internationally and that might assist them in accelerating their own economic growth and development. Their relations with Western countries were disappointing in this respect. With China there seems to be the hope that Africa would be able at long last to provide at least a modicum of security and stability on the continent.

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